

The Vireya Venture.

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.7 APRIL 1992

Comments on the weather in any newsletter are not of interest as a rule but in Wollongong this summer the frequent showers and the many cool and cloudy days were in great contrast with last summer's unbroken heat. The Vireyas were eager to flower and to flourish and some very fine trusses were the result. Even the species excelled themselves, particularly R.konori, R.brookeanum, R.luraluense and even R.arfakianum for the first time.

It was pleasing to read that Dr.Bob Withers had been honoured by the Royal Horticultural Society's award of the Veitch Memorial Gold Medal for his contributions to three major plant families, Lilies, Rhododendrons and Camellias. While in England he contacted Canon Norman Cruttwell who is now going to stay there; he is still busy with his botanical records of P.N.G. and not really welcoming the chill of an English winter after 40 years in the tropics,but he is feeling much better.

Some interesting comments on advertising and culture of Vireyas have come in and are detailed later; the latest overseas registrations of Vireya hybrids have come to hand from the R.H.S. and are included but the latest listings from the Am.R.S. do not show any Vireyas.

Further to previous comments on the different forms of R.lochae I was pleased to see at Yellow Rock Nursery (Wholesale) plants from Bartle Frere and Bellenden Ker. The Bartle Frere form has prominently veined leaves as shown in the painting on the cover of the Australian Rhododendron Society journal,'The Rhododendron' for June 1988. This was painted by Vera Scarth-Johnson from life, on the top of the mountain. It was not in flower but the plant from Bellenden Ker was showing a truss of large flowers of very good colour. Both plants looked in good shape and were deeply rooted.

This newsletter depends on your contribution whether comments or criticism, gossip or enquiry on any aspect of Vireyas. Send them now to:- The Editor, P.O.Box 8, Keiraville, N.S.W. 2500.

J.Clyde Smith.

ADVERTISING VIREYAS

Malcolm Fletcher of Parkers, Gardening Specialists of 45-47 Tennyson Avenue, Turramura, N.S.W. 2074, has written to say: "I have just had the chance to read issue No.6 of the Vireya Venture. I was very interested in your opening comments about advertising Vireyas. As a keen enthusiast I have been including Vireyas in our Parkers Nursery adverts for the last couple of years in the Garden Journal. In addition we have had colour photos of 'Coral Flare' in Vogue Living and Country Style, advertising our nursery and Vireyas in particular.

We have advertised Vireyas not only because we have found them excellent plants for our climate here but also to attempt to make them better known to the gardening public. To this end we have also been handing out a coloured brochure to all interested customers and in particular to customers who are purchasing their first Vireya to ensure that they are aware of their cultural requirements. In addition we regularly feature Vireyas quite prominently in our nursery displays. They are an ideal display plant as there are nearly always some in flower.

We have stocked Vireyas for over three years now and we are now finding that they are gaining some popularity. This has enabled us to increase the range of varieties we stock to include more species and of course some of the new varieties.

So far it has not been my experience that demand exceeds supply. Rather that we need to advertise and convince gardeners to try these exciting plants."

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Lyn Craven has written to make this very generous offer: "Not attempting to compete with commercial growers, I am offering to propagate Vireya species upon request with the resulting tubed plants being sold at a nominal cost, the proceeds going to the Australian Rhododendron Society's journal publication account."
So, if you cannot obtain a particular species, or form of a species from the commercial firms, then contact Lyn to see if he can help. He grows very few named hybrids and probably will not be able to help with these. Mail orders are no problem within Australia and Tasmania.

Write to: Mr. Lyn Craven
26 Saville Close
Melba, A.C.T. 2615

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Also noted in the latest issue of Australian Horticulture that Sapersteins Nursery, Main Arm, Mullumbimby, N.S.W. are now advertising Vireyas.
And Barry Paget of Orchidworld Nursery writes that he has placed a quarter page colour advertisement in the magazine 'Your Landscape' Queensland. This is a magazine published state by state . In Queensland it is promoted by the Queensland Association of Landscape Industries.

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M-dKP

Phosphorous Acid present as mono-di-potassium phosphite

In the Vireya Venture issue #1 Harold Lewis wrote recommending **M-dKP** for the prevention of phytophthora and this was later,in issue #3, repeated and confirmed by Barry Paget. But it has taken me until now to obtain some of this, through the courtesy of a friend. Alas,the only directions on the label referred to its use on grape vines to prevent downy mildew.

Fortunately Harold Lewis has come to the rescue and has written:

"Concerning the use of M-dPK (also known as Fosjet 200) as a foliar spray to protect susceptible plants from damage by phytophthora cinnamonii and other phytophthora spp; the standard dilution rate is 5ml of M-dKP per 1 litre of water (2.5ml per litre for young plants and seedlings) applied as a foliar spray about every six weeks.

I have been using it for just on two years now and can verify that it does keep phytophthora at bay, the only losses of Vireyas were during a hailstorm on December 22nd 1990 which lasted for over half an hour. I lost over thirty plants, mostly small, due to leaves being stripped or the effect of the ice which covered them - I suppose the same as a severe frost.

I did receive some printed directions with my purchase of M-dKP : they pointed out that it could be used only as a foliar spray and not as a drench, and mentioned other plants on which it could be used, namely Rhododendrons, Anthurium, Begonia, Chrysanthemum, Poinsettia, Carnations,Avocado etc. Also it warns not to use the spray material with any other substanceas its compatibilies had not yet been determined. It specifically stated that it is to used one week before any copper spray is used; alternatively do not apply M-dKP until at least three weeks after the use of a copper spray. The same applies to sprays containing di-methoate.

I also use it on the rhododendron seedlings in the glasshouse, they appear to like it. I hope you have success with this spray like I have had, in fact 95% of my Vireyas grow outside in containers in a mix of 2 parts of weathered pine bark (a mixture of medium grade and a smaller amount of finer grade bark), 1 part of peat moss and 1 part of polystyrene crumbled. Amongst other things, I add to this mix about 1 handful of lucerne meal per gallon of mix, it certainly promotes growth.

I believe that the action of the spray is to promote root growth which is not attacked by the phytophthora."

Harold Lewis, 7 Burroughs Road, Balwyn, Victoria 3103.

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The following notes are from Barry Paget of 'Orchidworld Nursery, 1422 New Cleveland Road, Capalaba West, Qld. 4157. He writes: "I was most interested to read Mr.Lou Searle's article in the recent 'Vireya Venture' regarding leaves dying back from the tip, as I have also experienced this when the weather has been hot and dry as it has been here in southern Queensland, especially during November, December and January. I have noted this difficulty, especially where there has been even minor dryness within the container housing the plants.

My local D.P.I. representative investigated such leaves and came up with the conclusion that the infection is Glomerella sp., related to Anthracnose. This disease, it appears, is active while the leaf surface is moist and once it dries out, the organism becomes dormant until the leaf surface is again moist. This phenomenom causes difficulties when investigating such pathogens. 'Octave' has been recommended and I am currently running trials to investigate its effectiveness. It seems such diseases as Anthracnose in its many forms are mainly tropical and sub tropical and seldom encountered in more temperate climes.

I wish also to mention the use of baskets for the culture of Vireyas, a trial I have conducted over a few years. Knowing these plants are in need of excellent drainage and that many species are actually epiphytic, I started trialling some of the smaller leaf types, such as R.jasminiflorum, in round wire baskets with pre-formed coconut fibre liners. Such plants are usually placed into 200mm or 250mm baskets depending on their size. It is essential to use good quality basket liners,even if they are a little expensive, as I nearly lost one plant of 'Pacific Shower' which I purchased already housed in a basket lined with mattress fibre which rotted and disintegrated. I will trial shade cloth as an alternative basket lining material.

I use my usual mixture of composted pine bark, fine charcoal, Perlite and sand, and have found growth to be excellent. It concerns me that some growers are using potting mixes suited to the culture of indoor plants and failing miserably with Vireyas. Following my early success with 'Pacific Shower' and jasminiflorum, I have trialled a number of larger leaf/larger growing species and am overjoyed with the results.

Some of the larger species and hybrids I am leaving well alone, such as laetum, 'Wattle Bird' etc... and those plants which are strongly upright in their growth. Plants which usually grow to just over one metre appear to be very satisfactory. Vireyas respond so positively to pruning. It has been very interesting to gauge reaction from some of the more experienced growers when I talk of some of my conquests.

A number of the miniature species and hybrids such as quadrasianum are doing very well as are larger species such as lochae, orbiculatum, phaeochitum and multicolor. The last mentioned of these species I had difficulties maintaining until I was able to provide them with the increased drainage."

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I suppose that I might have been one of the 'experienced growers' whose reaction would be sceptical of growing large leafed Vireyas in baskets if I had no memories of epiphytic Vireyas in Papua New Guinea. There is a photo on page 39 of the book 'Vireya Rhododendrons' of a complete plant of R.superbum taken at 3000m on the Kandep Divide after it had been collected from near the top of a tall tree. The root ball is held in the hand of our helper, Pundia Lepi. It would fit loosely into a 150mm container. By contrast we also found on Mt. Gahavisuka a plant of R.superbum in flower, but this was some 3m or more in height, growing on the top of a red soil bank.

Vireyas may be naturally terrestrial plants but most of them will also grow epiphytically. They will survive in favourable conditions with a very small root ball and consequently restricted growth. They are not rare - more than a hundred flowering plants of R.superbum were counted in one valley. Under forest conditions the only way they can get enough light to survive is to grow on top of the trees. They have to grow on very little nourishment, perhaps from frequent showers bearing nitrogen from lightning, from dust and minerals from native fires, and from the decomposing bryophytes on which the seed has germinated.

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Alan Raper of Rhodo Glen Wholesale Nurseries,Georges Road, The Patch, Vic.3792, writes of a problem he has had:
"Looking at my Vireya collection, I considered I must do something about plants that were causing me constant Rust and Mildew problems. The first plant that went into the rubbish bin was 'Clorinda'- a lovely plant I had had for many years, always smothered in rust unless sprayed.

Another troublesome plant was R.zoelleri,a plant from the Arisumi collection. I had a batch of these and took them away from the other Vireyas and put them in a plastic covered area, where I keep the winter dampness and moisture levels low on some special Agave plants. I put them in saucers as this area is watered irregularly. They already had a considerable amount of mildew and rust on them and were not sprayed but isolated. The plastic on the roof of this area was not white-washed for the coming summer, so they were in a particularly bright, hot environment.

Although we have had quite a cool, wet summer in Melbourne this year, we have still had the odd day, nearing 40°, so with these conditions you would surely only expect some burned cinders to remain. Instead I have plants that are totally free of disease and looking exceptionally happy, which I have never been able to obtain with this form of R.zoelleri before. My conclusion to this observation - that many of the problems we are having with these plants are coming from where we think they should grow and our idea of the plants' requirements.

Two plants of the same variety were put in this same area closer to the summer and these did burn, so when exposing Vireyas to more heat and light it becomes obvious that this needs tc be done - giving them maximum time to acclimatize to the change."

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On a visit down south in March, Marj.Rickard of Keiraville, N.S.W.2500, was much impressed by the Vireyas that she saw in Tasmania and Victoria. She writes:-

"On my recent holiday I was delighted to see the progress being made by Vireya Rhododendron plants growing in open gardens in the Hobart area. One group (about 60, maybe more) was growing quite happily in full sun on a footpath. All were showing new growth, some were in flower and others were budding well. These plants were brought from the mainland before last winter and have survived through the Tasmanian cold. Small seedlings from my garden (previously grown from seed in Canberra) were growing well and looking much better than my own. This particular gardener had heavily mulched his plants with shredded tree fern trunk and fine pine bark.

Another plant worth mentioning was a large R.lochiae growing in a pot at Woodbank Nursery, at Longley, south of Hobart. Two small plants given to friends about two years ago are still growing in pots and flowered this year for the first time. their climate is much more difficult for Vireyas as it is on the way to Mt. Wellington, and I would think, colder and damper.

Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden in Northern Tasmania is also trialling Vireyas. I was unable to visit there this time but I understand that cuttings from the Illawarra Rhododendron Park at Mt.Pleasant and from Victoria have struck very well and may be ready for planting out this coming Spring. Some more mature plants already growing in the open have survived two winters. I was told that last winter was the most severe in this area for about 13 years. More work is being done to allow more sun into the proposed Vireya section of Emu Valley garden.

Coming home via Melbourne I was privileged to visit several private gardens where Vireyas hold pride of place. On entering the front gate of one garden I was greeted by the most beautiful perfume which I was to discover later came from a large R.konori growing at the far end of the garden and hidden behind the house. It was spectacular, covered in huge blooms with hardly a leaf showing.

In another garden a mature R.lochiae (Mt Finnegan var.) growing in a large pot on a verandah was making a fine show. At Foothills Nursery in the Dandenongs where they specialise in Vireyas, they were many and varied, the truss on one, R.zoelleri, was so large and vivid in colour that the owners referred to it as 'vulgar'. I would be proud to own it! Vireyas in hanging baskets made a fine display while the R.lochiae growing at the entrance to the nursery was a mass of red trusses.

The garden where I was staying in Melbourne was basically all Vireyas, mainly growing in pots. The owner is a real collector of Vireyas and has the best collection that I have had the pleasure to see. There were plants growing in full sun-in shade-and semi shade, all a credit to their owner. I came home to find many of my own Vireyas putting on a good show,amonst them several un-named seedlings which give promise for future flowering and perhaps registration."

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VIREYA REGISTRATIONS 1991

The overseas additions of Vireyas to the International Rhododendron Register for the year ending 30th June 1991 have now been published by the Royal Horticultural Society. Colour references are to the R.H.S. Colour chart and the colour description is, as previously, from the American Rhododendron Society's 'Universal Color Language'.

Cherry Pie R.lochae hybrid x R.konori
Hybridized and raised by F.Jury, registered by M.Jury, N.Z. Flowers 9-12/truss,70 x 80mm, 5-6 lobed, starts pale cherry pink and deepens to dark cherry red, paler centre (as in javanicum). Leaves ovate, 140 x 70mm, with a white scaly indumentum which soon turns fawn. Apparently completely sterile. Flowers all year round.

Cordial Orange (Tropic Glow x Tropic Glow) x R.stenophyllum.
Hybridized,raised and registered by O.S.Blumhardt, N.Z. Flowers 3-5 truss, 45 x 45mm,5-lobed, tube vivid orange (28B), lobes vivid reddish orange (30A); stigma orange red. Calyx 1mm long,red. Leaves linear lanceolate, 75 x 12mm, scaly. Shrub to 1.0mm. Flowering at any time during the year.

Cyril R.leucogigas x(R.konori x R.laetum)
Hybridized,raised and named by P.Sullivan, registered by A.K.Morebeck and T.A.Lukaszewski, U.S.A. Flowers 8-13 in a lax truss, tubular funnel-shaped,83 x 114mm, with 7-8 wavy edged lobes,tube yellowish white (158C) to deep pink (48B), lobes yellowish white (158C) with strong red sinuses; highly scented (dianthus like); distal 6mm of style with a deep pink (48B) band, stigma brilliant yellow green (150 A-B); stamens 11-15, straight, of uneven length. Leaves elliptic, 146-178 x 57-64mm, flat.acute at apex. cuneate at base, hairless above, scaly below, scales strong orange (169D) when young, aging to moderate olive green (147A); petioles 13mm long, very scaly. Shrub of upright open habit,1.2 x 1.2m in 16 years, with large buds covered by dark red (187A) bracts. Mid year.

Haloed Gold R.christianae x Tropic Glow.
Hybridized,raised and registered by O.S.Blumhardt N.Z. Flowers 5-7/truss,60 x 60mm, 5-lobed, vivid yellow(15B) with a thin edge of vivid reddish orange (32A); anthers dark brown. Calyx 2mm long,green.Leaves elliptic85 x 50mm. Shrub to 2m. Flowers several times a year.

Hot Gossip R.lochae hybrid x R.konori
Hybridized and raised by F.Jury, registered by M.Jury. N.Z. Flowers 6-8/truss,75 x 70mm, 5-7 lobed opens pale red and deepens with age to an intense claret red. Leaves oblanceolate, 140 x 60mm, dark green with a scaly indumentum which starts fawn and soon becomes reddish brown; petioles dark red. Shrub of spreading habit. Continously in flower.

Hot Tropic Tropic x Tropic Glow
Hybridized,raised and registered by O.S.Blumhardt. N.Z. Flowers 5/truss,60 x 70mm, 5-lobed vivid yellow (15A) deepening to reddish orange (32A) around lobes; anthers dark brown, stigma green. Calyx 2mm long, green. Leaves elliptic 75 x 40mm, scaly. Shrub 1.5mm tall. Flowering at any time throughout the year.

Kesumba R.konori x (Dr.Herman Sleumer x R.laetum)
Hybridized by T.Lelliot,raised and registered by E.F.Allen, U.K. Flowers 9-11/truss,funnel shaped, 60 x 60mm, 6 lobed, held horizontally,moderate yellowish pink (38B),flushed yellow in throat,very strongly scented. Calyx imm long,green. pedicels 20mm long. Leaves ovate, 130 x 60mm; petioles 20mm long. Shrub of upright habit to 1.0m Flowers May-June.

Merry Christmas Tetramum x R.pauciflorum
Hybridized ,raised and registered by O.S.Blumhardt, N.Z.
Flowers 4-6/truss, 27 x 28mm, 5-lobed, strong reddish orange (42C). Calyx 2mm long, red. Pedicels 30 mm long, deep red. Leaves obovate, 60 x 35mm, scaly. Shrub to 1.0m. Flowers November-December.
Tetramum R.lochae x R.macgregoriae
Hybridized, raised and registered by O.S.Blumhardt, N.Z.
Flowers 8-10/truss,20 x 45mm,5-lobed, deep yellowish pink (39B); filaments brighter red, anthers dark brown; flowers of heavy, waxy texture. Calyx 1mm long, red. Leaves ovate to ± orbicular, 90 x 65mm scaly. Shrub to 1.5m. Flowering mostly during summer.

These nine registrations bring the total to 186, so a larger garden looks necessary in future if all are to be grown. However some of the earlier registrations have been supplanted by similar or better forms, while there is inevitably some duplication between here and overseas. It pays, also, to be selective in regard to one's climate considering the range that we have them growing in, in Australia.

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On a 'Friends' tour of the Wollongong Botanic Garden recently we had a useful tip given us while in the propagation area - use iron chelates in the usual strength solution to eliminate moss from around small seedlings or plants. It has started to work for me - but if it does not it is no loss.

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Plantings of Vireyas in full sun at the Rhododendron Park here have proved successful. A large planting of established plants taken from semi-shade took a year or so to settle down but are now looking well and are bushing up. Recent plantings of small plants of selected hybrids also in full sun have shown no difficulties - the few losses are no more than would normally be expected under Park conditions.
Gradual acclimatisation, as Alan Raper pointed out earlier, is essential for success. A sudden change to full sun in summer will certainly burn most plants, and is not always justifiable. However the more light that they have the less tendency there is to stay leggy.

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There is a very interesting article on Vireyas in Southern California by William Moynier in the latest issue of the American Rhododendron Society's Journal. As part of it he has also tabulated the characteristics of some recommended hybrids and species in a very useful form - although they have rather different forms in his climate, it seems, to ours. Such a tabulation would be worth attempting here and I hope to show an example in our next issue. In the meantime you might care to try your own hand at it?.