



photo by Paul Tsamtsis

Begonia 'Silver Jewell'

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Begonia 'Silver Jewell' is a hybrid between *B. pustulata* (f) and *B. imperialis* (m). It was done by Susie Zug in 1957 and has ABS registration number 136. Millie and Ed Thompson, in their book *Begonias: The Complete Reference Guide* classify it as rhizomatous, distinctive foliage, pustular type. Its flowers are white and appear in moderate numbers. The Thompsons recommend it for the Advanced Grower.

The pustular types (or *imperialis*-like) are a group that have the primary characteristics of the two species parents (which are the only two species in that classification) and their varieties. They are both from Mexico. Pustular means the leaf surface is thickly set with tiny blistery elevations. These elevations usually have a tiny hair at the top. The overall effect is a leaf that has a glistening velvet finish.

The oldest known hybrid of this group is *B. 'Otto Forster'* (*B. imperialis* X *B. rex* cultivar) hybridized by Otto Froebel in Europe in 1876. Other more well-known hybrids are *B. 'Al Clark'*, *B. 'Brown Jewel'*, and *B. 'Emerald Jewell'*.

The rhizomes of pustular types have varied spaces between the leaves and creep so

much as to nearly look trailing.

While the Thompsons do not classify this plant as requiring a terrarium, they do point out that it is delicate and requires higher humidity in many areas to grow well. The plant pictured here was grown by Joan Coulat in her greenhouse out on the bench and was exhibited in the Sacramento Branch annual show in September 2001. However, many other growers in Sacramento find they need a terrarium to prevent brown edges on the leaves. *B. 'Silver Jewell'* should also not be subjected to temperatures lower than 50°F. The ideal range is 72° to 75°F which is easily provided in a fluorescent light cart.

Watering must be done carefully, particularly in a terrarium, so as not to get water on leaves. That would result in leaf rot where the water remained too long.

This plant and others in this group are relatively pest-free, but growers should keep an eye out for mealy bug, particularly if growing it in a terrarium.

While *B. 'Silver Jewell'* and other members of this rhizomatous sub-group are a challenge to grow, they are certainly a group to consider if one wants to expand the look of their begonia collection.

