

Vireya Venture

Issue 48 July 2002

Blaze of Glory.

EDITORIAL

Thank you to all those who sent their subscription in, The Venture will be published for another year. Included in this issue is a list of people receiving the newsletters.

Robert Negas of Griffith N.S.W. Australia wrote to tell of his success with Vireya. Griffith is in the South West of N.S.W. approx 500km from the ocean where low humidity,high summer temperatures with hot wind,and low winter temperature with frost prevail. Robert has with his cultural techniques managed to overcome these, what could be considered extreme conditions for Vireya, to grow them successfully in pots and raised garden beds. 200mm plastic pots are cut in half, the top section placed on the garden to create a raised planting position. The plastic surround not only improves drainage but also protects roots from scratching birds. Robert also sinks 200 plastic pots into the ground at vantage points to display flowering plants. Potted Vireya in flower are placed into these, Robert finds that roots stay cooler than if sitting at ground level and the plants do not have to compete with tree roots. When a plant finishes flowering it can be retired to his nursery area and replaced by another to keep the display going.

The Garden has large trees that provide protection from the heat and he uses a sprinkler system to keep up moisture. Robert was kind enough to send a video of his garden showing some very healthy well grown plants that tose living in mild climates would be proud of.

Dick Ottaway writes;

It was a strange coincidence that shortly after picking a perfect truss of 'Wattlebird' , to admire while having lunch, I should have received your newsletter with well deserved tributes to the late Dr John Rouse. I had the pleasure of meeting him only briefly at the 4th Rhododendron Conference held in Wollongong, but was vastly impressed by his knowledge and pesonality.



Hellwiggii Hybrid

ARTICLE FROM VIVA VIREYA HAWAII

Dr John Gosden writes;

I was intrigued to read in Fran Jackson's article on cuttings that 'those allowed to bloom do better than those with flower buds removed' This is , of course entirely contrary to received wisdom, but accords perfectly with my own experience. Any cuttings, I have received with flower buds, which were sufficiently vigorous to go ahead and open the flowers, have been among the first to root and produce new shoots. Those in which the flower buds rotted off have almost invariably failed to root!

Your thoughts?

From Fran Rutherford Port Orchid, Washington
Dear VV, March 2002 *Reprinted from the Vireya Vine*

If you have a computer and have not yet joined the Yahoo vireya group, I suggest you give it a try. Lots of good information on growing vircyas, photos and opinions. Also it is free. A recent discussion on potting mixtures and fertilizers for container vireyas was very interesting. Obviously, there is no one best mixture or fertilizer and if you are happy with your current mixture and fertilizer, there is no real reason to change. For those who do not have access to a computer, the following information may be of help.

In the past, the standard mix at the "The Royal Botanic Garden" (Edinburgh, Scotland) has been 60% quality peat, 25% fine bark and 15% chunky bark. The size of the bark varies thumbnail size to fines. Bark is one quarter thick or less. To this mixture they added magnesium limestone (240 gms per 1/10 m3 {cubic meter} and fritted trace elements (60 gms per 1/10 m3). They are now going to an all bark mixture. They fertilize every two weeks with Vitafeed 1-1-1.

The standard mix for all rhododendron at the "Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust" (New Zealand) is one part sterilized loam, one part peat and one part untreated pine sawdust for all rhododendrons. A standard 5-5-5-crop fertilizer is added plus a small amount of trace elements and dolomite. For vireyas, the only major differences are in the container rather than the mix. Species, which are totally epiphytic, are grown in a non-soil mix.

The Standard mix at the "Rhododendron Species Foundation" (Seattle, Washington) is two parts pumice, two parts chunky peat moss and one part medium orchard bark. They fertilize with Miracid 30-10-10. Miracid has the advantage of increasing soil acidity and all nitrogen is derived from ammoniacal nitrogen and urea nitrogen.

"Pacific Island Nursery" (Hilo, Hawaii) uses a mixture of coconut chips and a coarse grade of perlite in a ratio of 7:1 or 5:1. Using this mixture, they obtain exceptional root growth in six months. They top dress (fertilize) with Nutracote 13-13-13 with minors which is a time release fertilizer. Once a month they apply a 5-1-1 fish or seaweed fertilizer with a sprayer.

"Bovees Nursery" (Portland, Oregon) uses a mixture of 1 part course peat, 1 part perlite, 1 part Oregon pumus, 1 part orchid bark (very clean bark with no fines), plus some coconut chips. They also add some "Super-Sorb which is a water absorbent copolymer. Bovees mixes its own fertilizer. It is based on organic nitrogen (canola seed meal and alfalfa meal) plus all of the other ingredients of a complete fertilizer including trace elements. They recommend applying this fertilizer three time a year.

For years, "Southern California Rhododendron Chapter" recommended a standard mix of 1/3 coarse peat, 1/3 fir bark and 1/3 perlite.

A sampling of other successful growers follows. Chip Lima (San Francisco) potting mix is 33% ½ inch red lava, 33% 1 to 2 inch fir bark chunks and 33% potting soil or rhododendron mix. Chris Callard (UK) uses 70% fine bark and 30% peat. Bill Moyles (San Francisco) mix is 1 part coconut chips ½ inch, 1 part coconut chips ¼ inch, 1 part fine fir orchard bark, 1 part medium perlite, 1 part horticulture perlite, 1 part pumice and one part milled sphagnum moss. Dick Chaikin (Florida) potting mix is 50% pine mini nuggets, 30% volcanic rocks and 30% peat. Jesse Dela (Southern California) mix is 1/3 perlite and 2/3 peat.

It is obvious that Vireyas can be successfully grown in a wide variety of mixes. In my trip to Papua New Guinea in 1986, I observed Vireyas growing extremely well on rotting logs, in fresh running water with almost no soil (not outstanding plants but they were quite old) and R. commonae growing on raised tussocks in the Kain Swamp.

I have used most all the fertilizers listed above with excellent results. It is essential that whatever fertilizer you use that it contains all the necessary trace elements. My best results have been obtained with a combination of frequent foliar feeding (1/4 strength) during the growing season and a base fertilizer in pots. Research by Robert Ticknor at Oregon State University indicated, at least for standard rhododendrons, that a fertilizer formulated with slow release nitrogen with a descending ratio of N.P.G. such as 10-6-4 was most beneficial. Work done by Dr. George Ryan at the Washington State Experimental Station in Puyallup, Washington has shown that adequate nitrogen is very important for flower bud formation

Far more important than mix or fertilizer, is mastering the art of watering. Vireyas will not tolerate over-watering or a soggy mix. When I water, I add water until it comes out the bottom of the pot. I do not water again, until the mix is slightly damp to the touch. If the water flows down uniformly through the mix, I am happy. If the water puddles or flows only down the sides of the pot, I then know I have a watering problem or a root bound problem.

Clyde Smith Writes;

There are a number of interesting comments in the last issue eg. What are coconut 'chunks' , or the Australian equivalent ? In regard to root systems our visit to P.N.G. in the 80's showed us Vireyas growing in a little moss on roadside verges and in the top of tall trees, in both cases with very small root balls. A shower of rain in the morning and again in the evening, full sun with high ultraviolet light levels (some of our party became sunburnt) for 12 hours every day gave them the support for their growth even if slow since their only feed was a little nitrogen from lightening. Others flourished in the ground amongst grasses and shrubs. We cannot reproduce their usual conditions, although we did see some in 86' growing in a semi drought with dusty roads. I think a favourable climate is the biggest factor in their successful growth.

Here in Wollongong we only had one very hot day in February, about 36 centigrade with low humidity and hot dry winds. Several plants of all kinds died immediately including two Vireya. The Tree Fern Cyathea Cooperi, shed all it's leaves but recovered quickly after watering.

I agree with Sylvia Saperstein's comments on Species but they are much more susceptible than Hybrids to poor conditions, I have lost many of mine. Yet R. laetum, my biggest Vireya has flowered magnificently and took first prize at our recent Horticultural Show in its section. R. javanicum is another good yellow, R. konori the best white and now R.tuba has flowered for the first time. A few others, Viz R.magregoriae, R.lochiae (3 or 4 different ones), R. notiale, R dielsianum are living but not very happy.

The outstanding hybrids so far have been 'Cakes and Ale' , R. leucogigas * R. lochiae , R. javanicum * Simbu Sunset , Gossamer Pink and Penrice – with a few R.zolleri hybrids.

Soluble Silicon

Clyde has been interested for some time in the benefits of Silicon to plants, especially of course for Vireya. Clyde sent me a bag of silicon powder, an extract from rice hulls to experiment with. One of my senior students is carrying out a trial with this product on Roses for her H.S.C. (final school exams) and I am playing with it on Vireya. So far nothing to report but it is reputed to improve growth and disease resistance, especially to fungus. Details to be published in another issue.

Editor.

IT'S ONLY 32 TIMES SMALLER

Typical garden rhododendrons are usually associated with overly large, pink or red flowers. Even most vireyas have flowers 40 mm or more wide. It comes as a surprise therefore when the first flowers appear on *R. perakense* each autumn. They are a very good yellow but each of the tubular flowers is only about 4.5 mm in width and 8 mm in length. There are 2-5 flowers in the inflorescence but even then the whole inflorescence is only about 25 mm across.

At the time of writing this note I could not find my record of the flower size of *R. konori* 'White Giant' which is the largest vireya that I have flowered. However, I have measured the flower width of an F1 hybrid between *R. leucogigas* 'Hunstein's Secret' and a western New Guinea provenance of *R. konori*. This was 145 mm -- 32 times the comparable statistic in *perakense*. To fully appreciate the difference, one can rule two lines on a sheet of paper, one 4.5 mm long and the other (ruled just below the shorter line) 145 mm long. Let's face it, *perakense* is very small, in fact it's tiny.

While on the subject of size, and I do wish I could find my records of the 'White Giant' flowers, I measured some flowers from Jack Wilson's *R. lindleyi-R. nuttallii* cross (both of these species are in sect *Maddenia*, Jack named one of the selections 'Southern Cloud'). These measured up as 135 mm wide by 150 mm high by 110 mm long; not bad but still not as good as 'White Giant'.

R. perakense flowers for most of the winter. While it never fails to give warm fuzzies, would that it had flowers the size of *R. laetum* for instance! Then winter depression in the glasshouse would disappear as the flowers have quite an attractive form and are definitely a good clear yellow; they are just far too small.

Lyn Craven
Melba, Canberra ACT

Fellow Vireya Venturers(financial)

Australia

Ivan Menzies
Barry Padget
Ray Clements
Clyde Smith
Lyn Craven
J.W. Cole
Sheila Porter
Kelvin Dagg
Dr. R.M. Withers
Neil Puddey

H Holmwood
Graham & Wendy Snell
Maggi Carver

Gerald Hall
David Liddle
Dick Ottaway

Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden

Belgium

Hendrik Van Oost

America

Bill Moynier
Jay W. Murray
Ralph Love
Mitch Mitchell
Sherla Bertelmann
E White Smith
Hawaii Chapter A.R.S.

England

George Argent
Chris Callard

Germany

Martin Monthofer

South Africa

Paul De Jager