



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

## *Begonia foliosa* von Humboldt, Bonpland, and Kurth

by Morris Mueller

*Begonia foliosa* HBK was discovered in Columbia in 1801, but was not described until 1825. Prior to the 1860s it was grown in France, but lost. By 1868 it had been introduced into England.

The leaves of *B. foliosa* are the smallest of any shrub-like begonia with leaves of one-half inch or less. It has been described by many people as having a 'fern-like' appearance because the leaves have almost no petiole and are close together on the stem. The leaves are bare. The new stems are erect/semi-erect, but droop with age. Because of this habit, it is a good subject for hanging baskets.

Once established, *B. foliosa* is a rapid grower. However, it is difficult to start unless in an enclosed container. Once cuttings root, they no longer require terrarium care, nor do they want it. Unlike many other shrub-like begonias, new plants can be started from leaves. Seedlings are slow to grow, but once they establish (like cuttings), they can become large relatively fast.

This plant will not tolerate drying out completely. It also does not like sitting in water. Aside from this, it tolerates conditions favorable to most other shrub-like begonias with no other special conditions needed.

The flowers are white with a pink cast to the ovaries. Like the leaves, they are small and appear singly and not in clusters. Some people report a very light fragrance.

It definitely requires shade in mid-day in all but cool coastal areas. It thrives outside when the weather is temperate.

Five varieties of this species have been identified: *B. foliosa* var. *amplifolia*, *B. foliosa* var. *miniata*, *B. foliosa* var. *putzeysiana*, *B. foliosa* var. *australis*, and *B. foliosa* var. *rotundata*. Very few hybrids have been made from this plant and the most common, *B. foliosa* 'Cascade' is a hybrid between *B. foliosa* and *B. foliosa* var. *amplifolia*. It was released in 1977 by Mike Kartuz.

This plant and its varieties are relatively pest-free, but growers should keep an eye out for mealy bug.

