

# The Yellow Flowering Begonias of Africa\*

By Don Miller

You usually do not think of yellow as a flower color for Begonias. But yellow is an uncommon color of some more unusual begonia species. You will find a few yellow flowering species in Asia and Andean South America, but in Africa there is a very large number of these. Most of these yellow flowering begonias grow, natively, on the West Coast of Africa near the equator. In the countries of Gabon, Cameroon, Liberia, Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea.



Begonia prismatocarpa

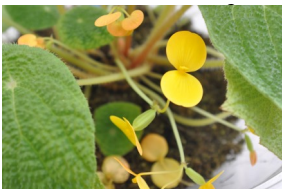
*Begonia prismatocarpa* is one of the more common of these golden jewels. It is rhizomatous and in Equatorial Guinea, its native habitat, it trails along the soil surface or will grow as an epiphyte on rocks and trees. It has a very small, bright green, lobed leaves. The flowers are bright yellow with a small orange mark near the center. This is a popular and easy to grow terrarium plant and is almost everblooming. It is usually grown in a terrarium because it thrives in very high humidity.

*Begonia microsperma* is another of these golden beauties. The medium sized leaf is oval and has a bullate upper surface, this means, it has a leaf surface covered with small bumps or blisters. It is rhizomatous but grows in more of a mound. In its native habit it grows near the mist of waterfalls and streams, clinging to rock surfaces or as an epiphyte in trees. The flowers are relatively large and a golden yellow. *B. microsperma* is listed as endangered and vulnerable because of mining activity in its home countries of Western Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.



Begonia microsperma

Begonia 'Buttercup' is a hybrid of *B. prismatocarpa* and *B. microsperma* created by Mike Kartuz of Kartuz Greenhouses in Vista, CA. The oval leaf is smaller than *B. microspermas* and has bright yellow flowers. This cultivar is nice if you want a mature plant that smaller than *microsperma*.



Begonia staudtii

*Begonia staudtii* is very similar to *B. microsperma*, but the upper leaf surface has a finer bullate leaf texture. Other characteristics that distinguish these two species is hairs on the petioles and a taller growth habit for *B. staudtii* while *B. microsperma* has smooth petioles and a more compact growth habit. In its native habitat it grows in sandy soil or as an epiphytic on rocks and tree trunks. It is often found growing near streams or rivers where it thrives in high humidity of Nigeria and Western Cameroon.

*Begonia vittariifolia* is a more distinct and rare species from the Crystal Mountains of Gabon. The thick, apple green leaves are long and slender. It has a rhizomatous growth habit but very short internodes, the space between the leaves on the stem, so it grows in more of a round clump. The flowers are bright yellow. This one prefers to grow on moist, mossy rock surfaces, again near waterfalls and streams where the mist envelopes them.



Begonia vittariifolia

These are just a few of the many yellow flowering species in western equatorial Africa. These can all be grown in a terrarium in average home temperatures. The nice thing about growing in a terrarium is you only have to check for moisture every two to three weeks.

As a growing media, I prefer to use a mixture of long fiber sphagnum moss and perlite. I soak the moss, cut it in smaller pieces and mix it, 4 parts moss with 1 part perlite. They will thrive under artificial lights or in a north window. Just be sure the hot sun does not shine on your terrarium and build up heat and cook them. Why not enjoy these exotic Begonias in your home.

\*This article first appeared in the April-May 2019 issue of the Southwest Region Newsletter.