

Figure 3. *Rhododendron superbum*, approximately 1/3 size.

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.32 JULY 1998

So far 1998 has had some of the extremes of our climate with an excessively hot and dry summer and then a very cold and windy transition to winter. What next?

At least we had some reasonable and very welcome falls of rain, a total of 324 mm for the last three months, spoilt by the N.W. gale force winds which did much minor damage, stripping some shrubs and leaving a conglomeration of branches, mainly dead ones, twigs, seed pods, leaves and camellia flowers all over the garden and grounds.

Prior to that there was a good showing of flowers on many of the Vireyas thanks to the rain, and even afterwards Penrose, Sweet Cherubim, Ne-Plus- Ultra, Littlest Angel, Coral Flare, Triumphans, and R.sessilifolium still had good blooms. And of course some basket plants like Cheeky Mandarin, St.Valentine etc. never seem to stop flowering.

A few more plants succumbed altogether with perhaps some effect from allelopathy, as detailed later, and a couple were blown out.

The illustration of R.superbum by the late Canon Cruttwell is described later.

Subscriptions for 1997/98 have been extended by another two issues as we have money in hand and will not be due until next year. But we need your comments urgently - please send them to :- The Editor, P.O.Box 8,Keiraville N.S.W.2500.

GROWING VIREYAS

Some further comments from the contributors to the last issue will add some more details that space did not permit then.

1. Leggy plants
From L.Searle,686 Bellangry Road,Morton Creek, N.S.W.2446.
"Early days, in Kundiana P.N.G., before I knew much about Vireyas I had established a garden of about thirty plants. Two plants of R.konorii about ten feet high and well established went two feet to the first whorl of leaves. I cut them back to around 6 - 8 inches. Eventually they both died, and I have not cut any plant below the lowest pair of leaves since.

2. Fertilisers
Eric Jordan praised 'Healthy Earth' fertiliser in the last issue, but as this is a local product you may not yet have heard of it. It has been used in the Rhododendron Park on Azaleas with good results and members have also used it with success. It is now produced by Growmaster P.O.Box 98 Kiama N.S.W.2533 after Peter Jack moved to Kiama from the North a few years ago. They also produce 'Seedling Starter','Lypsum', a clay breaker, 'Plant Spray', a foliage conditioner that can also be an effective deterrent at least,to other troubles, and'Lawn Food'.

From Lou.Searle: "Potassium is necessary as anyone knows, for the skeleton of the plant and the colour and brightness of the flowers. Grain crops lacking potassium in the soil will lodge in heavy wind and rain. But if over supplied it does act as a poison. I remember killing young cocoa plants with an over zealous application. In one of the last issues mention was made of wood ash - good for mature plants but not for very young ones. It contains calcium also. No good for Roses.

3 Acid fertilisers
From Lou Searle: I do not know anything about acid fertilisers. Tom Reeve, whom you will remember from Laiagam (in charge of the native Orchard Nursery for the Dept.of Primary Industry, P.N.G.) called in last year and had a good look around the garder He was concerned about the heavy mulch of pine needles because of their acidity, but most plants appear to be thriving under it, in composted sawdust, wood chips and pine needles.

6 Best flowering species and hybrids
Lou Searle says;"R.zoelleri has been magnificent, others laetum javanicum jasminiflorum brookianum also- I only have a few. Amongst the Lochiae species Thornton Peak is the best, I think. Of the hybrids Simbu Sunset is out on its own, Wattle Bird, Highland Arabesque, Christo Rey, and Pacific Shower do well here, as does Hari's Choice.

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Perhaps you have further questions that you may wish to put to other readers? You may want to grow some Vireyas indoors Not from necessity in most of our climates but just to enjoy the blooms. Or you may wonder how to avoid a container full of worms that block the drainage or of ants that do just the opposite. If so just write in now - to The Editor.

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ALLELOPATHY

John Stowar's book "in Sunshine and Shade" (Kangaroo Press 1992) has a chapter on 'The Old Garden and its Rehabilitation' with some very pertinent comments on allelopathy - where the growth of plants may be inhibited by chemicals in the soil either from fallen leaves or roots from neighbouring plants.

This was one of the factors that quickly became obvious after the removal of our overlarge Macadamia nut tree, near which there was little growth of other plants which normally grew in semi shade. An old plant of Camellia salicifolia produced a whole set of new leaves and a flush of flowers while other plants nearby also picked up.

I should perhaps have woken up earlier - a group of Casuarinas that we had here kept the ground around them free of anything much else and in W.A. in Jarrah country we saw a small planting of Eucalyptus 'Brown Mallet' with a complete absence of anything green underneath them while other nearby Eucalyptus plantings were normal.

By coincidence (?) the next gardening book that I picked up, Jackie French's new edition of "Organic Control of Common Weeds" (Aird Books Pty. 1997) detailed a whole array of plants that produced phytotoxins which suppress the growth of other plants - couch grass, paspalum, bracken, pittosporum trees, red gums, nut trees, oaks, cypress and wormwood. And some of these continue their effects even when used as a mulch. However, their effect was being measured on vegetable gardens in the main.

Obviously root competion, particularly in times of drought and excessive heat, may worsen this effect and the recent loss of several Vireyas near a Turpentine tree could have been due to both effects. Now I have been told that Turpentines should be added to the list - not all plants are susceptible to them, there is a forest of bamboo growing around some in a nearby garden.

So - if your Vireyas are not doing as well as others in different parts of the garden or in containers it might pay to look at what is growing nearby.

Editor.

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VIREYA REGISTRATIONS 1996/97

Dr.A.C.Leslie, R.H.S. Registrar, has advised one more registration for last year.
PUKEITI SKYROCKET possibly a hybrid involving herzogii collected on Mt.Miap P.N.G.(1986)G&N G.F.Smith N.Z. Flowers 10/15 umbellate truss,salver shaped, 75x20mm,with 5 smooth-edged lobes,deep pink (fuchsine pink 627) in bud opening fuchsine pink(627/2) inside,deep pink and covered with light brown scales outside,unspotted;scented.Buds, erect,open, flowers patent. Leaves elliptic, 100x55mm,flat,matt green, obtuse at apex,cuneate at base,scaly (scales tan when young,darkening with age). Shrub 1.0x0.85 in 10 years. flowering twice a year

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From S.Popple, Curator, Botanic Garden Wollongong.

I read with interest comments from growers around Australia of their experiences with Vireya cultivation. Here at Wollongong Botanic Garden we have been slowly developing a collection of both species and hybrid Vireyas mainly due to donations from Clyde Smith. The following comments relate to our experiences:-

Vireyas will grow in full sun and in fact some plants perform better under these conditions. These include: Ravalac, Liberty Bar, Pendragon, R.jasminiflorum x Pink Delight, and R.javanicum 'Red Orange'. Even in full sun Vireyas will tolerate periods of dryness,however drying out on scorching hot days is often fatal. One interesting point is that lanky plants when planted in full sun will frequently respond with lots of shoots from dormant buds along the stems.

Like Neil Purdy, I have noticed problems with shoot dieback in Vireyas, this is obviously a fungal problem, although to date we have had no success stopping its progression. It also seems to be particularly a problem with R.lochiae or hybrid plants with its parentage.

Establishment of plants: we'vefound large plants establish best when planted out, provided they are staked for the first six months to aid root growth. Mulching is essential with either fine pine bark or pine flake used to mulch all plants. Soil can be poor provided drainage is good.

Fertilising: we regularly use 6-9 month Osmocote on all potted plants, and either Dynamic Lifter or Mother Earth Organic fertiliser on garden plants annually.

Pruning: as most people are aware regular tip pruning is essential to keep compact plants and this coupled with staged removal of longer stems helps to keep plants attractive.

Spacing: plants spaced at 500mm centres gives a nice full display of plants without the bed looking too sparse.

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A combination of unpleasant weather and a bad cold made indoor living necessary for a few days and looking through old literature became interesting - for example:-

The 1973 Proceedings of the Rhododendron Breeders Round Table meeting (at the A.G.M. of the American Rhododendron Society) had much discusion to report on attempts to cross Vireyas with rhododendrons for two reasons - first to obtain a good yellow by crosses with e.g. R.laetum and secondly to increase the cold hardiness of the Vireyas.

In the exchange of views one unsual factor came to light when Dr.R.Hollowell detailed some research work on Trifolium and Sasanquas when temperatures of the flowering plants were increased in growth chambers to 20°C, 25°C, 30°C, and 35°C,the amount of seed produced increasing with the temperature.

He then went on to comment that higher temperatures at pollination time for Vireyas x rhododendrons also produced more seedlings. The results of such crosses have not been really successful anywhere but it would seem beneficial to make crosses of any species with some preference for warm weather.

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Mr.R.A.Mitchell of Hawaii has advised me that the address I gave in our last issue for Vireya news on the Internet was incorrect, as where I had a dash (-) this should have been a tilde (~), which is not available on my word processor.
However with the right address,viz: http://www.aloha.net/~iiwe the May newsletter of his Am.Rhodo.Scty. Branch was available here, thanks to a grandson at his workplace.

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Rhododendron superbum was described by Canon Cruttwell in the 1984 Rhododendron Notes and Records of the American Rhododendron Species Foundation in his article on Lipizauga Botanical Sanctuary:-
"the 'piece de resistance'of the shrubbery is Rhododendron superbum, which certainly does live up to its name. It is both terrestrial and epiphytic. Its grey leathery leaves are almost cirsular in outline and, in the young flush, densely lepidote with golden brown scales. It does not flower very freely but, when it does, the flowers are fabulous. First comes a silvery brown cone of bracts, out of which sprout conical fleshy buds, with the petals neatly imbricated and edged with crimson. Finally and quite suddenly, each bud erupts into a huge saucer of seven overlapping petals,white to pink and supported on a fleshy tube which can be white or deep rose red. The throat is salmon pink to deep crimson and from it protrude fourteen dark brown stamens. Each flower is about six inches across and overwhelmingly fragrant. The truss, which may contain up to six of these giant blossoms, is as big as a man's head. The plant is thought to be pollinated by bats."

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General Purpose **APPLICATION RATES**

HEALTHY EARTH

'ALL SEASONS - PROFESSIONAL STRENGTH'

*COMPLETE *General Purpose* FERTILIZER*

EASY TO USE - JUST SPRINKLE ON AND WATER IN

Suggested cultural notes: [Safe with sensitive Natives]

The average rate of application is 100 gr per sq metre for garden beds and lawn.

Additionally, individual **shrubs** should have an extra application from 100gr (1 handful) each.

The larger the shrub = larger application.

Seedlings: Good to mix with your soil at time of planting for quick results.

Pot Plants: 120 mm pot =1 teaspoon, 150 mm pot =1 heaped tsp, 200 mm pot =1dsrtspoon,etc.

Indoor Plants: . Poke holes into pot mix with a pencil,fill with fertilizer,cover over with soil, water in. [eliminates all odours]

Palms and Trees: Clear grass away from base 30-60 cm.

Apply 1 to 5 kg in this area, lightly working into soil, then water in.

Palms or Trees with 30cm butt apply 5kg.

Palms or Trees with 10cm butt apply 1 to 2 kg etc.

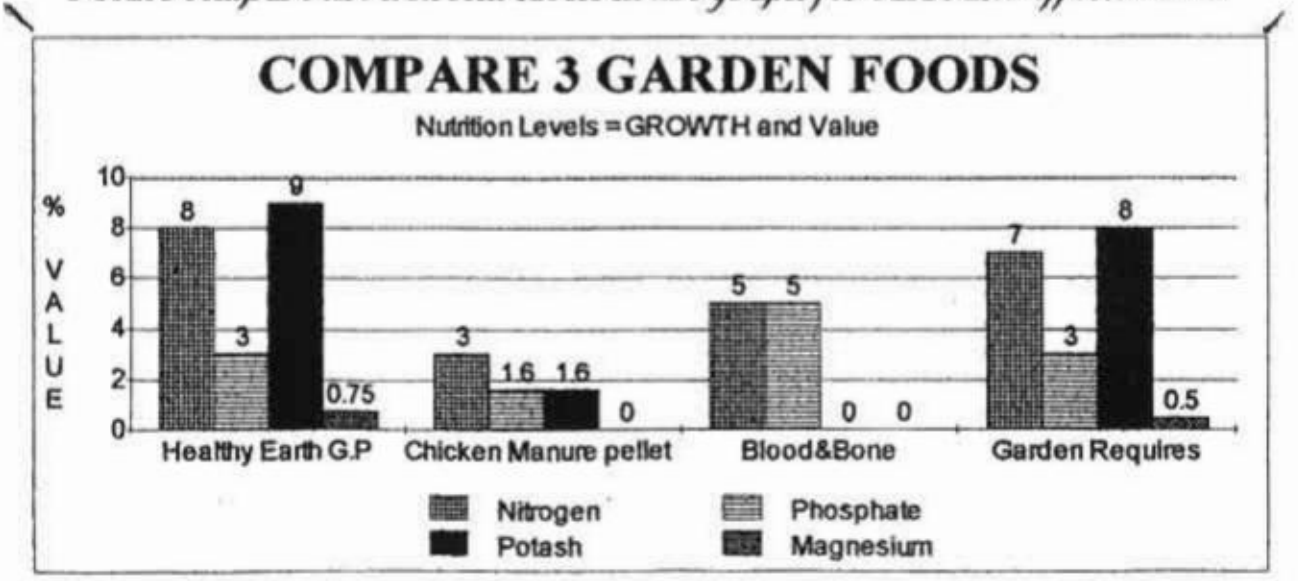
Cover the garden bed with mulch. Grass clippings or compost, pine bark, etc.

N.B This is a professional strength fertilizer and has fishmeal and meat and bonemeal along with a full range of all the essential plant nutrients incorporated for excellent and long lasting results. Hints: Hose in thoroughly on application day. Because nutrient levels in your soil or pots may be depleted, an additional application after 10 days should bring nutrients up to luxury levels. (Palms and Trees wait 4-5 weeks). Thereafter apply fertilizer 3 to 6 times per year, *or as required.*

*ORGANIC * NO SMELL * NO BURN*

Excellent For *** SEEDLINGS * AZALEAS * ANNUALS * ROSES * LAWNS * NATIVES**
*** VEGETABLES * SHRUBS * INDOOR PLANTS * MIX WITH THE SOIL WHEN PLANTING**

Please compare the nutrient levels in the graph for value and effectiveness.



P.S. If you like our General Purpose garden fertilizer you will love our Lawn Food