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THE VIREYA VENTURE JANUARY 2000 No. 38

Wollongong's weather has been damp,cloudy and almost cold at times lately but the garden has very obviously been favoured by it and helped by good rain in July (283mm) and again in October when 245 cm fell. With numerous light showers also, there has never been so much growth - Camellias became trees and everything else tried to follow their example. Weeding and pruning are a constant job and deadheading Vireyas added to the duty.

The flower of the year was undoubtedly R.konori, showing off with remarkably luminous flowers - three large trusses with only five flowers in each, it could not be overlooked. And it passes on its beauty to its hybrids, a particularly good example being R. konori x R. zoelleri with very long lasting flowers. Alongside R. zoelleri (both in containers) was R.Notiale, its small flowers covering the bush with 65 trusses, a much better show than any of the lochaes. In the ground 'Littlest Angel' was the best of the small flowered plants and the Lelliot cross of (R.lochiae x R.gracilentum) x R.lochiae was the best of the hanging basket plants.

The most unusual one to flower, for the first time, was Dr H.Sleumer x R.carringtoniae. This had a small truss of white tubular flowers of a distinctive shape held close together by large sepals. The form is very similar to the photo of R.herzogii in the book 'Vireya Rhododendrons', page 49.

This issue is the first for our new Century and I am pleased to advise that we can keep going this year without further payment of subscriptions. But this is my last effort - old age is hard to avoid - and I am pleased to introduce, over leaf, our new Editor, Mr. Neil Puddey, of Woolgoolga. Please send your contributions to him at P.O.Box 126, Woolgoolga, N.S.W.2456.

The Vireya Venture was started in 1990 after its introduction by Mrs Wendy Snell who wrote:-

" THE VIREYA VENTURE " was mooted to bring together Australian Vireya growers and enthusiasts by way of a 'newsletter'. With your support and interest it will be able to bring you the latest information and news from Vireya growers all around Australia.

Like other newsletters and co-operative publications, this one will depend on you to contribute news, questions,complaints, comments and criticism (constructive, it would be hoped) on what is going on in your garden and/or your district. It would be most interesting to hear what successes you have had and how you achieved them, what difficulties you are having and/or what species and hybrids do best in your climate. Also your comments on the Vireya Venture articles and fellow growers' letters will be of interest....."

At that time this newsletter was thought desirable because the only regular source of rhododendron information was the Australian Rhododendron Society, centred and generally supported by those in colder climates than those of the Sydney and northern areas. Vireyas are rather more tolerant of heat and less tolerant of frosts and it has certainly been proved that there was much interest in them as far north as where R.lochiae was found.

Now it seems time to review our position and perhaps the best move is to accept some more modern management. After some 62 years in N.S.W. and the myriad changes in Wollongong alone in that time it is difficult not to stay 'in a rut' - and think in feet and inches still, for example!

So I am very pleased to welcome Mr.Neil Puddey of Woolgoolga as our future Editor. Mr.Puddey's garden 'JAGERA" is one listed in 'Gardens of Australia' and has many Vireyas growing happily as an essential feature of his garden. His nursery, a part time project, has a range of Vireyas esecially selected for his conditions. His interest in Vireyas has extended to the Coff's Harbour Botanic Garden where he was responsible for the establishment of their Vireya bed - see Issue number 24 1996. As a computer literate user he has access to the Internet and the world wide contributions on Vireyas that will be of interest to us.

Mr.Puddey is going to edit the Vireya Venture from the next issue and will be looking to all of us for support and news on the subject of Vireyas. I hope that you will support him as you have supported me in the past.

So, from now, please send your letters and articles to him at P.O.Box 126, Woolgoolga, N.SW.2456.

"SUCCESS WITH RHODODENDRONS AND AZALEAS"

A small new book with the above title is now available at the unusually low full price of $4.95. Published by Murdock books in 1999 it is a pleasant translation of a German book written by Andrea Kogel in 1989, which is easy to read and seems applicable to our climates. And it even includes Vireyas - five illustrations in two pages!

WHY GRAFT?

An article in the June 1985 issue of 'The Rhododendron', journal of the Australian Rhododendron Society by the late Alan Raper refers specifically to the advantages of grafting rhododendrons, but his last paragraph on Vireyas is very interesting,viz:-
"I have found the Vireya rhododendrons interesting subjects to graft, having a sap flow at most times of the year makes it easy as to when you can do it. I have used the hybrid 'Dr.Robert Withers' (R.christianae x R.aequabile) as a root stock for both standard and regular grafting. Many of the recessive but beautiful plants will become popular if they have a vigorous tolerant root system.

Many times I graft Vireyas progressively allowing the root stock to grow on and using its trunk and branch structure for the variety that sometimes is weaker in character. So in this way you can form a plant that may only cascade over the side of the pot onto clean branches with a style some what like a bonsai. Of course creating a 'standard' style of plant of a pendular form gives a great effect but this is much more formal."

TISSUE CULTURE

Also relevant to propagating Vireyas the January 2000 newsletter 'Vive Vireyas' of the Hawaii Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society have a note on tissue culture, taken from Vol.23 No.3 newsletter of the Am.R.S. Southern California Chapter on the results of a trial of tissue culture by Monrovia Nursery Ca. Seven Vireya hybrids were used , of these six 'took' and 2,500 blooming sized plants had been produced in five years.

Tissue culture proceedings may vary with the species but I have not heard of any recent trials here with Vireyas. Have you?

HEAT INDEX

Further to the comment in the last issue, Cheryl Perkins has written "Do you have access to the Internet? I checked our weather channel at www.weather.com in their glossary and found a definition - I never could find the formula - maybe you'll be more successful. It is a combination of air temperature and humidity and reflects how the temperature feels. The 'wind chill' index is used in the same way in winter to detemine the average loss of body heat and how the temperature feels."
Certainly here our temperatures have been below average but the humidity has been high and more than compensated for that.

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From Mrs Sylvia Saperstein :-
" My new line of hybrids has taken off to a good start. My goal this time is to create a new range of colours for the garden that I have been supplying to Thailand. Since their taste seems to be for the largest flowers possible, I am using 'Hunsteins Secret' (R.leucogigas) as the seed parent. I have three Hunstein seedlings which have been flowering intermittently throughout this year. I have also selfed quite a few of these to be shared amongst any collectors who are particularly interested in Vireya species. These should be big enough to distribute by August this year. Any one who might be interested could get in touch before then.

My dilemma is that I have run out of any new species to create a larger genetic range and I run the risk of becoming repetitive in colour and form. So I would be very keen to buy pollen of anything interesting and am willing to pass back any successful crosses that eventuate. This is an excellent time of year to hybridize because the seed pods set very quickly and fill out more than at other times. So collectors, please go forth and see if you have anything suitable and you will get something new!

The news from Doi Tung (Thailand) is mixed - most of the Vireyas are blooming but there are patches where the soil is heavy and the planting sites have not been prepared adequately. I think it takes a few years of Vireya growing before it sinks in that chemical remedies do not really work and that site selection is of the essence. So while I am recommending fungicides such as'Phosjec'as an emergency solution, it really is not the answer in the long term.

Here is another request:- the members of the Thai royal family that are running the gardens are very anxious to acquire a large flowered Vireya that is a deep red - the colour of a Dunhill cigarette box. This is to be named after the Princess Mother who bequeathed a large part of her personal fortune to establish the project. Alan Raper very kindly donated a fantastic seedling of R.hellwigii x R.konorii. It produced magnificent ruffled flowers with an intense perfume, but the powers that be considered it insufficiently red. If anyone is interested in putting another candidate forward I would be happy to hear from them.
My address is:- Sylvia Saperstein, Main Arm, Mullumbimby,N.S.W. 2482. Fax/phone 02 6684 5272. email Saperstein @ big pond.com.

And - if any reader is familiar with R.polyanthemum, I would like to hear about it. I have a plant which flowered for the first time this year after a six year wait. It was labelled polyanthemum , but Dr.Sleumer's book states that its flower is bright scarlet where as these were a sort of tangerine orange. In all other respects it answers Sleumer's description. I selfed some of the flowers so, hopefully, I will have some to share next year, as I consider it a very attractive specimen (even though painfully slow).

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Not knowing that this is my last effort Sylvia dared me to include:-" Perhaps other readers would like to join me in acknowledging Clyde Smith's work in getting the Vireya Newsletter out so regularly. I, for one, have found much of both interest and use in its pages."
My thanks to Sylvia and all of you who have contributed to and supported this very satisfying project.

J.Clyde Smith.