

VIREYA VINE

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E. White Smith, Editor

From Chris Fairweather,
Dear VV,

Beaulieu, England
August 2002

This has been a good year for vireya Rhododendrons in U.K. We started off in the spring with an excellent conference in Edinburgh; this was a good opportunity to meet enthusiasts from around the world.

In July we set up a display of vireyas at the Hampton court flower show. Luckily we had quite a few in flower, always an uncertain factor when you decide to show these plants. Luckily, many lochiaie hybrids and the species itself coming up trumps. The star plant on our stand was Gwenevere; the scented pale pink flowers looked stunning, and created a lot of comment.

Our stand was in the Heritage tent, which was organised very efficiently by the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens. It was interesting to receive public reaction to a range of vireya Rhododendrons that have certainly not been displayed for many years, certainly not in my lifetime.

We sold a lot of young plants. I just hope they survive. Obviously our problem here in U.K. is our climate. While we can promote vireyas as good patio plants, to use during the frost-free months, they do need to come in during our winter. Some of the late flowering hybrids like Java Light; Flamenco dancer and First light make excellent cool conservatory plants that flower in to our autumn and winter. They appear to require the minimum of heat to survive the cold weather.

Visiting Plantarium, an annual plant show, held in Boskoop, Holland this summer I was interested to see plants of Rhodo vireya Saxon Glow and Blush on display. A Dutch nursery has taken out plant breeders rights on both these two and raised, I gather, 20,000 for the pot plant trade and plans to do even more next year, after this first successful sales launch. This is an interesting development that might increase the awareness of vireyas in Europe.

Following some discussion with Sylvia Saperstein in Australia, we did some trials with Bonzi, dwarfing chemical, to see if we could grow more compact plants. This was given as three separate sprays in the spring, applied at weekly intervals.

Looking at our trial batch we have produced some interesting results with young bushy two-year-old plants, in some cases covered in flower buds. The old Veitch hybrid, Pink Delight, has responded very well and should be in flower in a few weeks. Before we can say this is all successful we have to make sure they grow away next spring. I gather that if you overdose with these dwarfing chemicals the plant might not grow again!

The notes from Fran Rutherford on compost are very interesting. Our mix is made up of. 50% coarse peat, 30% medium peat, 20% coarse bark, 3kg per m cu multicote 12, 280 grs per M cu of intercept (to control vine weevil), 15grs per M cu of iron edta. This mix has a P.H. of about 4.5 to 5.00. I give no extra feed during the growing season. We are probably using higher rates of fertilizer than many other growers are in UK; this results in green healthy plants. Does the extra feed encourage more flower bud? I wish we knew.

Our number one pest is mealy bug. A persistent little insect that we attack with two chemicals. Imidacloprid and deltamethrin. It is a constant battle to keep certain hybrids mealy bug free. Any bright ideas gladly received.

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From Chip Lima,
Dear Vireya Vine

San Francisco, California
August 2002

It all started from a simple gift of 'Saint Valentine' from Red's Rhododendrons on Valentines day in '86. From then on I have been hooked, growing vireya *Rhododendrons* as indoor/outdoor plants in Portland, greenhouse plants in Rhode Island, and now I am organizing a tour to West Papua and forming a new chapter of the ARS in San Francisco mostly for vireyas.

I've spent this dreary February afternoon organizing my new greenhouse space graciously offered to me by Pete Sullivan. He likes to describe himself as the mythical Pete Sullivan, but he does exist. His experience in breeding and raising vireyas is unparalleled in the US and I am fortunate to have his instruction.

Like many compulsive collectors, I have nearly filled the space and have more than enough larger plants to fill the garden wall to wall. What I have to learn now is how to cull inferior plants, less important souvenirs, and eliminate those which will not contribute to my breeding program. I also need to limit my obsessive collection of orchids for cool climates.

I'm setting up a mist bed for propagation and a nursery for the small plants inside the greenhouse. In the basement I am setting up grow lights where the seedlings can germinate and begin life safely from disease and slugs. Outside I'll have some nursery style growing of pots on plastic with drip irrigation and some field grown larger specimens in the ground. I plan to shade the vireyas with larger pots of bamboo, *Phyllostachys vivax aureocaulis*, *Phyllostachys tutsig variegata*, and *Himalyacalamus hookerianum* and banana 'Rajah Puri.'

Working in Pete Sullivan's Church Garden has shown me how to use vireyas as landscape plants in the most protected locations in San Francisco. Now I have landscapes including 'Lawrence,' 'Cristo Rey,' and 'Sunny's Brother'.

Two years ago the plants at the Church Garden were moved, but now they have settled in and are growing and blooming like crazy. The 'Lawrence,' 'Peter Valder II' the *leucogigas* hybrids like 'John Henry' and 'Cyril of Alexandria' are getting close to eight feet high. Winter seems like the time for everything orange to blossom, 'George Budgen F2,' 'Cristo Rey,' 'Peter Valder,' 'Athanasius,' and *brookeanum x lochae*. There is also a beautiful seedling of *laetum x lowii* about ready to bloom. Last year it had 14 yellow light bulb shaped flowers in a truss. The *R. superbum* from PNG Forestry Dept. continues to bloom most of the time. The leaves are sub-obovate elliptic (rounded), and not acuminate, (pointed with a drip tip).

The winter showstopper is 'Leonore Francis' when grown in cool shade. Nothing else is that color of raspberries and white and yellow, there is even a light scent. When grown warm or in sun it is watermelon and white. Please come visit, but bring a coat, it's always cold and windy.

Chip Lima

San Francisco

Editor's Note:: Things change fast in this modern world. The last I heard was that Chip was going to move to Scotland to live. End of November I think. We sure wish him good luck. Chip's work with Pete Sullivan's church garden in SF is much appreciated. Chip is looking for someone to take over for him at this garden. Pete Sullivan is a special person, so Chip's friendship with him has been good for both of them EWS.

From Glen Jamieson

British Columbia, Canada

Dear Vireya Vine,

September, 2002-09-12

I have read with interest the many articles in the Vine, but have been hesitant until now to contribute myself, as I believed I knew relatively little about vireyas. As recent past president of the Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society on Vancouver Island, I have long had an interest in plants, and since about 1995, rhodos in particular. Up until I became involved with rhodos, I had cultured orchids for many years, so had greenhouses and was familiar with the culture of tropical species. However, as I found out, this quickly proved to be both a benefit and a problem, which I describe below!

While about one third of the genus Rhododendron are vireyas, to my knowledge no one in Canada has previously advocated their culture or is marketing them. Seeing a challenge, I began building up a collection of plants and through trial and error, have been learning how to best grow them in my climate – occasional periods of frost or even snow in the winter (Zone 9 – seldom below -5°C , up to 33°C), and a summer drought of typically 2-3 months duration. Since most vireyas can't take frost, this required their being cultured in pots and being held in a minimally heated structure during the winter. I winter my plants in a greenhouse that is maintained at a minimal temperature of 5°C (40°F) – the lowest my thermostat will go. Operationally, the exact temperature setting just needs to be above freezing. The coldest weather here is typically associated with sunny days, and since the greenhouse can then heat up during the day, it usually retains sufficient heat in its gravel floor to minimise my heating costs.

My biggest trials and learning experience have come with how to culture vireyas during the summer. For the first year, I kept them in my greenhouse all year. Since I have shade cloth and an evaporative cooler (warm outside air is blown over water-soaked materials into the greenhouse when it exceeds an upper thermostat temperature, and the water's evaporation maintains the temperature at a programmed temperature), the greenhouse temperature never exceeds my desired maximum temperature of 27°C (80°F). However, the high temperature and associated high humidity from the evaporated water, although great for orchids, led to excessive mildew and root problems which killed a number of plants, particularly newly rooted ones. In summary, growing conditions for orchids are not appropriate for vireyas, even if both groups of plants come from "vireyaland", i.e. south-east Asia! I had read this, of course, but since everyone's orchid growing conditions differ, I had to determine this for myself with my growing conditions, and I proved once again that indeed, optimal orchid and vireya culture are not similar! I now keep my vireyas in a structure that is open to the outside from April to November so that an ambient outside temperatures exists and the humidity is not consistently high. The result has been no plant losses in recent years!

The other challenge we have here in Canada is that by the time of year in the spring when frosts are no longer likely, i.e. April, the sun is so high and hot that plants taken from a partially shaded environment will suffer leaf burn very quickly if exposed suddenly to full sun. Particular care has to be taken in moving plants around, and I ensure that only gradual exposure to full sunlight occurs.

I now have a couple of hundred plants, and because of their number, a watering regime is required. Because of the summer drought, scattering the potted plants around my large garden would make it difficult to hand water them all. Some would invariably be missed and potentially die. I thus keep the plants mostly concentrated in one location, where they are easily hand watered about once a week – a 20-minute job!

With respect to the plants I have, like most beginners, I was initially most attracted to the larger flowering hybrids and species. Flowers of *R. konori*, ‘Humboldt Bay’ and ‘Cyril’ are truly spectacular.

They help get others interested too, but from a practical perspective in my climate, large flowers are typically on large plants, and this makes moving them around and maintaining space for them in a greenhouse a chore. From my orchid and temperate rhodo experience, I also know that while hybrids are nice, the long-term interest for true aficionados is really with species. The result is that while I have about 50% hybrids, I am now concentrating on building up my species collection, and presently also have about fifty species. I am particularly interested in the small to moderate size, cold hardy species and their hybrids, and was intrigued to see the hybrid crosses that Bill Moyles was making with *R. gracilentum*, *R. rubineiflorum* and *R. saxifragoides* when I visited him in California last year. *R. commonae* hybrids are also of interest, although I have yet to acquire any except ‘Lawrence’.

Finally, I have found the vireya growers I have met or corresponded with to be all exceptional people – very friendly and helpful with advice, and often even with cuttings! This is important, since because there are relatively few of us, we have to support each other to get the word out about how great vireyas really are! Bovees (White and Lucie) has been particularly helpful in assisting me to establish my collection, and being only an eight-hour drive away, I visit there regularly. I’m really hoping one day to get to New Zealand, as from what I’ve read, vireya culture is really progressing well there.

I have given talks on vireyas to three rhododendron societies around Vancouver, and found the audiences to be very receptive. My plants are now becoming established, and I am at the stage where I regularly have to pinch them back to keep the plants from becoming either too large or too leggy. I’m rooting some of the cuttings, but with a present limited market for them in Canada, I’m mostly doing so only on an as-need basis. However, I am interested in increasing the awareness of vireyas in Canada, so if anyone would like advice on growing them or would like to obtain a cutting, rooted or otherwise, from one of my plants, I would be pleased to try and help them.

Glen Jamieson
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Parksville, BC V9P 1S4
Canada

From Sherla Bertelmann (from e-mail on the Vireya Group) Hawaii

Aloha, A couple quick notes...

September 2002

Our vireya seed distribution is alive and well. I encourage you to at least try germinating vireya seed once. It will require patience on your end that will be rewarded when your "babies" grow up. Seeds are \$1 a packet. Also available is a paper on germinating vireya seed by Bill Moyles (\$1, too). If you are interested in receiving the seed list please feel free to contact me.

Our (Hawaii Chapter, American Rhododendron Society) 2nd Vireya Seminar scheduled for Feb. 14 & 15, 2003 is getting very close to being firmed up. The tentative program consists of presentations from Richard Currie, New Zealand, ... Bill Moynier...California, . Martin Monthofer of Bremen, Germany. and George Argent of Scotland... There will also be a growers panel to end the seminar with questions on techniques, media, and tips to share are slated to be asked.

On Sat, the 15th - A full day of gardens is being planned - the day will start with a visit to our zoo and our vireya garden that is being developed followed by a visit to a commercial vireya nursery... lunch up in Volcano Village... and a visit at the infamous Mitch Mitchell's vireya garden.

Information and contact numbers for hotels is on page 7 of this VV, as well as, registration fees etc. If you wish to receive more information and have not previously contacted me... please do so.

Our new e-mail address is pin@greensand.net

Aloha for now, Sherla <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/vireya> <http://www.vireya.net>

From Lyn Craven

Dear Vireya Vine

Melba A.C.T. Australia

September 2002

Easy cure for fungal attacks on newly sown *Rhododendron* seed

One problem that often arises for me when germinating *Rhododendron* seed is that of fungal growth on small pieces of capsule that inadvertently get sown with the seed. It may be a problem with all groups of *Rhododendron* but my experience is largely limited to vireyas. The fungus can grow vigorously and spread to the seed and kill it before the seed germinates. In some cases the fungus develops directly on the seed; usually this occurs with seed that has been collected from capsules that have been open on the plant for some weeks and have become contaminated with spores. Maybe I should have been keeping some of the fungus to obtain an identification for it is somewhat embarrassing to report that I have no idea as to which species or even family (ies) of fungus are involved. My first thought has always been to eliminate it!

My seed raising techniques are probably fairly consistent with those of other growers and, with seed of reasonable quality, they generally give good results. I sow the seed on moderately damp peat moss pressed into a seed punnet, mist it lightly (I use an atomiser/hand mister for misting cuttings) and then wrap the punnet in standard household plastic cling wrap. The sealed punnets are then kept in a heated and illuminated propagating box that I use for cuttings and I watch them carefully for a few weeks in case mold develops.

If I planted the seed without using cling wrap ventilation would be improved and I imagine that mold would not be as great a problem. But then the seed might dry out, especially if there were only one or two punnets of seed in an otherwise empty propagating box.

Several decades ago a medico friend, Bob Withers, gave me some excellent advice as to an effective, safe compound for controlling this type of organism. It is potassium permanganate, KMnO_4 , also known as Condy's crystals, permanganic acid or potassium salt. It is a purple crystalline substance, is soluble in water and (at high concentrations) gives a rich purple solution. Whenever I have a problem with mold on germinating seed I put a couple of pieces of crystal into the reservoir of the atomiser and swirl it around until the water turns a definite light purple. Then I unwrap the punnet and spray the fungus until it is thoroughly wet and starting to collapse. The punnet is then wrapped in fresh cling wrap and replaced in the propagating box. (When commencing the process of getting the peat moss wetted, etc, there is a fine line between having the peat too dry or too wet; it comes down to experience in assessing just how much water to squeeze out of the peat and how much misting to give the seed when first sown.)

I have found potassium permanganate to be a very easy and extremely effective control for this type of fungus. The major problem with using modern fungicides, and I have no idea which of them would be suitable for molds, is that one cannot readily measure the very small quantity of material required for 300-500 ml of water, which is about the volume one needs to prepare. With potassium permanganate it is easy; just add a few crystals to the water in the reservoir and one is away.

Sources of supply are no problem either. A polite approach to the chemistry lab in your local high school or college, an explanation of why one wants KMnO_4 , and a request for a teaspoonful of crystals should succeed. This amount, at the rate I have been using the compound, should be adequate for about 400 years!! Possibly your local pharmacy may have some KMnO_4 in stock although pharmacists these days rarely make things from first principles (and one definitely does not need to acquire, a 500 gm pack!!).

Potassium permanganate apparently has been used fairly widely as a disinfectant but it should not be thought of as an old-fashioned agent. I noted on the web that the US Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service is experimenting with it as a potential control agent for parasites of freshwater fish. It certainly works well on Rhododendrons.

Lyn Craven
26 Saville Close
Melba, Canberra, ACT 2615
Australia

Thanks Lyn, here at Bovees we got a jump on other Viners and have used the potassium permanganate on some seed that Lyn sent to us. Works great. Of course one of the problems is that Vireya seed grows SO slow that it often is in trouble with mold problems.

OK and there are problems with potassium permanganate. It may be very hard to get. Probably older drug stores might have some on a back shelf but the new operations in supermarkets probably will not have it. If you happen to try walking into a school now days you are probably required to go to the office and sign in and try to explain what you were interested in (which could cause a lot of funny looks). Don't just take off looking for the chemistry classroom.

Feb 14 & 15, 2003

****Requests for room must be received by January 14, 2003 or subject to rate and space availability.**

Some interesting Internet sites

www.vireya.net

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/vireya

The Bovees Nursery (Lucie Sorensen-Smith)
1737 SW Coronado (E. White Smith)
Portland, OR 97219 USA
(503)-244-9341 or 1-800-435-9250
E-mail - info@bovees.com www.bovees.com
Catalogue is \$2.00 (Mail Order)

Glendoick Gardens (Kenneth & Peter Cox)
Glendoick, Perth Mail Order
Scotland, U.K. PH2 7NS www.glendoick.com
Phone Nursery 073 886 205

D. & P.J. Brown
Vernon Road www.homepages.ihug.co.nz/~brownnz
Te Puna, Tauranga E-mail brownz@actrix.co.nz
New Zealand

Mark Jury
Tikurangi, RD 43 E-mail jury@xtra.co.nz
Waitara, North Taranaki
New Zealand

Vireya Valley Nursery
Woori-Yallock Road
Cockatoo, Victoria 3781
Australia

Neil & Kathryn Puddey Nursery
PO Box 126, Woolgoolga, NSW
Australia E-mail puddy@bigpond.com

VIREYA NURSERIES

Rhododendron Species Foundation
PO Box 3798 www.rhodiegarden.org
Federal Way, WA 98063 USA
(253)-838-4646 Mail Order E-mail rsf@rhodygarden.org

Christopher Fairweather
The Garden Centre, High Street
Beaulieu, Hampshire www.website.lineone/fairweather.com
England SO42 7YR E-mail plantdoc@martex.co.uk

Te Puna Cottage Gardens (John Kenyon)
Te Puna Road, RD6 E-mail TePuna.Cott.Gdns@xtra.co.nz
Tauranga, New Zealand web site at www.vireya.co.nz
Mail Order NZ only Phone (07)552-5756

Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust
Carrington Rd. RD4
New Plymouth E-mail pukeiti@pukeiti.org.nz
New Zealand web site at www.pukeiti.org.nz

The Vireya Venue
2 Clifford Street
Maleny, Queensland 4552
Australia

Pacific Island Nursery (Sherla Bertelmann & Richard Marques)
P. O. Box 1953 E-mail tropical@greensand.net
Kcaau, HI 96749 (808)966-9225
www.pacificislandnursery.com
They also handle the Vireya seed exchange. WorldWide.

VIREYA VINE

RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION

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