



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

Begonia 'Golden Sands'

by Patrick Jesse Pons-Worley

Begonia 'Golden Sands' is the result of crossing two unusual low-growing rhizomatous plants. The female parent, *B. attenuata* has elongated leaves rising from a short, compact rhizome. The flowers are white with the males blooming on a short stalk above the foliage and the females blooming at the base of the leaves directly from the rhizome. *B. attenuata* is a native of Brazil. The flowers have a sweet smell, hence the nickname "lily of the valley begonia." It entered cultivation in about 1861. There are at least two or three different clones of the species currently in cultivation, one variety of which, *elongatifolia*, has much longer leaves. The male parent, a low growing species, *B. plebeja* var. *brooksii*, has dark brown leaves with yellow veins. It is native to Mexico and is said to have been introduced in 1968.

Two newer clones have been introduced, one with a brushing of mahogany on its medium-sized leaves and the other all green. The dark form, which was introduced first has was originally named *B. brooksii*, presumably after a man named Brooks. Further studied proved it to be a form of a known variety. I have dubbed it variety *brooksii* to distinguish it from the green-leaved and brushed-leaved forms. It is a rare beauty that is seldom seen today.

I made this cross in the early 1980s and it resulted in a hybrid that nicely combined the elongated leaves of *B. attenuata* and the dark color of *B. plebeja* var. *brooksii*.

The flowers are smaller than either parent, quite tiny

in fact, and held above the foliage. I am not aware of any scent to the flowers, but perhaps it is scented? The hybrid is low-growing with short compact rhizomes and is easily reproduced from leaf-cuttings or rhizome-cuttings.

It can be grown on the window sill or in a terrarium. It can go dormant when the weather turns cool, like *B. plebeja* var. *brooksii*, and must not be over watered at this time. In all other respects it can be treated like any small begonia hybrid.

I made use of *B. attenuata* in a series of hybrids, many of which were lost during the 1990 freeze that destroyed all of my plants when I was living in the San Diego Area. *B. 'Golden Sands'* was released to the trade before that and survived.

Leslie Woodriff used *B. attenuata* many times, crossing it with *B. socotrana* yielding *B. 'Pink African Violet Begonia,'* a long and botanically incorrect name, but an interesting plant nonetheless.

B. plebeja var. *brooksii* was used in a limited way for hybridizing. I used it in crosses with *B. incarnata* yielding *B. 'Hastor'* and a number of others that did not survive to be released.

There have been many questions as to the identity and current status of *B. plebeja* var. *brooksii*. I hope that among the many growers we will find this lovely species and reintroduce it to general cultivation.

Our begonia heritage is disappearing fast. Many species are extinct in the wild. We must find and conserve our plants before they disappear forever, and this one is a must.

