

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.33 OCTOBER 1998

In the last issue I commented on the extremes of climate that we had had here, and asked 'What next'?

The answer was 'August', and another extreme variation in climate. August is usually a very dry month here with cold, strong westerly winds off the Alps, but this year we had little wind and much rain - a '300 year' storm. This was a disaster for the region, destroying over 300 homes, damaging many others and even flooding shopping Malls and one large club at a cost of many millions.

Following that we had some fine weather and the gardens responded with much fine flowering with the Vireyas not lagging behind - the outstanding ones were R.javanicum, R.sessilifolium, R.leucogigas (pink form), R.loranthiflorum x R.christianae, and the first flowering of a R.hellwigii x R.konorii, a large flower with six petals of a most fluorescent red. It is rather unusual for the species to outdo the hybrids at any time but there was no doubt on this occasion.

A visit to the Hills Garden Club this month showed an intriguing and spectacular innovation - plants flowering in 'Upside Down Pots', as detailed later. Would Vireyas react favourably?.

Your comments and suggestions will be much appreciated, your experiences would be of interest to all of us. Send them to The Editor, P.O.Box 8, Keiraville N.S.W. 2500, Phone (02)42292521

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'CLORINDA" one of the Malesian Rhododendron Hybrids by Mssrs nearly 100years ago. Flowered by Dr.R.M.Withers.-Photo by A.W.Headlam

From Mr.K.Dagg, 16 Tristania Cres. Taree, 2430. :-
"I did receive your request for news in April and am still getting around to it so here goes.
My wife and I purchased a nursery in 1988 and soon after we purchased Vireyas from Sylvia Saperstein. Of our original plantings in our new home garden about 1990 we still have: 'Vladimir Bukovsky', 'Tropic Summer', 'Liberty Bar', 'Sebastian', and 'Sunny'. We lost 'Sweet Wendy', Simbu Sunset', Christo Rey', and 'Lomac' out of this first lot. These were replaced with 'Pink Delight', 'Coral Flare', and 'Triumphans'.

All of these are in a mixed planting bed with other shrubs and annuals and are thriving, and we have continuous flowering. We do not over fertilize - they get whatever is at hand. All have been affected by severe heat abd some burning of leaf occurs when temperature exceeds 36°.

A second bed facing north was planted with a mixture of Grevilleas and Vireyas. These were of the newer and more exotic varieties and we found we needed to experiment more as many we tried would not take to the direct sun. We now have a mixture of some growing in sun - 'Lady Di', "Arthurs Choice', and 'Tropic Tango' - and some with more shelter - 'Cherry Liqueur', 'Bobs Crowning Glory', 'Charming Valentino', 'Our Marcia', and 'Simbu Sunset'. We lost in this bed - 'Princess Alexandra', 'Esprit de Joie','Sweet Wendy',brookeanum var.gracile,'Iced Primrose', 'Pink Ray', lochiae, 'Littlest Angel', 'Flaming Ball', and zoelleri.

On the Eastern side of the house we have a large Frangipanni tree. this has become a home to a collection of Vireyas in pots. They do extremely well with the Frangipanni having leaves for shelter in summer and no leaves in Winter. This group consists of :- 'Felicitas', Pindi Pearl', 'Robert Bates', 'Arivir', and 'Highland Arabesque'.

In the Nursery we propagated many plants and varieties and encountered similar problems to those of your many subscribers. We find that people who grow azaleas and camellias generally have success with Vireyas. The major problem for many, including nurserymen, is watering and poor drainage.

To answer your Questions (refer to Issue #31) :-
1. I have found that pruning heavily when the plant is young is by far the best method. If it becomes leggy and is pruned heavily some varieties will shoot OK whilst others will die back. Generally as long as some leaf is left the plant will shoot.

2.Fertilizers. At home we mainly use Camellia and Azalea packaged fertilizer for all three types. (We also grow Camellias ans Azaleas). However some Dynamic Lifter gets used. The flowering with these appears satisfactory. In the Nursery we use mainly Osmocote but of late I have used Dynamic Lifter and Patons Hibiscus fertilizer for flowering and these seem to be giving excellent results with vigorous growth and good blooms. I stopped using Blood and Bone because we had an invasion of bush rats digging it out of the pots.

3. As we are growers of Azaleas and Camellias we do not use fertilizers of an alkaline nature. we normally have a potting mix of Ph 5 at least and use ferrous sulphate and coated iron to keep the Ph down.

4. I found pruning back to bare stems not very satisfactory. We had occasion to prune heavily when some plants became leggy and were also attached by lacewing. About 50% of the plants pruned to no leaf died, but those left with at least one leaf recovered. These were again pruned when new growth started.

5.Curl Grubs are the larvae of Christmas beetles and the like and eat woody roots or wood in soil/potting mix. We have not had any specific loss but occasionally encounter them in pots where plants have died. We have no trouble with plants in the ground. They start off near the surface and gradually work lower. A drench is available but will only work whilst the grub is near the surface. One of our suppliers recently recommended a lawn grub granule which can be spread and watered in. We are currently trialling this.

6. Our best flowering Vireyas at home are: In ground 'Arthurs Choice', 'Liberty Bar', 'Triumphans', 'Sunny' and 'Coral Flare'. In pots 'Arivir', Pindi Pearl' (changes colour depending on Season).

7.Only when the temperature exceeds 36° does the sun burn some leaves of our western or northern facing plants in the garden. We use 50% shade cloth to cover them - held on with clothes pegs. Looks a bit unsightly but does the protecting job. In the Nursery we have little problem as we grow them in an easterly facing situation with 50% shade cloth cover after about 11am. We have an overhead watering system which is turned on in afternoons of hot days. We cannot grow any of the small-leaf or miniature varieties, nor can we do much with lochiae, zoelleri or 'Ravalac'. Humidity seems to be the problem. Ordinary rhododendrons will not grow very successfully around here. I know a couple of people who are successful with one or two varieties of early flowering ones but generally it is not worth trying. Mollis azaleas also will not flower here. We find we can sell Vireyas to azalea growers for the orange/yellow flowers.

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The R.H.S. Colour Charts

The summer edition (Vol.52 No.3) of the American Rhododendron Scty.has detailed the result of a comparison of the three editions of the R.H.S. Colour Charts,viz.1966,1986, and 1995 respectively - from 'Horticultural Science'.
Apparently there are significant differences amonst some of the corresponding colours of the 3 editions and these are concentrated in the 'Purple'fan. It is now recommended by the A.R.S that the edition of the chart be specified,eg RHS 66,when quoting a colour and if the plant's colour falls between patches in any colour it is desirable to refer to a range,so: R.H.S.66 -72A/72B may be necessary, for example.

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THE ILLAWARRA '300 YEAR STORM"

The Illawarra Region from Stanwell Park to Kiama is no stranger to heavy rain, we have had 2500 mm in a year, and its location on the narrow strip of land between the Escarpment and the sea has meant that there are many small creeks draining the hills. While these are hardly noticeable normally they have caused localised flooding in the past (but nothing to equal the recent storm) and some measures had been taken to control the situation.

On this occasion most of the Illawarra was affected and while there were many stories told of damage and danger there was a situation very close to us that exemplified some of the worst of the troubles. In our case we had no damage but Cassian Street has a low side starting no more than 40m. from our land, where a small creek has been run into a 1m.pipe that runs through the blocks on the low side and when this blocked it was the source of much damage.

It started with good rain in August, we had 214mm on the 5th/7th and with 121mm on the 15th/16th the soil was reasonably moist when the storm started on the 17th. It rained during the day and in the evening 300mm fell in 3 hours and a total of 860mm for the whole period (our rain gage overflowed, these figures are the official S.E.S.record). People who suffered on that evening all spoke of a sudden wall of water coming through their homes and gardens.

The Cassian Street pipe was probably too small to take such a flow but it was blocked with rubbish and many tons of coal wash apparently from halfway up the escarpment below the old Mt.Keira Coal Mine with little to stop its passage on the way down. So a dozen homes were inundated and some of their cars were ruined. At the end of the street the water crossed the road through yards and a Park, thence across three more roads through gardens and Parks to a fourth road which sloped to the right and took the water and contents to a retirement village and several houses that had seemed to be well out of any danger from such a source.

For the next ten days Cassian Street was a hive of activity with up to ten Bobcats and Endloaders working all day to clear the street and the affected yards; the adverse effects are still to be seen.

The Botanic Garden at least had no serious damage and lost only a few plants, washed out from the bank of a small creek, these were Vireyas unfortunately. The Rhododendron Park had no significant damage to any plants but there was much damage to paths, walkways, and bridges, while silt joined the island in the lake to the bank. Some help was available to clear the creeks but so many large and heavy rocks have been washed down that an Endloader or similar is needed to clear these up. The tool shed was flooded and some mowers etc. were ruined. A house adjoining the Park was flooded and their car washed away.

The largest single unit to be affected was the Fraternity Club at Fairy Meadow which was inundated and the initial estimate

of the damage, which included many machines, was $2 million.

We were fortunate that there was no wind to increase the damage and there seemed to be no losses from poor drainage any where, which has occured in the past with very wet periods. Indeed, within a few weeks the garden excelled in growth and flowers - but the growth of weed grasses was phenomenal.

Unfortunately I only took colour prints at the time and they do not reproduce in black and white very well, so I show only two.

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Cassian Street Homes



