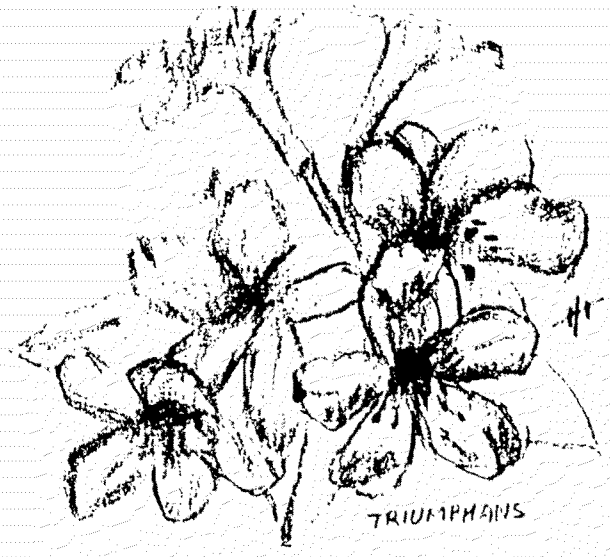


THE VIREYA VENTURE No.22 JANUARY 1996

Wollongong weather has been most erratic since our last issue, with many cold,cloudy days, frequent 'nuisance' showers and some heavy falls, some hot and some windy weather. But the garden has never grown so well, shrubs that were pruned hard in the spring are bigger than ever. Some of the Vireyas have joined in with two plants of R.leucogigas (Hunstein's Secret)x R.zoelleri producing the largest flowers yet seen in this garden - some 10cm in diameter, and a plant of R.lochiae that was a seedling (?) probably 10 years old without flowering, suddenly covered itself with over 30 trusses. Many others flowered also for the first time in profusion.

It was sad to hear of Canon Norman Cruttwell's death on October 21st last year. He had retired to England because of ill health after many years in P.N.G. As a student botanist/missionary he retained a keen interest in flora and particularly Vireyas and orchids. After moving from the Daga to Goroka he was involved in establishing the Environmental Botanic Garden at Mt.Gahavisuka near Goroka, and guided the two tour parties from the Aust. Rhododendron Society in '81 and '83 with great interest for all. In 1988 many of us met him here at the International Rhodo. Coference where he spoke on Vireyas and later addressed the local orchidists.

The Wollongong Horticultural Society flower show in November had a good show of Vireyas and local interest was evident - even at the sales table. At the Rhododendron Park there has been much in flower and Vireya sales have also increased with a larger selection of plants available.

my apologies for the lack of news on page 6. As you see your contributions are vital to our continuance. So please let us have your comments, your ideas, your queries, and even your complaints!

Send them to P.O.Box 8, Keiraville,N.S.W.2500.

J.Clyde Smith, Editor.

From Mrs. Maggi Carver, 'Hills and the Sea', Woodbridge 7162, Tasmania :

In July '95 I was thrilled to be given some Vireya cuttings, which I treated with Fongarid and rooting hormone, after wounding them, and inserted into pots of compost made with one third copra-peat and two thirds vermiculite. The pots were put onto a heated propagating tray with the temperature set at 15°C and housed in the laundry which is also heated overnight. I placed plastic bags, with bamboo sticks to hold the plastic off the leaves, over the top of each pot to increase humidity, which came from wetting the mat on the tray.

The bags were left for about two weeks, but not without the odd peek to see how the cuttings were doing. Then the bags were removed for a couple of days and closed at night, then left off (unless it was to be colder at night), until at the end of the third week they were dispensed with. About this time I watered in some Fongarid, and repeated it twice more over three months.

Several times a day the cuttings were treated to a little spraying of water, and eventually were put outside on warm sunny days after misting/watering for an hour or two in the mornings. I lost a third of this batch of Vireya cuttings quite early on, those left are looking good (Nov 6th) and R.lochiae x R.gracilentum) x R.lochiae are well ahead with new growth of about two inches (5cm) from each little plant. All three cuttings of this one took, whereas all the cuttings of R.javanicum failed.

I used Fongarid in which to dip the cuttings before putting them into the rooting hormone, and subsequently re-reading my 'Vereya Ventures' came across the information that some fungicides block the rooting process. Had this been the case with Fongarid I would have expected all the cuttings to have died. However the possible reasons for the failed cuttings could be various, because ,of some, I have two of each and some only one of each. Feeding began at first sign of shoot movement, and I have used low strength liquid seaweed twice a week for two weeks and the acid plant Phostrogen similarly, so as to get some trace elements too.

The cuttings were as follows:

St. Valentine	2	growing	1	lost
R.lochiae x R.gracilentum)x R.lochiae	3	"	0	"
R.laetum x R.loranthiflorum	2	"	1	"
R.orbiculatum	1	"	1	"
R.sessilifolium	2	"	0	"
R.crutwellii	1	"	1	"
R.javanicum yellow form	0	"	3	"
Robert Withers	2	"	0	"
R.jasminiflorum	3	"	0	"
R.loranthiflorum	1	"	2	"

The cuttings have been off the heated tray for about three weeks and out in the glasshouse for one week, where there are infra-red lights to use should the night- time outside temperature

drop below 6°C. Inside it is usually 5° higher without the lamps. Each of the three 175 watt lamps increases the temperature by 3°-4°C and I can control the temperature reasonably well by the number of lamps put on. With the warm sunny days that we are now experiencing, the soil in the glasshouse has warmed up so there is added heat held in it for slow release overnight. Fine 'earth blanket' draped on overhead wires creates a micro climate and sunscreen. The cuttings are all looking healthy and several more are now showing signs of shooting, as well as the first ones. I am thinking of adding some orchid mix with copra peat and vermiculite when the cuttings are ready to move on into their own pots.

xxxxx

Mrs Carver's methods may be rather unconventional but the results are certainly not bad for a collection that was largely of species - often not as easy to strike as the hybrids - with 17 successes. Her constant attention would certainly have been a major factor in her success.

The comment in this newsletter (No 16, July 1993) on the effect of systemic fungicides on the rooting of cuttings was in specific reference to Benlate or Bayleton. Recently, by chance. I came across an article on Benlate, viz: 'Benlate, Everyman's Fungicide', by George W.Clarke of Portland, Oregon, in the April 1973 Quarterly Bulletin of the American Rhododendron Society. He was invoved in the initial trials of Benlate, and eventually commenced dipping and then soaking rhododendron cuttings in Benlate - "the greatest single benefit from this product in our nursery". With Benlate and a rooting hormone his success rate was 90%. This would have been on Asiatic rhododendrons and not Vireyas at that time, of course.

However Benlate was withdrawn from the American market some years ago because of some difficulties with which I am not familiar; and in Australia the Benlate that is sold today is not - I believe - the original form.

Editor.

xxxxx

AUSTRALIAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY - A.G.M.- OCTOBER.

Melbourne's climate is always rather changeable and the temperature there was 32°C on arrival. On the way to Kalorama we stopped at the new venue of Foothill's Nursery in Montrose, but were disappointed that they had few Vireyas to see as their move had necessitated a temporary cessation in their propagation. But their was still much to see!.

Then it rained that night and the Melbourne temperature dropped to 14°C, the coldest December day since 1924. In the Dandenong mountains it felt more like 4°C and our anticipated garden visits were severely curtailed, however we did have a quick look at the Olinda Rhododendron Garden and were pleased to see that their Vireyas had come through the winter alright, although there had been some snow falls. The garden in general is looking most impressive, both quality and quantity are excellent.

There is an intention to re-open the quarantine house in future, so we may see some new introductions eventually. The Australian Rhododendron Society members who work there voluntarily are still very active and the original Vireya Glasshouse is now used by them for the propagation of Vireyas and other rhododendrons. A new shade house nearby gives good conditions for growing on and plants for sale are displayed near the entrance. A visit is well worth while - lunch is available in the main building - and a day can pass very easily there.

In December we made a visit to friends and relations in our home state of S.A.; the garden highlights of that tour were visits to two gardens in the Adelaide hills and to the Botanic Garden at Mt.Lofty. We saw a surprising number of Vireyas in these areas, all looking in good shape and flowering on relatively young bushes, despite a period of extreme drought last year that necessitated using much water from the Murray river with a high percentage of salt.

xxxxx

From Other Sources

The American Rhododendron Society has an article in their Journal (Vol 49, No. 4 1995) from the David G.Leach Research Station on 'Enzyme Fingerprinting of Rhododendron Cultivars'. This is aimed at solving the common problem of identification of very similar plants. This problem may arise when siblings of a named cultivar are sold under that name, but are slightly different, for example. While this procedure was applied to Asiatic rhododendrons it could no doubt be applied to Vireyas if this became a problem with Plant Variety rights ? However this is a complex technique and not likely to be readily available as yet.

There are also details of their Annual Convention, to be held in May this year in Oban Scotland, where one of the speakers will be Dr. George Argent, his subject will be Vireyas. Some good advice is given in detail on what to expect in Scotland - "Although the British speak a similar language, their customs, social expectations and the ways of life are very different from the U.S." This applies both ways of course and one early shock that occurs in the U.S. is not just the cars travelling on the wrong side of the road but the fact that there is nobody in the driver's seat! Recent statistics indicate that visitors from overseas are more prone to road accidents than are locals and this is no doubt due to the change from driving on the right to our left hand rule.

xxxxx

If your attempts to spray with insecticides have been thwarted by threatened showers just when you had the opportunity to do this then perhaps the alternative - as recommended by the Adelaide Botanic Garden leaflet No.3.78 might be attractive. They say:"soil drenches with systemic insecticides e.g.Metasystox are an effective alternate to spraying the whole plant". The recommended rate for metasystox is 1 part in 500,i.e.10ml.in 5 litres (twice the normal spray strength) then use at the rate of 12ml per cm of pot diam. so a 20cm pot would need 240ml.

PEAT SUBSTITUTES

German peat was once a major element in our potting mixes, in striking cuttings and in raising seedlings, but when it became not only hard to obtain but also very expensive, the alternatives of pinebark and local or New Zealand peat became widely used. Now other substitute materials have come on the market although only recently have these become available in this region.

The one which first aroused my interest was 'Sunpeat', a by-product of the Biocon Division of the Rice Grower's Co-op. Ltd. This came to my attention in an interesting article by Alec Bulford that was first printed in The Gardening Australia magazine. However local enquiries were unproductive so I wrote to Biocon at Griffith.Their reply was that 'Sunpeat' ceased to be made in 1994 because of lack of market interest.

However they have two other products of interest, viz: Sterilized Rice Hulls and Composted Rice Hulls. The sterilized rice hulls have been available here for some time and I have used them in my potting mixes (20% max) as a light weight, well drained diluent. These rice hulls are designed as a bedding material in stables in fact, but they work well in a mix. The sterilized rice hulls are designed for potting mixes as a substitute for vermiculite or to be incorporated in the ground where their potash content (230.9 mg/litre) is a very desirable additive particularly if fertilizing with Blood and Bone. But they too are not available here so I have not seen nor tried them.

Also available now (at last!) is 'CocoPeat', made from Coconut husks imported from Indonesia, as a growing media and soil conditioner, it is claimed to have superior porosity and better water holding capacity than most peats. It is certainly easy to wet and it holds water well. The bag details its properties as: PH 6.3, air filled porosity 15.9%, water holding capacity 69.7%. Their suggestion is to add up to 50% by volume of cocopea to the potting mix to improve the wettability and water holding capacity, even 20% will greatly improve the water holding capacity.

There is also Copra peat on the market, ready made garden compost made by Debco with copra and pinebark and additives of Saturaid re-wetting granules, Zeolite, trace elements and slow release fertiliser. It is designed to be used for topdressing and garden bed renovation, and not as a container mix.

Finally a note from Peter Sullivan adds another variation by a reminder of his article in 'The Rhododendron' in Sept.'73 entitled 'Ten Years of Vireya Rhododendrons at Strybing Arboretum'. There they used a mix of 3/4 pine needles and 1/4 wood shavings to grow on Vireyas from containers in raised beds in a lathe house. They flourished in this but showed in some cases evidence of chlorosis which was considered due to the compaction of the bed by visitors leaving the paths.

Editor