# The Vireya Venture



THE VIREYA VENTURE No 39 April 2000

Clyde Smith, what a great job you have done over many years. To produce an informative, well presented and interesting journal has been no small task and I am daunted by the standard you have set. As a teacher of Agriculture and Vireya grower I have a keen interest in the weather but my record keeping is wanting, so my comments on local weather will be limited. I'll have to find a new introduction.

I have received several letters wishing Clyde well and I know other readers will join me in thanking Clyde for all his work. Hopefully I will be able to continue this newsletter but not without contributions. Please either post your news or requests to me at P.O.Box 126 Woolgoolga N.S.W. Australia or email to- puddey@bigpond.com

editor

In V.V. No. 38 Sylvia Saperstein queried the flower colour of R. polyanthemum as compared with the description by Sleumer as bright scarlet.

The original Sleumer description was made in 1963 and was based on a 7m. terrestrial tree at MT. Trus Madi (2597). Since 1978, R. Polyanthemum has been frequently found as an epiphyte at Sabah and at Northern Sarawak. It has flowered regularly at RBG, Edinburgh since 1982.

I n the Rhododendron Handbook 1998 ( RHS London ) , R. polyanthemum is described by George Argent as bright orange or pinkish orange with a yellow eye, very powerfully and sweetly scented. A colour photograph of this species is featured on the cover of this Handbook. A similar description is contained in the book 'Rhododendrons of Sabah" which also features two colour photographs (P2 and P65 ). Each of these three photographs is in different shades of orange.

Following the technical description in the Rh. Handbook 1998, George Argent adds - " A delightful species which can make a magnificent visual display but is so powerfully scented that in forests in the wild it is often the nose which discovers it before the eye.

Brian Clancy,
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It is good to find continuation of J. Clyde' work with the Vireyas. If you could pass on my regards , he has been an important worker in this field. I am also hanging up my trowel and pots, age is catching up on us here. I have been working with Vireya since 1965 when Sleumer opened up the magic door. Good luck and good sailing on the Venture.

Peter Sullivan
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Many thanks should also go to Peter for all his work and some of the wonderful hybrids he introduced to Horticulture. Some fine examples including; Calavar, Aravir, Cristo Rae, Jean Baptiste and Marshall Pierce Madison to name a few.

Editor

Our weather until the New Year was very favourable for the garden but since then we have had a few weeks of misery. Temperatures were not so high, usually 28 - 30 c maximum but the humidity was very high , making working in the sun most uncomfortable. There was little rain and what we had most frequently were light 'nuisance showers'. What was also most unusual were the number of burnt leaves that appeared one day, Vireyas in particular being the most affected - several well established plants in the ground died.

Otherwise there was little other trouble, some evidence of mites and a few plants had a little powdery mildew.

Then we had four days of rain - light steady rain that produced very little run off, even though it totalled 125mm. And with it a good display of blooms from Jock's Cairn in particular but many others were almost as good.

The Wollongong Horticultural Flower Show on March 4th presented the N.S.W. and A.C.T. State Dahila Championship in addition to their usual array but this seemed a little early for the Vireyas and only four blooms appeared, a pity since they had record attendances.

J. Clyde Smith

The Hawaiian Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society held a Vireya seminar on the big Island called Hawaii. This seminar proved to be a great success. The combination of a beautiful Island, excellent venue , a hard working committee headed by Mitch Mitchel, Richard Marques, Sherla Bertelmann and Dennis Rees and an interesting and informative line up of speakers made for a special Vireya experience.

Mitch gave the warmest of Hawaiian welcomes and was himself presented with a Bronze Medal, recognising his enormous contribution to Vireya, from The Hawaii Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. The program that followed included;

* E.White Smith with slides and descriptions of new hybrids and species he and Lucie Sorenson-Smith have in their collection. E. White told us of two new species they have in cultivation R. celebicum and R.rhodopus. 'Rhodopus is all white with a light fragrance, Celebicum is a semi-dwarf plant that branches good and sets flower young with wonderful hanging pink blooms'. Bovees Nursery has these listed in their 2000 catalogue. E. White has also recently finished a publication 'Vireya Species in Cultivation'.

* A presentation by Brian Bushe, Dr Wayne Nishijima (plant pathologist) and Dr Arnold Hara (entermologist) on 'Identifying Insects & Diseases of Vireyas' An excellent presentation enhanced through the use of microscope projection for group viewing.

* Neil Puddey(editor) presented details of his experiences in growing Vireya in the sub-tropics of Australia. Extracts of this presentation are included below.

- A growers panel including people from different parts of the Island presented details of their experiences with Vireya. Some topics covered included ; potting mixes, propagation methods and coping with the individual conditions that different altitudes and sides of the Island present.

- Dr. Richard Criley spoke on using growth regulator on Vireya. This was very interesting and described different hormones and the effect these can have on growth habit. Of particular interest were the dwarfing hormones that reduce internodes and produce very compact plants with more flower opportunities. More details on this in another edition.

- Mr Keith Adams spoke of his experiences as a plant hunter in Borneo. Keith's wonderful slides and his tales of seeking out new species on the mountains of Borneo kept the participants alert to the end. Maybe his introductory blast on a siren also helped. Keith Adams has collected and introduced many wonderful species Vireya to cultivation. Keith collected R. celebicum that Bovees nursery now list.

The display table at the seminar, put together by members, was a tribute to the Hawaiian growers. Many beautiful blooms of a good range of species and hybrids were shown. One in particular that gained my interest was 'Java Rose', a beautiful double, where the petaloids have become distinct petals.

Day two of the program took participants to local gardens featuring Vireya. These gardens ranged from sea level to four thousand feet and were an inspiration. Of special significance was Mitch and Sandy Mitchell's garden in Volcano bordering the Volcano National Park. This is a special Vireya garden, undoubtedly one of the best private collections in the world, all displayed naturally amongst native trees and tree fern. To list and describe the species and wonderful blooms would take pages.

Congratulations to the Hawaiian Chapter for an exciting, well run seminar, their hospitality and willingness to share knowledge and plant material.

Following are two of the topics I discussed at the Hawaiian Seminar, as part of my presentation, that may be of interest.

Editor.

## Landscaping with Vireya

Using Vireya in the garden as a landscape plant has been very rewarding, no need to sing their praises here. To create the best effects we use Vireya in several ways.

- As individual specimens nestled into other tropical type foliage. In this case the really vibrant flowered hybrids such as Sunset Fantasy, Cristo Rae or Simbu Sunset look spectacular.
- As group planting where we have chosen mainly perfumed hybrids and clustered them under palms. Here they produce a beautiful understorey and bring perfume to those sections of the garden .Group planting can also create a screening effect. The taller growing hybrids such as Haris Choice, Pink Pizzazz, Simbu Sunset, Bold Janus, Shantung Rose, Iced Primrose and White Rajah could be used in this way,
- In tiered beds that begin with the compact types, as the lawn border and grade to the tall large leafed forms at the back. In one corner of the garden we have achieved this using; Just Peachy(compact apricot) as the border then Sunset Fantasy in the centre(medium bushy red /orange) and a mixture of Bold Janus (large open apricot) and R. Gardenia(large open cream) as the back row.
- To others I have suggested using Vireya as a hedge. Charming Valentino , Just Peachy and Lochmin are well suited, being quite compact in habit. Haloed Gold , Sunset Fantasy or Rosie Posie could be used if a taller hedge was required.
- Bobs Crowning Glory and Arthurs Choice look there best in a rockery or on a bank , where their spreading, almost prostrate habit, can develop unimpeded. In this situation they can be used as a ground cover.

Vireya as a group, so diverse in their growth habit, flowering time and colour, leaf size and ability to release perfume, have great potential as a landscape plant. As a wholesaler, I am trying to convince gardeners of this in any case.

**Pest and disease**

One of the greatest problems in commercialising Vireya in Australia would seem to be overcoming the problem of Phytophthora Root rot. This widely spread fungus is the cause of many vireya failures and I have had my share. The key to avoiding this disease is to provide excellent drainage in both pot and garden culture. An open free draining mix for the pot, minus the drip tray and planting **on**, not **in** the ground, will keep this problem to a minimum. Vigilance with this is most important when potting on root bound plants, a wet mix surrounding tightly matted roots seems to be a recipe for disaster.

A second problem for me is the short tailed mealybug. This pest is difficult to manage and my efforts with some state of the art insecticides have proven fruitless. In an attempt to reduce chemical usage and save time I obtained a batch of a biological control agent for mealybug called cryptolaemus, an Australian native ladybird beetle.

What a circus my introduction to biological control turned out to be. 400 live ladybird beetles arrived in the post, I was excited and impatient to release them into my shadehouse, to devour the invading mealybug curse. To my shock and horror, the beetles took flight and headed straight on out through the 30% cloth and off to freedom. As each beetle is worth 25 cents, I was literally watching dollars fly through the roof .

With several canisters each containing 40 beetles left my release tactic was changed , lids were taken off under the canopy of densely foliaged plants where flying was restricted and they had to crawl past their favoured food. The next day only three beetles could be found but in three weeks time, there were hundreds of larvae cleaning up the problem. This year cryptolaemus were released to top up the now resident population but with greater caution. A mosquito net was hung, some infested plants were grouped under this and then beetles were released, within this enclosure.

Using this method to control a pest has several down sides. Firstly to keep the control, you must have a population of the pest. Retail nurseries are not too excited, when they find plants that have slipped through, with pest and predator attached. There is a lag time between release and control ,so reasonable levels of the pest may need to be suffered for a period. Also control of other pest problems using chemicals will become difficult as the chemical may kill the predatory beetles.