



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

Begonia 'Bashful Bandit'

by Greg Sytch
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Begonia 'Bashful Bandit' was created in 1996 by crossing two easily grown parents, *B. manicata* X *B. 'Joe Hayden'*. The idea was to create a dark, easy rhizomatous that was also rather compact but still of good size. After all, I enjoy big begonias that are easy to grow.

Initially part of a series, I dwindled them down to three sister seedlings which also include *B. 'Bodacious Bandit'* (named by fellow Floridian, Virginia Jens) and *B. 'Kissing Bandit'* (named after the cartoon character). *B. 'Bashful Bandit'* just came to me one day prior to the other names.

Classified as rhizomatous, medium cleft-leaved, *B. 'Bashful Bandit'* is a spreading grower to 18" across at maturity and leaves reaching up to 8", although usually leaves stay around 6" wide. They are a glossy, dark ochre with purple sheen, red blush underneath. *B. 'Bashful Bandit'* blooms regularly in late

winter and spring with tall spikes that begin as green buds and gradually open to pink flowers, rather profuse. Cold tolerance is excellent, and it adapts to most environments well. It does not like to be overwatered. Propagation is swift from leaf cuttings, and overall growth is easy.

B. 'Bashful Bandit' makes an excellent compact houseplant, light plant or moderate landscape plant in mild climates as it does not require a lot of room but can spread if given space. No particular care is required, which makes it an excellent subject for beginners. I have heard from many growers that it thrives almost everywhere it is grown. It does not seem to attract pests or any diseases worth noting.

Sometimes, when hybridizing, a seedling appears that is unassuming but holds some special character, so you continue to grow it "just to see what happens." *B. 'Bashful Bandit'* is just that seedling, because it has proven popular and vigorous over time.

