



photo by Julie Vanderwilt

Begonia kellermanii C. DC. by Morris Mueller

B. kellermanii was discovered in Southern Guatemala in 1809 by William Kellerman who was a fungi specialist at Ohio State University. The plant was described in 1919 by Casimir DeCandolle. It is listed under the Section Gireoudia along with about 65 other species from Mexico and Central America.

This begonia is classified as a shrub. It branches moderately and sends up new stems from the soil as well. The thick leaves and stems look as if they were cut from felt, as they are covered by short, wooly, silver-gray fuzz giving them a greenish gray color. Leaves are peltate (joined to the leaf near the center away from its edge, much like a water lily). The leaf margin is slightly wavy. The flowers are very pale pink, almost white and not very large. It has never flowered for me so I have no idea the time of year it blooms.

B. kellermanii is closely related to *B. kuhlmanii* and *B. peltata*. The differences with these two are that *B. kuhlmanii* is covered with brown hair and the leaves of

B. peltata are larger than *B. kellermanii*.

All three plants grow best when kept on the dry side as too much water causes rot. The planting mix should be light and fast draining. They are all hard to start from cuttings because of the rot problem. They can take more sun than most other begonias (I have found *B. peltata* for sale in a cactus nursery!). Higher light increases the density of the fuzzy hairs. This fuzz is easily brushed off revealing a smooth green leaf underneath. It also withstands more cold than many other begonias for me.

There have been quite a few hybrids using *B. kellermanii*. It was used nine times as pollen parent and six times as seed parent. Most of these hybrids are not easily found, if they still exist at all. *B. 'Mish'* by Rudy Ziesenhenné is still available. It is registered with the ABS as #444. *B. 'Notre Dame'* is a hybrid of Leslie Woodriff.

The Thompsons in their book **BEGONIAS: The Complete Reference Guide** list it as For the Collector. I have found it easy to grow (if kept dry).

