

The Vireya Venture.

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.4 JULY 1991

Winter is well upon us, as I guess most Venturers will know, especially those who have Vireyas growing out in the garden. We have been very fortunate to date, here in Maleny, as this has been a much milder winter than last and our Vireyas so far are still happy, growing well and flowering with verve. How are you all faring in other states?

The two June Shows featuring Vireyas here in Queensland are now over and everyone seems pleased with their success. As well as this Vireyas were part of the A.B.C.'s 'Gardening Australia' show , which went to air on June 21st. By the way the A.B.C. in their listing of the new releases had one down as 'Bold James' which was misnamed, as it should have been 'Bold Janus'. Please note! The Vireyas were also the subject of a comprehensive article, headed 'Vireyas a Garden Hit' written by Colin Campbell for the Courier Mail,'Weekend Gardening' Sat.July 13th.

The Vireyas are also featuring in a display from 29th July to 3rd August, at Toowong Village Shopping Town, a suburb close to Brisbane. Then from 12th to 15th September Vireyas will be on display in conjunction with Maleny Fine Arts, as part of the Sunshine Coast's Festival of Gardens week. Queensland certainly seems to be taking the Vireyas into her heart as well as into her gardens! We have also heard whispers of a Vireya promotion in Bundaberg, Queensland during September, but details are not yey to hand on that. Has anyone heard any news on the Vireya front from other states or overseas? We would love to hear,if so.

Which brings me to the next point. The treasurer for T.V.V. has asked me to tell you that we are financial enough for the October issue of T.V.V. to be a bonus one and that further subscriptions (10.00) will be due in January for the next four issues. Thanks go to our helpers and successful treasurers for that good news. Nevertheless please keep in mind that it is only the interest of we Venturers that will continue this valuable work.

The last thing that I want to bring to your attention is the fact that after this issue T.V.V. will have a new Editor. Mr.J.Clyde Smith, with the very valuable assistance of Marj.Rickard and Hazel Holmwood, has agreed to take over the task, for which I am most grateful, as with increasing business commitments I have not been able to give the job the attention it. and. you deserve. So thank you all very much.

Therefore in future would you please address your letters, news, requests, queries, enthusiasm and new discoveries to:-

THE VIREYA VENTURE,
P.O.Box 8
Keiraville
N.S.W. 2500

Many thanks to all contributors so far and please keep up the good work of sending in those letters. We all do so like to be kept up-to-date with everything that is happening in the very special world of the beautiful Vireya.

Wendy Snell, Editor.

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Our thanks must go to Mark Vowles, (Our 'roaming Vireya reporter?) of Aspley Nursery, 6 Simon Street Deception Bay, Q.4508, who has sent in this report on the June Vireya Shows.

" Enthusiasts have been treated to some wonderful Vireya displays in the past few months. In early June we saw an exhibition presented jointly by the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Nursery, 'Adams Palms', and Graham and Wendy Snell from 'The Vireya Venue'. Many old and new hybrids and species were shown in full flower, demonstrating the incredible colour range now available. Of personal interest were some advanced specimens of R.orbiculatum which demonstrated their perfect suitability to growing in a hanging basket. In full bloom with a pronounced spreading habit and loose large flowers, the plants were spectacular when presented at eye level.

A 2.5m specimen of R.tuba was also of great interest. The trusses were very pendulous with long salver blooms, giving the plant a highly ornamental appearance. It is interesting to note that the photo in 'Vireya Rhododendrons' has been printed upside down and does not show a pale pink flush present in the above specimen's blooms. Also present were some exciting new releases. These included 'Fire Plum', 'Bold Janus' and Highland Arabesque', the latter being a delightful "Wattle Bird x R.orbiculatum cross. It showed large soft pink blooms and orbiculatum-like foliage with the upright habit of 'Wattle Bird'. The stamens produce sterile pollen thus preventing self fertilisation, which results in blooms being held for longer (mine have held for nine days so far).

Late June saw the Nambour Garden Show which is always a major event on the gardening calender and Vireyas were featured at many stands. By far the most impressive was a collection of plants from the 'Vireya Venue's' massive collection. The layout of the display was such that one could wander along a meandering path and view advanced flowering specimens set among palms. A video on Vireya culture played at one section and patrons were able to attend regular talks on Vireyas in another. Such was the interest that there was standing room only.
Of special interest was a plant placed at the entrance of the display. A 1.5m specimen of 'Watermelon' (cross unknown to me) showed a spectacular truss of huge (approx.80 x 80mm) flowers. Each bloom had lobes of a strong pinky red with a creamy yellow throat. Public interest was very obvious but unfortunately juvenile specimens of the plant are not yet available. Let's hope we sha'nt have to wait too long. 'Rosie Posie'was featured displaying its unusual petalloid flowers. I have often wondered about developing a double flower and 'Rosie Posie'would be a good step toward this.

Other blooms included R.javanicum, 'Pink Seedling','Burning Embers'(very luminous blooms),'Bold Janus' (big flower) and'Stanton's Glory'to name only a few. All in all an interesting time in S.E. Queensland for a Vireya ethusiast.

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Question: I have a R.javanicum (orange form with a darker throat) that develops a few flowers with petaloids. Only one stamen is usually modified. Is this common?

Mark Vowles.

The May Meeting of the Illawarra Branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society was treated to a very interesting talk from David Stanton on Vireyas, as reported rather briefly in the following notes:-

For some years he and his wife Pat, with Ray Brown, Nurseryman, have been developing a selected group of Vireyas from the five to seven thousand plants that his father (Don Stanton) had bequeathed to him in 1977. They have experimented with the objective of producing hardy plants for the average garden that will not be 'finicky'. They certainly found that all Vireyas are not equal - R.lochae has,for example, not proved very tolerant but it has been crossed with almost everything and some of its progeny are very good - its colour dominates the cross.

Their specifications in selecting Vireyas have called for a plant that is easy to grow, reliable in its growth and flowering habit, vigorous but shapely and different from others on the market. So far eleven plants have been released on the market, three more are due shortly and they expect to increase this to thirty. Eventually they hope to build this to a hundred; happily the feedback from growers has been good. While some of the hybrids around now are quite spectacular we could expect that when a broader range of species becomes available to Breeders ,there will be even more spectacular results.

In growing Vireyas, what is below ground level is just as important as what is above it. The ideal medium in which to grow them can be defined as one which allows water to run straight through it. As an example a potting mix recommended by a Sydney nursery is one made of equal parts of standard potting mix and orchid mix. Cuttings are struck in a mix that is basically very coarse sand,perlite, coke breeze and German peat. From the sample shown it would all pass through a 6mm screen. Cuttings are struck individually in 75mm x 100mm tubes, and as shown root through to the bottom of the tube in 10 to 12 weeks. They are best potted on at that stage before they become rootbound to any degree as that then necessitates thoroughly teasing out the roots. The use of such a big tube has overcome the problem of losses at the first potting on.

In the garden the prime requirement is for perfect drainage. Raised beds built up with additional humus will help this and gravelly soil will help too. Some gypsum assists in keeping the soil open, and the plants should be kept well mulched. The site should not be fully shaded, full morning sun is best, with shelter from the west. If only heavy clay soil is available they are best kept in pots. Fertilizers that have been used include Osmocote, Nutricote, Hortico Rhododendron Food, Dynamic Lifter, and Nitrophoska. All of these have been satisfactory and have proved the necessity to feed Vireyas for the best results.

The worst pests have been Lacebug and Red Spider, bad attacks have even resulted in leaf drop in addition to the usual damage. Powdery mildew also occurs and is effectively controlled with copper oxy-chloride although this leaves some unsightly residue. Benlate is an alternative unless you are averse to spraying.

A number of flowers were then tabled to show what was being grown and it was commented that some Vireyas tend to change colour at different periods of the year, eg. R.brookeanum 'Gracile' is very good now but it is not as bright in the Spring. Many also tend to flower irregularly through the year, perhaps not unexpectedly with the weather we have had lately, certainly there are few plants that can be so variable. Some do fall into a reliable pattern although even then there may be a variation in colour. Possible factors affecting the time of flowering are daylength, temperature, available fertilizer, but ???

J.Clyde Smith

Many thanks to Brian Clancy of 31 Renown St. Bentleigh, Victoria 3204 who has written about 'Arthur's Choice' for us, as well as several other hybrids, which I am sure will be of great interest to you. Brian writes:-

"'Arthur's Choice' is an outstanding, floriferous hybrid acclaimed both in Australia and overseas and was only registered at the request of the Registrar, Scotland. It is a second generation hybrid of R.christianae x R.lochiae and a distinct improvement on both parents. This latter attribute is rare in hybridising. The flowers are larger and of greater substance than either parent whilst the leaves are greener, thicker and more leathery. The F2 is easier to strike and easier to grow. It is very floriferous and the flowers last much longer than either parent. It is a very showy rhododendron.

The flowers of the best seedling of R.christianae x R.lochiae (Lelliot) were selfed with their own pollen to produce the F2 seed. Eight seedlings were grown to flowering and seven of the seedlings produced flowers larger than both parents. I selected one with rose-pink flowers whilst my late friend, Arthur Hedlam, selected another with bright scarlet flowers to which I attached the name 'Arthur's Choice'. Amongst some controversy, 'Arthur's Choice' did not win the coveted Award of Merit when first exhibited because one of the Stewards considered that "it was too easy to flower" !

'Pink Delight' x R.intranervatum F2 was my prize winning truss at the Nov.1990 Annual Show at Olinda. This exhibit was awarded the Certificate of Merit, the Pritchard Trophy for Best Rhododendron raised by an exhibitor, the A.R.S. trophy for Best truss in Open Section and the Louise Anderson Trophy for best Vireya hybrid in the Show. The primary cross of this hybrid was made by Dr.John Rouse and I grew one seedling to flowering. This seedling had perfumed flowers leaning towards 'Pink Delight'. I immediately selfed the flowers with their own pollen. The first F2 seedling flowered in 1988 when only ten inches high with an exquisite truss of pink flowers reminiscent of 'Alice'. In 1989, the same small seedling had a 14 flower truss on a side stem. Luck plays an important part with all show exhibitors but fortune smiled on me for the 1990 show. This Vireya would have to be given the highest rating and is to be named 'Chayya' if the Registrar agrees.

Sunny is indeed a very floriferous and easy to grow Vireya. Congratulations Clyde Smith, 862 trusses (VV April 91) is a mind boggling record. Even if Clyde's plant had 200 trusses it would be an amazing record. The cover of the Vireya book features 'Sunny' as grown by Dr.Bob Withers in the driveway against the fence of his previous home in Hawthorn. The colour plate of this plant shows that it had some 80 trusses. The first flowering of the original three year old seedling subsequently named 'Sunny' had 21 trusses each of 14 flowers on a plant grown in a six inch pot. From this plant I exhibited a well balanced spray of nine trusses at the Annual Show at Olinda in 1970. This exhibit won for me the Award of the Rhododendron Society's Certificate of Merit and the Special Pacific Rhododendron Conference Trophy for the best exhibit in the Show. I still grow the original seedling of 'Sunny' and it flowers without fail every year.

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In issue No.1 of this newsletter I commented that Vireya hybrids with more than five petals were the result of crossing five-petalled species with those few other species that had 6, 7, or 8 petals, and inferred that all Vireyas with more than five petals must be of such parentage. Now I wonder because in May and June three mature bushes of R.jasminiflorum x 'Pink Seedling', both five-petalled, began to produce some flowers with six and seven petals. I have not noticed such flowers before - nor have they ever flowered so well - the plants are old ones, I have lost their history but I believe they were all seedlings. Two are identical, the third has flowers that are darker pink. They have almost finished flowering now, after seven weeks and the last few trusses have only five petalled flowers. Have you seen this?

J.Clyde Smith

R.triumphans

Many debates have occurred as to whether the 'Triumphans' that we grow is a Species or a hybrid by Veitch. Well as far as I am concerned it is a Species.

The true history of R.triumphans as found by Don Stanton is this:- in 1964 Don heard about a Malesian rhododendron that an orchid grower had growing in Sydney. Don went to see the grower who was not interested in rhododendrons and persuaded him to sell it for what he had paid for it, which was five pounds. At the time it was more dead than alive after having gone through quarantine. The grower was only interested in the orchids he had purchased in Malaya, but with careful nursing the plant gradually recovered and became the original of many R.triumphans through Australia and the world. When it first flowered in 1965 we were astounded with the beautiful clear red. Since then it has been used to hybridize many beautiful hybrids, also it has been selfed several times, the resulting plants have been exactly like the original.

It was first collected by Mr Adams in Northern Malaya. As far as can be found out the species R.triumphans was never sent to the U.K. and as this plant came direct from Malaya to Australia it could not be Veitch's hybrid as so many people seem to take for granted just because Veitch named a hybrid by that name without knowing the history of the plant.

Sleumer in his monograph of Flora Malesiana suggests that the closest affinity lies between R.brookeanum and R.triumphans, except that the flower of R.triumphans is a beautiful clear red. I have wondered for many years why people jump to conclusion without knowing the history of a plant and just take it for granted that it is so and so.

W.Mearns, 155 New Mt.Pleasant Road,
Mt. Pleasant N.S.W. 2519.

VIREYA - WHATS IN A NAME ?

Vireyas are presently being labelled and/or called 'Tropical Rhododendrons', Warm Weather Rhododendrons',Alpine Plants of South East Asia',Queensland Rhododendrons' as well as Vireya Rhododendrons - and maybe some other names. All of these names are in part correct in some sense, but they may be misleading particularly to those who only know rhododendrons as very large plants from the Himalayas that are so cold hardy.

Vireyas have such a wide distribution and such a varied range of forms that any brief description is difficult. Their East-West distribution is not so significant as their range North and South of the Equator, and their elevation above sea level. In relation to the Equator they range from R.lochae at about 18° S. to R.vaccinoides and others at about 28° N. in Southern Tibet. This range affects the variation in the hours of daylight between summer and winter and was a significant factor in the opinion of the late John Womersley that made R. lochae such a good parent. However their elevation above sea level is also very significant. The range here is from sea level for a few, to 4000 metres above sea level, with the majority growing at 1800 to 3000 metres. At this altitude days are cool, nights are cold and the sun is much brighter. So some vireyas do grow near Alpine conditions and some survive tropical humidity and heat.

They may therefore prefer the climate of their origin, adaptable as they are, and this must not be forgotten. I suggest then, that we restrict all our references, comments,labels etc. simply to 'Vireyas', just as we have done with that other very popular group of the rhododendron family, the Azaleas.

J.Clyde Smith.

VIREYA SPECIES

For some time now, Dr. Bob Withers has been researching the progressive introduction of Vireya species into Australia. The work is now complete and, I understand, it will be printed in the next issue of the Australian Rhododendron Society Journal.

This paper should be of great interest to Australian Vireya enthusiasts providing a record of when, from where and by whom, the many species were collected or imported. Knowing Dr. Withers, the subject will have been thoroughly and accurately researched and he is to be congratulated on his efforts.

As I have been fortunate in receiving a copy from Bob, I can do no more than repeat the words written by the Horticulture Botanist of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide and State Herbarium, Dr. L.Haegi, who wrote: " This is a valuable contribution to horticulture in Australia for which horticulturists, botanists and historians will thank you (Dr.Withers) for many years to come".

Well done Bob.

Graham Snell, Maleny, Qld.

PENRICE

It is now just twenty years since Don Stanton arranged the first meeting of the 'Malesian Study Group' at his home in Wollongong, N.S.W.
His objective was to encourage members to grow Vireyas in some quantity, as at that time no one else had more than a few specimens and they were rather a problem since reliable methods of growing them had not been determined. Solitary plants were therefore 'coddled' and over protected, anything approaching a risk could not be tolerated, any loss was a disaster.

Over the next twelve months Don distributed large numbers of small seedlings which were grown on by four or five enthusiasts. Casualties were, as expected, fairly high from lack of experience but enough survived to enable them eventually to be planted out in the ground and in containers ranging from hollow logs to a variety of pots. We had enough plants at last to be able to afford some losses, so we could try varying conditions to see what suited them best. As might be expected now, they were tolerant of most conditions, and from then, much of the fear of failure could be forgotten.

There was one exception. Only one plant of R.aurigeranum x'Pink Seedling' suvived to flower. It was a thin straggly bush growing in heavy shade, not worth a second glance until it flowered. Time proved later that it was in an area in which no Vireyas have yet been successful, poor soil and an infestation of surrounding tree roots were no doubt to blame. But when it flowered the clear salmon pink colour was so distinctive that it was hastily lifted and potted on in relative luxury to ensure that it lived. It did so and has continued to produce good flowers but it has never departed from its rather straggly form.

Nevertheless it was propagated and registered as 'Penrice', as there was still no Vireya that I knew with similar colouration. 'Penrice' still has a tendency to straggle but it is well worth growing for its colour. The original plant has not changed its habit but it grows in a container alongside other Vireyas where its straggly habit is not conspicuous, but its flowers are.

J.Clyde Smith.

LAETUM x ZOELLERI x	
(zoelleri x leucogigas)	Anatta Gold
(zoelleri x leucogigas)	Sunset Fantasy
(macgregoriae x zoelleri)	Belisar
(macgregoriae x zoelleri)	Cristo Rey
LAETUM x LEUCOGIGAS x	
phaeopeplum	Jean Baptiste
LAETUM x AURIGERANUM x	
(Dr Herman Sleumer x herzogii)	Highland White Jade
LEUCOGIGAS x	
konori	Duchess Satin
laetum	Bold Janus
(phaeopeplum x lochae)	Felinda
(phaeopeplum x lochae)	Lady Clare
(Triumphans x javanicum)	Cair Paravel
(Triumphans x javanicum)	Hari's Choice
(Triumphans x javanicum)	Marshall Pierce Madison
LEUCOGIGAS x LAETUM	
(phaeopeplum x lochae)	Shantung Rose
LEPTANTHUM	
Taylori	Tiffany Rose
LOCHAE x	
aurigeranum	Liberty Bar
christianae (F2)	Arthur's Choice
gracilentum (F2)	Alisa Nicole
gracilentum	Saint Valentine
jasminiflorum	Lochmin
javanicum	Tropic Fanfare
konori	Bellenden Coral
konori	Great Scent-sation
laetum	Coral Flare
laetum	Donald Stanton
macgregoriae	Ferdinand von Mueller
macgregoriae	Rob's Favourite
pauciflorum	Littlest Angel
phaeopeplum	Kurt Herbert Adler
Pink Seedling	Penrose
LOCHAE x MACGREGORIAE x	
Loranthiflorum	Little Pinkie
macgregoriae	Cheeky Mandarin
Pink Delight	Irian Jaya
Tropic Glow	Brightly
Tropic Glow	Kisses
LOCHAE x LAETUM x	
macgregoriae	Pendragon
LOCHAE x JAVANICUM x	
zoelleri	Red Rooster

LORANTHIFLORUM x	
christianae	Sweet Cherubim
christianae	Sweet Seraphim
konori	Crinolette
(lochae x macgregoriae)	Little Pinkie
macgregoriae	Popcorn
MINERVA x	
(jasminiflorum x javanicum)	Clorinda
MACGREGORIAE x	
aurigeranum	Bulolo Gold
aurigeranum	Flamenco Dancer
aurigeranum	Leonore Frances
aurigeranum	Tropic Summer
christianae	Sunny
gracilentum	Rosie Chimes
inconspicuum	Sweet Mac
loranthiflorum	Popcorn
lochae	Ferdinand von Mueller
lochae	Rob's favourite
(lochae x laetum)	Pendragon
(lochae x macgregoriae)	Cheeky Mandarin
laetum	Don Stanton
rubineiflorum	Sweet Beatrice
MACGREGORIAE x ZOELLERI x	
(laetum x zoelleri	Belisar
(laetum x zoelleri)	Cristo Rey
MACGREGORIAE x AURIGERANUM x	
Dr Herman Sleumer	San Gabriel
PHAEOPEPLUM x	
aurigeranum	Angi Gita
laetum	Pindi Peach
laetum	Pindi Pearl
(laetum x leucogigas)	Jean Baptiste
lochae	Kurt Herbert Adler
zoelleri	Dr Herman Sleumer
PHAEOPEPLUM x LOCHAE) x ZOELLERI x	
Hunstein's Secret	Australia II
PHAEOPEPLUM x LOCHAE x	
leucogigas	Felinda
leucogigas	Lady Clare
(leucogigas x laetum)	Shantung Rose
zoelleri	Fire Plum
PINK DELIGHT x	
Dr Herman Sleumer	Terebinthia
lochae	Irian Jaya
PINK DELIGHT x JASMINIFLORUM x	
Dr Herman Sleumer	Clipsie
(Dr Herman Sleumer x Pink Delight)	Elizabeth Ann Seton
Konori	Aravir
Konori	Shasta