



B. peltata demonstrates the meaning of its name by showing the attachment of the petiole inside the leaf margin.

photo by Julie Vanderwilt

Begonia peltata Otto & Dietrich

By Morris Mueller

This Mexican, shrub-like species was first described in 1841, making it one of the earlier begonia introductions to the horticultural world. As its name implies, its leaves are peltate, *i.e.*, shield shaped, with its petiole attached to the leaf inside its margin, much like a lotus or waterlily. The leaves are covered with a white felt-like material, giving the plant a silver-green color. This latter characteristic is enhanced with brighter light.

Horticulturally, it is classified as hairy-leaved by the Thompsons. It blooms in the winter with white flowers; new growth is also nearly white.

It grows readily from seed. Stem cuttings are somewhat difficult to root as they tend to rot. As begonias go, this

plant wants very little water. (It can sometimes be found being sold in cactus nurseries!) The Thompsons classify this as a plant for the Collector, but I have found that a well-tended plant can become very full and quite an attention getter. *B. peltata* (previously *B. incana*) does need staking. It also branches relatively freely.

If water and light are not to its liking, the edges of the leaves curl under. Two other species that look much like *B. peltata* are *B. kellermanii* and *B. vanderveldiana*. These also have comparable cultural requirements.

A search of the Thompsons' list and the John Ingles Memorial Checklist shows there are fewer than a dozen hybrids using *B. peltata*. Of those, the two most commonly seen today are *B. 'Suncana'* and *B. 'Peach Fuzz.'*

