

The Vireya Venture.

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.3 APRIL 1991

Once again it is time to say "Hello" to all of the Venturers. Time certainly passes very quickly in this busy world of ours and so,for this issue,I am going to combine the 'Stop Press' section with the editorial.

First of all,I think a grateful 'Thank you' must go to Mr.J.Clyde Smith for all his hours of work put in to give us the detailed tables of the Vireya hybrids, making up the last two pages of each of our T.V.V. issues. I am sure all the Venturers have found them most interesting and they should have clarified quite a number of questions about the hybrids. Clyde is also preparing a list of the new Vireya registrations for this issue. Many thanks,Clyde.

We are also very pleased to announce that there is,on the way,a reprint of Clyde's invaluable reference book,'Vireya Rhododendrons',the only one of its kind in existence and most sought after by Vireya buffs. I am sure you will be pleased about that as stocks have begun to run rather short.

There are also several shows and displays,featuring Vireyas that are happening here in Queensland. At present the GARDEN SHOW in Brisbane has several nurseries making a feature of the Vireyas. Then on the Queen's Birthday long weekend,June 8,9,and 10, ADAMS PALMS OF Montville,Qeensland are putting on their annual VIREYA RHODODENDRON SHOW,which is becoming quite a feature in the horticultural calendar up here. Also on the 28th.29th,and 30th June the Vireyas are going to be a part of the Sunshine Coast Garden EXPO which is held at Nambour every year.

So there we are. As far as other states are concerned,my grapevine seems to have dried up. PLEASE if you hear any news for the next issue,let me know. Once again my thanks to those who have taken the time to put pen to paper and share their knowledge and experience. Don't forget,this is Your newsletter and without your input there will be no news to impart! Good luck with the pens,pencils and word processors.

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Our FEATURE ARTICLE this issue has been written by Mr. Barry Paget, from Queensland. Barry is an experienced nurseryman of many years and also a lecturer in Horticulture at a Brisbane TAFE college. Barry writes:-

Having been an orchid grower for some thirty years and looking for another challenge, I experimented with vireyas some four or more years ago.
I have been an avid plant collector for many years and over those years I have observed new plants which have comme onto the market, only to find in time, that some do not suit the climatic conditions of southern Qeensland.

As a trial, I placed some twenty-five plants in my garden, in pots above ground level, where they received full sunlight until eleven or twelve midday. These plants were periodically potted on to larger pots and watered perhaps twice a week. Situated on the crest of a hill, these plants received excellent air movement. Under these conditions the plants have thrived. I was aware that the plants required good drainage and using my rules for watering orchids, once a week in winter, twice a week in summer, I was determined not to over-water. In retrospect, I realize that vireyas do not have water storage organs such as pseudu-bulbs. Perhaps I was a little hard on them. I now have in excess of twelve hundred plants and I am still collecting.

Growing vireyas has been a somewhat frustrating experience as information about them is not available to the budding grower. One may search libraries for information only to find that the only advice to be gleaned applies to those magnificent cold growing rhododendrons of our southern counterparts. I feel we have a duty to educate growers about these most beautiful high-elevation tropical plants.

Originating at high elevations in tropical parts of the world their climatic requirements appear to be akin to those of southern Queensland and northern New South Wales where the temperature range is roughly that of their natural environment. Plants appear to grow exceptionally in shallow pots and in baskets where good drainage is provided. As with orchids, the smaller the pot the better the drainage one is able to provide. This is because the root system is better able to draw off excess moisture from a smaller volume of potting medium. Of course, should roots become girdled around the pot these may be cut three or four times vertically with a sharp knife prior to repotting.

I grow my vireyas on galvanised ARC mesh benches, used previously for orchid culture, located in a shade house covered with 50% knitted shade cloth. The advantage of the shade cloth is that it prevents hail damage. I have found growth under 50% shade to be equal to that of full morning sunlight. Do not use a higher shade rating as good sunlight ensures good firm growth and satisfactory blooming. Increased shade will provide lush lanky growth on plants loathe to bloom. The galvanised mesh ensures good drainage, prevents problems of earth worms entering the medium from the soil and there is no danger that the pots, when placed on the ground, will settle into the soil spoiling the necessary good drainage requirement. The other advantage of a bench raised some 45cm above the ground is the increased air circulation.

An organic potting medium is desirable and the recipe I use consists of composted medium pine bark (to avoid nitrogen draw-down) fine hardwood charcoal, perlite and coarse sand. Drainage is essential and this medium appears to meet this requirement. It should be remembered that such a medium should be acidic. Too high a pH will result in chlorosis (iron deficiency) appearing as yellow between bright green veination in the leaves. The pH may be adjusted using sulphur or a sulphur product such as sulphate of potash, sulphate of iron or similar.

I now water roughly three times a week, keeping an eye on the state of the potting medium. During dry periods I wet down the plants daily to maintain high humidity without adding to the moisture content of the medium.

I have found that vireyas respond to regular weak applications of soluble fertilizers. Osmocote Plus has also proven satisfactory providing excellent growth when applied in Spring. This past season, plants have tended to streak away with soft, limp growth. Sulphate of potash applied in solution has hardened off such growth. A slow release form of this product is available which relieves the difficulty of dissolving the granular product.

Plants respond well to pruning. When leggy portions of the plant are pruned, the apical bud is removed and this allows lateral growth to occur. This makes for a well furnished plant. Be sure to prune back to a node where leaves exist.

This past summer has provided growers with some disease problems. It is known that powdery mildew attacks vireyas and this may be prevented and/or cured using a Benomyl spray which is also known to control/and petal blight. It has been noted that some plants have collapsed. It was suspected that this may have been caused by Phytophthora (root rot disease) but upon investigation by DPI plant pathologists was found to be a form of anthracnose known as Glomerella. I appears that this disease is most prevalent during periods of wet weather, especially at night. The organism is only active while the leaf surface is wet and the condition is compounded where plants are crowded, where air circulation is reduced. The disease appears as blackened tips to the leaves which gradually expand. Once the disease enters the stem, it will spread if left unchecked. It is suggested that all affected portions of the plant should be removed using sterilized sharp secateurs and the material destroyed. It appears that the organism multiplies in organic matter left rotting on the floor. The disease may be prevented using products such as Daconil, copper oxy-chloride, etc... The weather which appears to favour the disease is a combination of still, hot, humid conditions characteristic of some summers. It has been noted that with February passing and the weather becoming less humid and cooler, this problem appears to have passed.

As these plants are epiphytes they are prone to root rot diseases when placed into an inappropriate, heavy potting medium. Fongarid is the product generally recommended for the control of phytophthora. It is found that the best product is Phosphorus acid sold under the trade name of 'Phosjet'. This is applied as a foliar spray.

It has been found that vireyas are prone to the same range of insect pests as most garden plants - scale, mealy bugs, aphids etc.. and these pests are easily treated with one of the systemic insecticides such as Dimethoate and Metasystox. Mites are also troublesome at times as are caterpillars and may be dealt with in the regular manner. A product called Mavrik, which is rather expensive, controls both these predators in one application.

In the four years of my association with vireyas I have experienced considerable pleasure with the consistent blooming achieved with a large collection of plants. Most plants appear to bloom twice per year and because they do not bloom en masse, the blooms occur at random on the various leading canes of these plants. The chief blooming seasons are Autumn and Spring, with a fall away in bloom production in Summer being particularly noted. They are particularly rewarding plants requiring a minimum of attention. I am sure that more vireyas will be killed through over attention than neglect. I am sure that through publications such as 'Vireya Venture' we will have the opportunity to share our experiences.

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xxx

I am sure that you will all have enjoyed Barry's article as much as I did and it should prove an encouragement as well as providing some excellent information for all vireya growers, particularly those in the Brisbane area. Many thanks indeed, Barry, for taking the time to share your work and expertise with us.

Editor.

Many thanks go to one of our new Venturers,Mr. Mark Vowles,of Deception Bay Queensland, who has sent us the following letter:-

I must say that I am very excited to find and be part of T.V.V. The exotic beauty of vireyas was shown to me only a year and a half ago. An overwhelming passion to collect and cultivate these beauties soon followed and I now have 30 different varieties and species.

Working in the retail nursery industry,I been able to witness a growing interest in vireyas. Although they are still expensive,customers have been keen to include a vireya in their garden. Most seem to be having success but the problem of root rot is experienced by a few. I feel that as soon as the cultural requirements are appreciated,the vireya will no doubt become a very popular and much sought after plant. We,at the nursery have paid particular attention to advising customers on growing vireyas and find people soon return to increase their collection.

We recently had a crew from Vogue magazine in to photograph vireya blooms. They concentrated on some excellent umbels (trusses) of 'Flamenco Dancer','Coral Flare and 'Simbu Sunset' so, with any luck,we can expect to see some fine portraits of these flowers in a future issue.

I have had great success growing vireyas in baskets. Hybrids like 'Tropic Fanfare and'Pacific Shower' have produced stunning displays on a vigorous well shaped plant. It would be interesting to attempt growing certain plants in an epiphitic manner,ie.in a tree fork or mounted on a board. Perhaps peat moss or a fibro compost could be used as a growing medium to protect and encourage the roots. I recently placed a small 'Pacific Shower' in a Platycerium superbum (Staghorn fern) and expect the two to do well. Both have been placed in a high light situation and growth is promising.

Mark Vowles,6 Simon St. Deception Bay Q.4508

Mark seems to have the right idea about experimentation with the vireyas,as this is the only way we are going to learn. Then,if we are prepared to share our experiences,good or bad,in such a medium as T.V.V, then what a wonderful vireya World this could be. We certainly wish you every best wish for your personal adventure,Mark, and would love to hear about any other vireya exploits that may be lurking out there!

xxx

WOLLONGONG 1990/91

Our plant of 'Sunny' (christianae x macgregoriae) excelled itself early this Spring and put on a magnificent show for weeks. Dead heading it was a boring j but the bush had certainly earned some assistance,it is about 1½ metres high a the same width and was completely covered in flowers. To relieve the monoto v counted the trusses as they were removed and the total was 862,each with an ve age of some four flowers.

Much later this was followed in flower by 'Pendragon' alongside it.In the pre year it had also covered itself in flowers of similar colour but twice the si of 'Sunny'. This year it had about half the number of flowers and they were miserably small and unhappy,as were many other vireyas in our garden,if they flowered at all. The reason was obvious, the year had commenced with record h rainfall and then continued to be wet,cold and windy. Three mature trees died with root rot - as did a few minor plants. Then,overnight,the weather became very hot and very dry. The summer was the hottest and the most consistently in our experience. Cool changes did not occur. Temperatures reached a peak of 42°C and many plants were badly burnt that day. Our heavy ground dried out, cracked and was almost impossible to moisten. A few vireyas gave up and some had to be rescued from the ground and potted up.

Now that autumn temperatures are with us and we have had a few showers the vireyas are producing a good crop of normal flowers again, but they certainl did not enjoy the consistent heat.

J.C.Smith.

Dr.Geoff Atherton has written down how he has grown R.lochae,for the interest of the Venturers. Geoff says:-
I have found R.lochae very easy to grow in Brisbane's conditions. I have them growing in a mix of Cymbidium Orchid mix and fine sand in the ratio of 4:1. Cymbidium mix on its own tended to be too open and to dry out quickly.

I have grown them in terracotta pots in full sun throughout the year,with no significant leaf burning occurring in hotter months of January/February. They have been fertilized with Osmocote on the surface of the mix and are all showing vigorous growth. One plant is looking a little chlorotic and I have treated it with Iron Chelates recently. I am not yet certain if this represents iron deficiency.

All of the large terracotta pots have broken pottery pieces and sand extending about one quarter of the height of the pot. All of the plants of R.lochae are showing very vigorous growth after being in this setting for twelve months but no flowers yet.

xxx

Many thanks,Geoff,for sharing your growing of R.lochae with us.

We have been lucky enough to visit Geoff and Christine's home recently and certainly admired the healthy new growth on their plants of R.lochae,which looked very resplendent, indeed in their beautiful terracotta pots. Certainly they looked the ideal 'potted plant'. What a wonderful bonus when they do become smothered in those waxy bright red bells!

I wonder if others are also experimenting with different growing techniques? If so,we would love to hear about your experiences.

Ed.

xxx

Ruth Funder of 7 Mary St.Kew,Victoria 3101,has kindly sent us this item of interest:- " In the recent publication of the New Zealand 'Vireya News' - I saw an article written by Graham Smith of Pukeiti about a very disappointing vireya plant he had grown. His cross was (R.phaeopeplum x R.lochae) x R.leucogigas. Just after reading this a very handsome plant of mine - covered with buds,burst into flower. The cross was (R.phaeopeplum x R.lochiae) x (R.leucogigas x R.lochiae) and I had expected something quite handsome. Instead of this,as each truss opened the flowers were tiny dull red tubes - mostly split - with gangling stigmas hanging out. So it has joined the'R.Rubbishheapii'plants to my great disappointment.

xxx

I don't think you are all alone in this forlorn enterprise, Ruth. It has been part of our lives many times, as I am sure it has been with other hopeful vireya breeders. How many 'R.Rubbishheapii's are there out there?

Ed.

xxx

We frequently bring small vireya plants into the house,while they are in flower to enable us to enjoy their beauty at close quarters. This way the blooms can be protected from harsh weather and often,in consequence,can last up to a couple of weeks without spoiling. However,I suspect there is a danger of overwatering a pot plant under such circumstances,because I believe the water requirements of a plant indoors,without the natural movement of air over the leaves,is much reduced,compared with out of doors. Overwatering could result in severe root damage and,I suspect,I may even have killed a couple of plants in the past by being over-indulgent with the watering jug.

G.Snell, Maleny.

VIREYA REGISTRATIONS 1990

The following are the latest addition of Vireyas to the International Rhododendron Register during the period 1st July 1989 to 30th June 1990.

Autumn Berry Wine — laetumn x zoelleri
Hybridized and grown by G.L.Snell Maleny Queensland,registered by R.MacDonald Montrose Victoria.
Truss of 6-8 flowers 60x50mm funnel shaped,moderate red in bud (47A) opening to vivid reddish orange (43A).

Bright Lights — ([konori x laetum] x commonae) x laetum
Hybridized and grown by G.L.Snell, registered by R.MacDonald.
Truss of 6-8 flowers 70x90mm funnel shaped,tube brilliant yellow (21C),lobes strong reddish orange (32B)

Choc Orange — laetum x 'Sweet Wendy'
Hybridized and grown by G.L.Snell,registered by R.MacDonald.
Truss of 7 flowers,tubular funnel shaped 50x70mm,tube vivid yellow (17B),lobes vivid reddish orange.

Highland Peter Pan — christianae x 'Sweet Wendy'
Hybridized,grown and registered by G.L.Snell.
Truss has 5-6 flowers funnel shaped 60x50mm with 5 twisted lobes. Tube brilliant yellow (14A) inside and out,lobes strong red (41B)

Lana's Gold — (christianae x laetum) x (laetum x zoelleri'Golden Gate')
Hybridized by P.Schick,U.S.A. Grown by J.L.Rouse Toorak Victoria,registered by R.MacDonald.
Truss of 8 flowers tubular funnel shaped,lemon yellow in bud opening to vivid yellow (15A).

Little Nell — wrightianum x 'Dr.Herman Sleumer'
Grown and registered by R.Macdonald.
Flowers 3-5 per truss,tubular funnel shaped 40x35mm,strong red (46A).

Simbu Goldstrike — 'Simbu Sunset'x'Simbu Sunset'.
Hybridized and grown by A Gray, registered by G.Smith,Pukeiti,N.Z.
Truss of 4-6 flowers,open funnel shaped 75x90mm. Vivid yellow (17C) slightly darker (17A) in throat.

Sweet Wendy — laetum x phaeopeplum
Hybridized and grown by R.M.Withers, registered by G.L.Snell.
Truss of 3 flowers tubular funnel shaped 60x60mm,tube vivid yellow (15A) lobes deep pink (51C).

Note: The numbers in brackets (e.g. 51C) refer to the R.H.S.colour chart, but the names of the colours are those of the American Rhododendron Society's 'Universal Color Language' as published in their booklet 'A Contribution Toward Standardization of Color Names in Horticulture' by Huse and Kelly.

JAVANICUM x	
Crown Princess of Germany	Souvenir de J.H.Mangles
Duchess of Edinburgh	Ne Plus Ultra
Duchess of Edinburgh	Triumphans
jasminiflorum	Princess Royal
laetum	Flaming Ball
laetum	Java Light
laetum	Niugini Firebird
laetum	Mount Pire
laetum x (lochae x macgregoriae)	Athanasius
lochae	Tropic Fanfare
unknown	Sir George Holford
JASMINIFLORUM x LOCHAE	
laetum	Weston Glow
KONORI x	
aurigeranum	Buttermilk
aurigeranum x Dr Herman Sleumer	Lazarus
christianae	Sweet Rosalea
laetum	Cameo Spice
laetum	Esprit-de-Joie
leucogigas	Duchess Satin
lochae	Bellenden Coral
lochae	Great Scentsation
lochae	Wentworth
loranthiflorum	Crinolette
(Pink Delight x jasminiflorum)	Aravir
(Pink Delight x jasminiflorum)	Shasta
zoelleri	Calavar
zoelleri	Ravalac
KONORI x LAETUM x	
commonae	Ruby Bells
LAETUM x	
aurigeranum	Gilded Sunrise
aurigeranum	Wattle Bird
christianae	Clare Rouse
gracilentum	Carillon Bells
javanicum	Flaming Ball
javanicum	Java Light
javanicum	Mount Pire
javanicum	Niugini Firebird
(javanicum x lochae)	Weston Glow
konori	Camro Spice
konori	Esprit-de-Joie
leucogigas	Bold Janus
lochae	Coral Flare
lochae	Donald Stanton
macgregoriae	Don Stanton
phaeopeplum	Pindi Peach
phaeopeplum	Pindi Pearl
Princess Alexandra	Tropic Tango
Souvenir de J.H.Mangles	Vladimir Bukowsky
Triumphans	Scarlet Beauty
zoelleri	George Budgen
zoelleri	Tropic Glow

DIELSIANUM x	
christianae	Minnie Mouse
DR HERMAN SLEUMER x	
aurigeranum	Nan Cutten
herzogii	Pink Feathers
(macgregoriae x aurigeranum)	San Gabriel
Pink Delight	Terebintha
(Pink Delight x jasminiflorum)	Clipsie
(zoelleri x javanicum)	Emmanuel
DR HERMAN SLEUMER x herzogii x	
(laetum x aurigeranum)	Highland White Jade
(laetum x aurigeranum)	Our Marcia
DR HERMAN SLEUMER x Pink Delight x	
(Pink Delight x jasminiflorum)	Elizabeth Ann Seton
DUCHESS of EDINBURGH x	
javanicum	Ne Plus Ultra
javanicum	Triumphans
GRACILENTUM x	
Carillon Bells	Janelle Marie
jasminiflorum	Craig Faragher
(laetum x gracilentum)	Lemon Minuet
lochae (F2)	Alisa Nicole
lochae	Saint Valentine
macgregoriae	Coral Chimes
macgregoriae	Rosie Chimes
GRACILENTUM x LAETUM x	
gracilentum	Lemon Minuet
HERZOGII x	
Dr Herman Sleumer	Pink Feathers
HUNSTEIN'S SECRET x	
(phaeopeplum x lochae) x zoelleri	Australia II
INCONSPICUUM x	
macgregoriae	Sweet Mac
JASMINIFLORUM x	
christianae	Petra
gracilentum	Craig Faragher
javanicum	Princess Royal
lochae	Lochmin
Princess Royal	Princess Alexandra
unknown	First Light
unknown	Star Posy
JASMINIFLORUM x JAVANICUM x	
brookeanum	Crown Princess of Germany
Minerva	Clorinda