



Slightly elongated star shaped leaves give *B. kenworthyae* its distinctive look.



Bluish gray powder with red highlights accent leaves.
photos by Paul Tsamtsis

Begonia kenworthyae Zies.

By Morris Mueller

This species was discovered in the 1940's by Thomas MacDougall in Chiapas, Mexico, and described (named) in 1950 by his friend and one of the founding members of the ABS, Rudy Ziesenhenné of Santa Barbara. Rudy named it after Eva Kenworthy Gray, another early California begonia enthusiast. Little has been written about this rhizomatous, rhizome-erect plant with medium-sized cleft leaves. Its habitat was described as at the edge of a rain/cloud forest. It grew in well-drained pockets of limestone that had filled with humus in partial sun to shade.

This plant's attraction is its grayish-powder blue leaves with an underlying reddish cast. The plant is rarely full and bushy, but rather long stemmed with leaf clusters at the stem tops. The white flowers, similar to plum blossoms, appear sparsely December through March. The leaves are like elongated stars with the tips slightly curled under. They are reminiscent of ivy leaves. The upright rhizomes are gnarled and rarely branch. New growth generally appears at soil level.

This collector grows it in light, well-

draining mix. It is allowed to dry nearly completely between thorough waterings. In cold weather it enters a dormant period of little growth and requires even less water.

Its succulence makes it a poor candidate for propagation by leaves and stem cuttings. Rhizomes need to callous thoroughly to improve chances of rooting. Seeds are the most reliable method of propagation. Cutting off or damaging the growing tip usually results in the whole rhizome's drying up. If that happens, new growth may appear at soil level, so do not discard the plant immediately.

Approximately two dozen hybrids list *B. kenworthyae* as a parent including *B. 'Col. Gale,' B. 'Dark Forrest,' B. 'Kingsbury,' B. 'Kumwha,' B. 'Maxine Zinman,'* and *B. 'Swirly Top'* (a cane-like plant resulting from a cross on *B. 'Lenore Olivier'*). Invariably the distinctive shape and color of the leaves are apparent in these hybrids. As they are usually much easier to grow than their famous parent, they are a good way to have the '*kenworthyae*' look in one's collection without the cultural difficulty of the parent.

