



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

## Begonia 'Julie Vanderwilt'

by Paul Tsamtsis

There is a very interesting new shrub-like begonia that has been hybridized and released by Rudy Ziesenhenné of Santa Barbara. I consider it a shrub-like because it makes a full bushy plant, but when one looks at a mature plant, some characteristics of thick-stemmed begonias look back at you. The stems in particular get thick and have the trunk-like feel of other thick-stemmed plants. One of the parents, *B. incarnata* is classified as a shrub-like plant. The other is unidentified and may be a thick stem, giving rise to this toss-up in appearance

Rudy released and named it in July of 2001. Its name is *B. 'Julie Vanderwilt,'* and its cross is *B. incarnata* X *B. MacDougall C243*.

This second plant was collected by Thomas MacDougall a friend and associate of Rudy's, who did extensive plant collecting in Mexico which included many unidentified species of begonias which are now in Rudy's possession. In fact, Rudy has done the research and published many of the begonias collected by MacDougall including *B. carrieae*. MacDougall collected until he was killed on an expedition to Mexico in 1973.

The leaves are crinkly and apple-green in color. When mature, the stems will be covered with an adventitious 'fuzz' of what looks like tiny leaves that make the stems look like they are starting to grow a cover of lichen

on them. Also, most begonia stems get 'bark' on them after a season or so; this plant's stems stay green.

Once it starts, it is a non-stop bloomer. The flowers are a two-toned pink; the petals are light pink and the ovaries take on a deeper pink for a pleasing bi-color effect. It seems to reach 18" to 24" before sending up basal shoots, so its size is a plus for many growers

This plant takes more sun than most begonias, so it can occupy a wider range of settings in the garden. Even more important, this plant is virtually problem-free. For those that have had the opportunity to grow it, they report that it is mildew-free.

Now of the part of our story that might qualify as 'strange but true.' As was mentioned, once this plant starts to bloom, it is non-stop. However, a year or so ago, a large group of cuttings were started for distribution from a plant that was not blooming. To date, none of these cuttings has bloomed. Rudy has speculated that maybe only cuttings that are rooted with flowers already on them will bloom. I have had my plant for just under a year, now. It is a vigorous, steady grower. It gets a high level of sun. It came from that aforementioned group of cuttings. It has not yet bloomed.

Fortunately, I consider the plant attractive and well-worth growing for its foliage only. If flowers appear in the spring, they will just be an added bonus.

