



photo by Paul Tsamtsis

## Begonia 'Doublet Pink'

by Morris Mueller

The name *semperflorens* (Latin for ever-blooming) cultorum was proposed by Helen Krauss in 1945. As with rex cultorum the most commonly grown 'semps' are hybrids. The first semp hybrid in 1878 was first identified as *B. semperflorens* X *B. schmidtiana*. Since then, the 'semperflorens' in the cross has been identified as *B. cucullata*. Both plants are native to South America.

There are three foliage types for semp hybrids: green, bronze and variegated. As a group, semps take more sun than most all other begonias. Green foliage is more likely to burn than the bronze. Interestingly, variegated foliage appearance varies by the amount of light it grows in. The first report of variegated foliage was a mutation in 1886; bronze foliage appeared in 1890.

Flowers come in four forms, single, semi-double, double, and thimbleberry (a variation of double flowers). 1898 saw the introduction of the first double-flowered semp in France. Bessie Buxton reported a reference to a double in 1873, but it was never confirmable. These early doubles were more like the semi-doubles of today. Selective breeding resulted in what is considered the first 'modern' double semp, *B. 'Gustav Lund'* originating in Sweden in 1934 and introduced into England and Germany in 1938. *B. 'Little Jewel'* was the first of the variegated (or calla) foliage semps. In 1903, a French nursery listed 18 named doubles and Theodosia Burr Shepard of Ventura listed one double and two semi-doubles in her catalogue in 1911. *B. 'Doublet Pink'* (pictured) is a recent introduction being distributed in America by

Oglevee, Ltd. from Pennsylvania. This 'Doublet' series has three other colors: red, rose, and white. All have bronze foliage. Unlike many other doubles, this series freely drops its spent blooms for a neater appearance. As with other double-flowered begonias, the male flowers are the doubles while the females have the traditional form.

Culture is the same as for other semps. Compared to other begonia horticultural groups, semps tolerate greater extremes of all growing conditions including temperature, light, water, planting mix, and humidity. They can be grown in shorter pots and the root crowding seems to agree with them. Heavier feeding will result in better plants. Pinching is even more important to produce bushiness, particularly in the spring. If your plants grow vigorously and become leggy by mid-season they can be re-pinned for a second bloom. Remember that after a severe pinching, it takes approximately 8 weeks for a full rebloom.

All semps are mildew-prone and can get mealy bug. Here they are happier out-of-doors, even through our winters, if provided minimal protection.

Propagation is easy through cuttings that must be taken a node or two below where flowering started on the stem. If not, branching will not occur because semps flower from each leaf node, and with rare exceptions, the axils with flower stems will not produce side shoots. (Most other begonias bloom from every other leaf axil.) Whole plants may also be divided by cutting them into sections as with garden perennials. If a semp produces seed, it may be viable, but will not produce identical plants.

