



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

Begonia 'Al Clark'

by Julie Vanderwilt
with Paul Tsamtsis

Begonia 'Al Clark' is a rhizomatous begonia with distinctive, pustular (imperialis-like) foliage. It was hybridized by Rudy Ziesenhenné in 1975. The cross was *B. alice-clarkiae* X *B. imperialis* var. *brunnea*, and was registered with the ABS as number 441.

Rudy reports that it was named after Al Clark (no relation to Alice Clark), a former member of the Santa Barbara Branch. Phyllis Bates, interestingly reports that Al Clark was also a member of the San Miguel Branch along with Alice Clark back in the 1960s.

It has been published as *B. 'Al-Clark'* with a hyphen in some sources like *Le Petit Begofil*, but that is incorrect. For more detailed information, there was an article published in *the Begonian*, Vol 41, November 1974, p. 279.

Although this plant requires terrarium or at least greenhouse conditions in many areas of the country, in coastal areas of California like Santa Barbara, it is quite happy in the garden. The

Thompsons, in their book *Begonias: The Complete Reference Guide* classify it a plant for the advanced grower. It doesn't like too much light and does very well in lower light conditions. Too much sunlight will result in dry, brown-edged leaves. Windy, outdoor conditions can also result in a somewhat ragged-looking plant, so if grown outside, do give it protection from the elements

The flowers are very unusual. The outside of the petals and the ovaries are reddish and have a somewhat felt-like texture. The interior is white. For me, flowering starts in early summer and goes on through mid to late fall.

I grow it in regular mix that I grow my other begonias in and it is in a plastic, self-watering, hanging pot. I also try to keep the foliage dry as water on the leaves can contribute to leaf damage.

While a challenging plant, with a little effort the plant will reward you with comments from fellow growers about its unusual attributes.

