VIREYA VINE ISSUE # 26,

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In VV25 I had a note about a photo in the Smithsonian Magazine that they identified as "Singapore Rhododendron". I had written to the Smithsonian Magazine and more or less told them that what they had in the photo was not a Rhododendron. I got a nice letter back from them which follows.

Dear Mr. Smith,

In response to your inquiry regarding the source of a cutting of the Singapore Rhododendron pictured on page 218 of our April 1990 issue, although the common name for this plant is Singapore Rhododendron, it is not a member of the North American Rhododendron family, but of the family Melastoma, as described in Roger Booth's Malayan Wayside Trees. It grows wild in hedgerows throughout South East Asia.

Jane D. Scholl
Associate Editor
Smithsonian Magazine
Washington D.C. USA

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From Robert Grant, Boston (area), Mass
Dear VV, May 2, 1990

The VV editor's comments on the Singapore Rhododendron illustrated in the Smithsonian Magazine brought back memories of trips to the Far East. This plant is found along the roadside from India to Australia. I have seen it growing as a common shrub up to 12 feet high along roadsides in Malaysia and on the Island of Borneo. It is evergreen with rough hairy leaves. The flowers are rose colored to magenta with yellow stamens. It seams to always to be in flower. Its common name is indeed Singapore Rhododendron, while its Latin name is *Melastoma malabathricum*. This plant is illustrated in color in "Malaysian Flowers in Color" authored by H.F. Chin and published by Tropical Press in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Robert W. Grant
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The Smithsonian Magazine is sent to all members of the organization. The Smithsonian Institution is an Official United States Government Museum. They have major displays in Washington D.C. and do a lot of research work around the world. This Institution does some very good work and is respected in the scientific community.

This photo and reference caused a problem when common names are used for plants. I do not expect people to use botanical names for all plants but to use the Genus name of a group of plants for a common name in a different Genus is very confusing to say the least. I bet none of us Viners would do that.

All of we Americans who got a copy of the "Rhododendrons of Sabah" owe a vote of thanks to Robert Grant for his efforts to bring the books into the USA. He was the single individual directly responsible for getting the 150 copies into the USA from "Sabah Park last spring. His people personally handled the pickup and initial payment, air express shipment, daily computer tracking info updates, expedited transshipment at LAX (Los Angles Airport), and picked up the shipment at Boston's Logan International Airport within hours of its arrival.

The Massachusetts Chapter is selling the books and rebating $5.00 to the Sabah Park System. Good job, Bob. It would have been very difficult and time consuming for each of us to ha ve had dealings with the agency in Sabah, Malaysia. I had the pleasure of seeing Robert Grant's garden last May. He has an extensive planting of just about everything along with 2 large greenhouses. He will have a major Vireya collection if he keeps at it a while longer. I went to Grant's with my friends Ian Donovan, Dick Chaikin, and Red (Dick) Cavender & wife. Ian has a small place in Newton (Boston) where he has a Micro-Propagation laboratory in his basement. I was surprised with the lab because I thought this kind of thing was much more detailed. Dick Chaikin now has most of his Vireyas in his greenhouse at Fallmouth Ma. Dick says that he does not like people blowing his horn but I must tell all you Viners that Dick has the best displayed Vireya collection that I have seen in the USA.

*Dick Chaikin is a Dentist and has a small office in Fallmouth (which is in the SW area of Cape Cod) and his dentist chair room looks out into the Vireya Greenhouse with hanging plants growing right at eye level. Dick has the walls covered with photos and prints of Rhododendrons and Vireyas. I was impressed to say the least. The Vireyas are watered with "drip" and "micro heads" on a time clock. Dick also uses a backup type power supply in the winter in case his electricity goes off so that the greenhouse will not freeze. Nice job and the plants looked real good. Around the outside of the Office he has hardy Rhodies planted and "Micro Sprinklers to keep them happy. The*p+1X outside plants looked as good as the Vireyas. W also went to see the Vireyas of Willard Hunnewell in Wellesley, Ma. His plants are grown in large old style greenhouses. Willard has big plants in tubs. His plants are the biggest that I have seen in the USA and they were in bloom and looked good.*

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From Joyce Waters, Wellington, NZ
Dear VV, Feb. 15, 1990

I live on a very steep hillside in Wellington. I am making more places to fit Vireyas in and they are all happy. Perhaps I should explain that I plant them in the garden, with no protection, and that the frost that we do get here in Wellington flows down the hill past me, without settling. Wind can be bad here but the plants just sway with it. Rain doesn't worry the Vireyas as much as it does some of the hardier Rhodos. I had R. "Chrysomanicum" (R. chrysodoron X burmanicum) in flower on one side of the steps, badly marked with brown spots on the flowers from the rain. On the other side R. "Gilded Sunrise" was unscathed, and smiling. I use granulated bark mixed with a little of my soil to plant into.

I was interested in Hugh Caldwell's query about rooting media for cuttings. I have found that granulated bark works very well for Vireyas (and also Camellias). I am now installing a micro-jet sprinkler system, and wish (had it in place ages ago.

E. White, are you sure you have R. superbum? Those I saw in PNG had white flowers with pink in the throat, while at Pukeiti (at the time of Cyclone Bola) what had been thought to be R. superbum flowered and produced dark red flowers. Graham Smith identified this plant as R. hellwigii, a great excitement.

Joyce Waters
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A very good question about R. superbum, Joyce. Some plants we can identify from foliage because they are distinctive and we have seen a lot of them. But some can be a real surprise when they bloom. I have 3 different forms of what is labeled R. superbum. One from the RSF, one from Pete Schick and one that came to me from PNG as both rooted cutting and cuttings. The one from CW PNG is what I hope will turn out to be a real good superbum. The people who collected and sent this material to us did know the plants and should have picked good forms to send. I still have a flower bud hanging on and maybe some day I will see it. This plant is now 12 years old which should make it old enough to bloom. All of us Vireya growers must realize by now that we probable do not know what the real good forms of the species look like. Unlike the hardy species Rhododendrons, we just have not seen enough of the normal variation in species Vireyas.

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From Bill Moyles Oakland, California
Dear Vireya Vine, January 14, 1990
(this is a continuation of Bills letter printed in VV25.)

I have been asked for some comments about handling seed and it's storage. There isn't really much to say. All of the evidence seems to indicate (and I have found this to be so) that seed should be harvested only when mature (splitting capsules). Then after a brief room temperature drying it should stored immediately in the freezer.
Seed people have found that if viability is at issue and that the seed can be dried (Vireyas fit here), then the seed should be stored at low temperatures. Note, putting dry seed in the freezer IS NOT the same as stratifying seed. In general, no special storage containers are necessary as the 0° F in the freezer assures a dry environment, although I (most of the time) do store seed in a container with a drying agent. On the basis of the above, I recommend that when recipients receive their seed they either sow it immediately or pop, it into the freezer. John Rouse estimates the ½ life of Vireya seed to be around 1 week at room temperatures.

Pollen gets about the same treatment as seed. For instance, I periodically drag out Pete Schick's R. hellwigii pollen and use it (sparingly) and then back into the freezer it goes. Peter has been sending me pollen for years now. Pollen collection and exchange needs no special technique. Peter just snaps off the anther and some filament onto a wax paper square, folds, staples it and sends it off. When I collect my own pollen I generally snip it into a gelatin capsule, dry it over a desiccants, and put it into the freezer. By the way, species pollen is always welcome.

Seed may not be the easiest or the most efficient way of sharing Vireyas species. But, as it turns out, it is often the only way to share. Seed readily crosses international borders, cuttings do not. Further benefits come from selecting potentially superior forms from variable seedling populations. Jack Wilson in the September 1989 Australian Rhododendron Society Journal voices a eloquent appeal for localized selection from seed populations.

Obviously seed-rearing is the only way to create new hybrids. Admittedly and without a doubt, Vireya seed is a drag. For me Vireya seed takes at least 50% more "attention to detail" than does other lepidote seed. We just need to work on technique! As species seedlings are selected and tested they should be identified and registered or at the very least labeled, as to, the seed source. Reviewing forms of species can be a major undertaking -- the model I think worth rereading is John Swisher's review of R. brookeanum some years ago in the American Rhododendron Society Quarterly Bulletin.

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Bill is the Seed exchange person for Vireya seed for the American RS and to the rest of the world. You need to tell him that you want seed to get onto his list. Bill also keeps a "want" list. See VV25.

From Clarice Clark Puyallup, Washington
Dear VV, May 10, 1990

I hope that this letter offers a bit of help to Peter Cox in his efforts to grow Vireyas in Scotland. Like the Pacific Northwest, I am sure he has long periods on low light in the winter. Vireyas like light. At the Rhododendron Species Foundation, I always used supplemental fluorescent lighting in the greenhouse and gave the Vireyas the best south face in the propagation house. Stock plants crowded against a north wall always suffered, and resented being crowded together and being shaded by taller species. My advice is to give them no shade in the winter and to make sure that they are no crowded into a dark corner.

Typically, when plants lack vigor, root rot sets in. We tent to dry them out and then stimulate them with fertilizer. This is when you get leaf tip burn. One good way to prevent root rot is to not overpot the plants. When I was at the RSF I really hesitated to repot the Vireyas. Do so only if you experience severe wilting and can not water enough. Excess mix stays wet too long. I prefer clay pots to plastic but they require more attention. An open bench or flats are even better. Rooted cuttings in wood flats or benches always do better than potted ones. I regularly used SUBDUE (metalaxyl) as a drench - twice a year and ALLIETTE (fosetyl) as a foliar application on young, new or stressed plants. You need to water thoroughly a day after fungicide applications.

One of the last projects I was working on at the RSF as the Education Specialist was a "Care & Culture" sheet to be included with Vireya orders sent out through the plant distribution. I'll try to get permission from the Foundation to publish it for the Vireya Vine readers - perhaps in the next issue.

Clarice Clark
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From Barbara Campbell El Cerrito, Ca
Dear VV, May, 1990

I am very pleased that I have found a perfect solution for my cuttings. I had heard that meat markets used styrofoam meat boxes and I checked with a couple. They do get fish in large styrofoam boxes which are approximately 3 feet X 1 foot X 10 inches high - plus a lid. I got some for these boxes, cut the center out of the lids, and put on clear plastic. I had received a note from one of the Seattle group about rooting mix and a few instructions about rooting cuttings. At first I had my box in the sun where a few cuttings got burned. Now it is on the north side of the house and all looks good now.

One of our Rhododendron Groups up north of here makes it's own rooting compound. I mentioned that my bottle of Rootone was about 15 years old. They maintain that it only last for so long - about a year. When I mentioned it at another meeting they said that it never goes bad. SO does it go bad or not??? Then there are different strengths - what strength should a person use? And then there are the people who do not use any rooting hormone at all with Vireyas. What should I do now?

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O, the sweet mystery of hormones are back again. No, they have not ever gone away at all and most people will have a different answer. Yes, Barbara, I also was at a meeting one time and I mentioned that my liquid rooting mix was 5 to 6 years old and it still worked. I was told by a couple of people that I need to mix it fresh each time. I still only mix new stuff every 2 or 3 years. I also had a large mouth pickle jar with Benlate mixed up which I only changed when it got very dirty. I have heard that Benlate goes bad and can become toxic to plant tissue when not freshly mixed but mine still works well. Good job with the styrofoam boxes. Many people do not try to do Vireya cuttings because they do not have a cutting bed in a greenhouse. When Don Stanton, the Australian who grew many Vireyas, was here years ago he told me that I should just use a clay pot full of peat and sand for rooting. Don said to put the cuttings next to the outside rim of the pot and put it into a window. They will root easy. I never use any rooting hormone on Vireyas, but the weak solution ofRootone should not hurt and could help a bit.

Boy O Boy, I now have 2 cuttings of R. fallacinum rooted. And thanks to Steven Trout I did not through them out and waited until they rooted. Now if they will only start to grow.

I can't remember if I mentioned it in the last Vine or not, but I saw a plant of R. carringtoniae in bloom last spring at the RSF. It is very different from most other Vireyas. The flowers stand up and look out at you. White flowers (not very large) that are very pleasant to see.

I have a communication going with a Mr. Laane in Estonia (northern most Baltic state of Russia). He puts out a Journal for the "Estonian Horticultural Society". It has been 50 years since they have published a Journal. In the winter if 1987/88 it got down to -42° C and Mr. Laane says that they have trouble growing many Rhododendrons. He is passing on Rhododendron information on to the few growers in hope that they will be encouraged.

In reading Mr. Laane's letter I get the feeling that they are desperate for freedom. He says that they now have some hope, but that it has been 50 years as he puts it, "not participants in this grand social experiment". I told him in my last letter about Vireya Rhododendrons and I doubt if there is much of a chance of it happening but maybe there will even be a Vireya Nut in that small part of the world.