

VIREYA VINE

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RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION

R. S. F., PO BOX 3798, FEDERAL WAY, WA. 98063
E. White Smith, Editor

From Bill Moynier Los Angeles, California
Dear VV, March 31, 1992

After pondering for some time, what I could write about to hasten the next issue of the Vine, it dawned on me that the Vine would be a ideal vehicle for thanking a number of people. They have been very generous in donating seed to the American Rhododendron Society Seed Exchange. Bill Moyle's runs the Vireya Seed Exchange. We are quite isolated here in Southern California from any primary sources of seed or pollen. Most of what I have been working with has come from the late 1960's and 70's hybridizing efforts of Pete Sullivan at Strybing Arboretum in San Francisco. With a few exceptions, it wasn't until 1987, when I first become aware of the Vireya Exchange. Then I was able to obtain seed involving a wider range of species. Some of these species were just plain rare and others were recent new introductions. For a long time I had been my observation that there didn't seem to be any good, large red hybrids around. Since seeing a picture of *R. hellwigii* in Dr. Sleumers slide show many years ago, I had longed to get my hands on some pollen of seed crosses of this species. Then in 1988 Peter Schick ended the drought by sending me some pollen from his *hellwigii* which had just bloomed. I used the pollen on one of my moderately large red hybrids ('Cair Pravel' X *javanicum*) and on 'Ne Plus Ultra'. I now have 2 1/2 and 2 year old colonies, respectively, of thriving seedlings from these crosses.

Another hope is to introduce some fragrance into a large flowered, truly, blood red hybrid. I think that I have made a good step in this direction with a seedling of 'Felinda' X *javanicum*. It has brick red color, a nice full truss, and light fragrance. I plan to continue working with it and couple of other prospects. Even if, as I suspect, someone out there has already developed a good large flowered fragrant red, its still fun and educational to watch these things develop and get some understanding about how the various characteristics are passed on. It probably won't hurt to have several good plants with these traits.

Since discovering the Vireya Seed Exchange, Bill Moyle's has been very kind and carefully to see that I don't miss any opportunity to obtain the new and exciting things becoming available. I now have many batches of seedlings coming along from seed donated, mostly from the South Pacific area, by generous souls such as John Rouse, Paul Kores, Graham Smith, Jack Wilson, Lyn Craven, Keith Adams, Oz Blumhart, and Leslie Riggel (So Africa). I am sure I have left out someone, but thank you one and all for your generosity and the time it takes to package the seed up and get it mailed to Bill Moyle's. Just for the record, these batches of seedlings now coming along involve the following species, which I did not previously have access to work with. *Rs. leucogigas*, "Hunsteins Secret", *scabridibracteum*, *intranervatum*, *crassifolium*, *durionifolium*, *rubineiflorum*, *baenitzianum*, *polyanthemum*, *carringtoniae*, *rugosum*, *stevensianum*, *retivenium*, *blackii*, *praetervisum*, *saxifragoides* and many with *hellwigii* blood.

As long as I am in the name, naming mood, perhaps it will be of interest to some of you who visit Southern California, to be aware some of the more serious growers in our area. Even though we don't have really large collections or gardens, there are some real dedicated growing of Vireyas going on here.

Fred Renick (in Camarille) is having outstanding results. He frequently brings beautifully grown plants to our Southern California Chapter meetings. An excellent example was a four foot tall "Cair Paravel" in peak bloom and immaculate foliage. He dug this plant out of his garden and took it to the last February meeting. These Vireyas transplant so easy that Fred had no qualms digging the plant just to enhance our meeting. Because of very poor water (ground source) in Camarille, Fred uses reverse osmosis water on his plants which partially, explains his outstanding results. Fred is one of our most knowledgeable growers and has developed some of his own unique cultural practices which have clearly paid off.

Bill Jenkins (in West Los Angeles) is another successful grower, but of a different breed. He likes to try unorthodox approaches and has had surprising success. I won't go into details except for one example. Bill converted his concrete driveway into a sizable Vireya bed by throwing up some shade cloth and forming a raised bed directly on the concrete, using 12 inch wooded borders. There are beautiful, large (some up to 4 feet) plants thriving in this bed. He uses practically no fertilizer, another Jenkins abbreviation.

Another pair of serious and knowledgeable growers are Graham and Susan Podd, in Costa Mesa. These former residents of Southern England have always had a love for Rhododendrons, especially the species, and since moving to our area they have been delighted to find Rhododendrons, the Vireyas, which will thrive here. After some initial difficulties and subsequent experimentation, they have developed their own cultural practices which are now producing excellent results.

It is hard to know where to stop, but I should mention at least two others. Bill Paylen (West Los Angeles) is undoubtedly the most knowledgeable plants man, across all genera, that I have ever had the good fortune to know. He is a widely recognized and honored Southern California landscaper and consultant, including being a primary consultant for ex US President, Ronald Reagan. Bill has somehow found time to become a avid grower of Vireyas along with his very large collection of Orchids, Bromeliads and just about everything else you can think of. His unique garden was the subject of an article in the Los Angeles Times newspaper some years ago. Most of his Vireyas are in containers and he has managed to nurse along a very nice collection.

Gloria Wildharber (Culver City) is our current Chapter President and our local specie person. She has a deep concern for the preservation and distribution of Vireya species. She has been the driving force in species procurement and distribution to Chapter members and the establishment of the new Vireya species bed at the UCLA Botanical Garden. Gloria often displays blooming Vireyas around Southern California encountered much interest in these plants.

Our own garden here in West Los Angeles is already showing a noticeable improvement in general health and vigor. We had our first "wet" winter in six years; 20 inches of rain here this year to date versus a normal 13 inches. We have been fortunate during this drought period to loose only a few of our more mature plants, because of the bad water we have had available to use. There hasn't be much of an adverse affect on the quality of trusses during this long drought period. Over the years we have generated a few hybrids of some quality and promise to watch to see if some should be registered in the future. There are two more of Pete Sullivan's hybrids which I hope to register soon. Pete has already given them the test names of 'Cephas' and 'John Henry'. Both are out of the same seed pod of 'Dr. Sleumer' X leucogigas. Pete has the originals, buy my copies, now about three feet tall, are now both in glorious bloom. The plants are essentially identical except that 'Cephas' is a medium pink while 'John Henry' is a light pink. Both have trusses of typically 5 or 6, 4 3/4 inch diameter flowers, with a very rich carnation fragrance.

Bill Moynier
2701 Malcolm Ave.
Los Angeles, Ca 90068

Thanks for the update Bill. How about some one down there explaining to the rest of us what you mean by "reverse osmosis" of water. What is going to happen to "Sunny Southern California" if you get so much rain?

I am trying to get some seed for Bill Moyles to distribute. I have been a bad boy in the past for not saving seed and shall try harder. I have seed pods forming on the large form of *R. christii* and on my very good form of *phaeochitum*. What a blooming summer I had, finely a plant of *superbum* bloomed. Seven trusses on one plant and then it set more buds. This was the first *superbum* that I have ever seen in person so I don't know if it was a good form or not, but at least it finely bloomed. I have another form (CW cutting from PNG) that has never bloomed and shows no sign of doing so. It is 14 years old now. ON the first of August I had *R. christi*, *brookeanum*, *commionae*, *dianthosmum*, *gracilentum*, *lochae*, *macgregoriae*, *phaeochitum*, and *superbum* on our back porch. I was in a very good *Rhododendron* mood to say the least. This plant of *phaeochitum* was one I got from Bob Badger some years ago. I had it labeled *scabridibracteum* but knew that was in error. When it bloomed I looked it up in the Sleumer book and found it to be *phaeochitum*. What I think is a fine form. I have bloomed this species before (different form) and it had a much smaller flower. The flowers are light rose pink, covered with pale scales, and as big as my index finger. They are in trusses of up to 5 flowers and hang straight down. A very striking plant.

While all of these *Vireyas* were in bloom I had a lady from "Sunset" magazine come to the house and interview me about *Vireyas*. "Sunset" is a home, food, and garden magazine for the west coast of America. Sunset has a large distribution and is a first class publication. There should be an article in the 1992 December issue about *Vireyas* (I think).

While we were at the Western Regional *Rhododendron* meeting in September I attended a session about using a computer to map a garden. The room was overflowing and I think that 1/2 of the people held up their hands when the speaker asked if anyone had a computer. So, at the risk of boring you even further. I am now using a IBM compatible 486 /33 meg computer to do the Vine. I have installed Microsoft Windows 3.1 and it is OK. I have been trying to learn Wordstar for Windows but I must just be too dumb. I might try Word for Windows and see if it is any easier to use. A windows word processing program could really dress up the Vine if I could only figure out how to use it. O Well. No Body Promised Us a Rose Garden.

From Charles Trommer
Dear VV,

July 9, 1992
Hawaii

This is a brief correction to Mitch Mitchell's letter in Issue #32 of the VV. He referred to me as Charles Kohler. My name is Charles Trommer and this is only important if people visiting the Big Island (Hilo or Kona) want to locate me. We live on the Hilo side of the island and welcome visitors. Mitch visited us a while back and we enjoyed getting to know him. His enthusiasm is a pure joy.

We grow about 12 *Vireyas* which prosper outdoors in our benign climate. The only ones that I have lost were planted in our heavy clay soil. Once I recognized their need for extreme drainage and planted them in a very course mix of lava cinders (course Perlite works equally well), and earth they have prospered. My plants are in full sun and remain reasonably compact with light pruning. A friend in Hilo grows his in fairly deep shade where they become very lanky. His plants do bloom more heavily than mine however.

I do intend to augment my collection when I locate a supplier that will ship plants. Glen Sahara lives about 35 miles from us in the Puna section of the island and grows *Vireyas* magnificently. He has a huge tight trussed orange (name unknown) that is breathtaking. There are five of us on this island who grow *Vireyas*. Most of us grow a relatively few varieties, with the possible exception of Mitch, whose garden we have yet to visit.

We would be pleased to hear from Vireya people when they visit Hawaii. Do recognize that we are on the Island of Hawaii, not Oahu where Honolulu is located. It's a 30 minute flight from Honolulu to the city of Hilo. Kona is on the other side of our island and is a two hour drive from us.

Charles Trommer
P.O. Box 118
Ninole, Hawaii 96773
Phone (808)963-6340

From Tom Tatum
Dear Vireya Vine

May 1, 1992
Point Roberts, Washington

The last time you heard about this, the Vireya Rhododendrons book nearing completion when my efforts were interrupted by a severe reaction to kidney transplant medication. I had no idea it would be so long before there would be new developments to report. Well, things are back in action at last.

The period of illness ultimately exhausted available funds. Since eating is a priority, it appeared that the only alternative after that was to earn needed income. At the same time I planned to tie up the loose end of the book. After a number of false starts it finally became clear that my stamina no longer allowed enough quality time for both efforts.

It is now apparent that further funding is needed to finish the job. Several potential sponsors have now been contacted. By hindsight, this current action could have been taken a long time ago. At this time an attractive corporate offer is now being deferred in favor of Vireya Rhododendrons. Instead, I'm going ahead with the book without waiting for further developments.

At the time of interruption, this project was nearing completion. The large, difficult and time consuming sections were done. At least 547 pages were typed and edited. About 120 photos were selected. What remains are the more peripheral sections, some polishing of text and most of all, incorporating more recent materials. One more good push and it's finished.

You will be hearing more about this in the near future.

Tom Tatum
P.O. Box 206
Point Roberts, Wa 98281 Phone (604)943-7420

From Jan Oldham
Dear VV,

Auckland, NZ
July 20, 1992

Many thanks indeed for our first issue of the Vireya Vine. We find it most interesting reading.

We certainly sympathize with the difficulties of growing Vireyas in the U.S.A. None of these ice storms ever hit us. In fact we are frost free and strike our cuttings in the open shade house without mist or bottom heat. The ground frost actually stops at our front gate. We extend and open innovation to any of the VV readers to visit us if they are down this way.

Jan Oldham
Garden Creations
1 Rangitoto Ave. Remuera
New Zealand
Auckland Phone 540-056

I have a copy of Jan's Vireya list in front of me and I just counted 82 different species and hybrids she is listing for sale. Each plant listing has a one or two sentence explanation. A nice job. We understand that the Vireyas are becoming very popular in New Zealand. I sure wish I could stop "frost" at my front gate.

I just got a letter from Bob Badger. You old time Viners will remember that Badger started all of this writing stuff back in 1982. Bob and Marge have moved to Longview Washington, which is north of Portland Oregon along the Columbia River. Bob is "Plant Manager" for Glenwood gardens, a retail nursery. If you are in the area stop and say hello to Bob. Now I have a good reason to drive down there and look around.

From George Argent
Dear VV,

RBG Edinburgh
July 29, 1992

Just an update on Vireya activity at Edinburgh. Earlier this year I was fortunate enough to go back to the Philippines to collect plants with the National Museum in Manila. I was able to see and collect a number of Vireya Rhododendrons in the course of more general collecting. Our first site was Mt. Pulog in northern Luzon, the only known locality of *Rhododendron taxifolium*. This is an extraordinary species with long narrow leaves like *R. stenophyllum* but with white flowers. There was a very small quantity of flowers and the plants were extremely desiccated by the intense drought the country is suffering. We now have rooted cuttings out of quarantine which we hope to grow on as stock for distribution to other botanic gardens, which might help preserve this species. We are also hopeful that a montane botanic garden may be set up in the Philippines to which plants could be returned. Further south the drought was even worse (March) and epiphytes were wilting and extremely unhappy. This dryness was especially bad on Mt. Apo where *Sphagnum* in the "bogs" was so dry that it crunched under foot. A number of plants were collected which will take time to evaluate but the most spectacular was *R. javanicum* var. *schadenbergii*. This species was described as *R. spectabile* by Merrill, a name which much better reflects its outstanding beauty with large brilliant red flowers.

While I was in the Philippines my assistant and the garden staff staged an exhibit of some 50 Vireya species at the RHS Rhododendron Show in London. It was no easy task taking 250 plants the 800 mile round trip with all the attendant difficulties of showing such delicate flowers, but we obtained a Gold Medal for the display. The display encouraged a lot of interest and was followed up by a HS lecture on my return devoted to Vireyas. Hopefully we have made a few converts.

July saw the retirement of Paddy Woods who collected Vireyas in Papua New Guinea (with Michael Black and Norman Cruttwell) in the early sixties. He also collected in Malaysia. He described *R. burtii* from living material of this species brought back to Edinburgh which now flourishes in many collections around the world. Paddy has a marvelously wide knowledge of plants which we hope will be available to us for many years to come. We wish him a more relaxed time in what will undoubtedly be a working retirement

George Argent
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United Kingdom
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And from the Rhododendron Species Foundation newsletter, a note written by Clarice Clark of Puyallup Washington. Clarice and her husband visited the Wilson Botanic Garden in San Vito, Costa Rica. She reports that the 25 acre cultivated garden includes some Vireya Rhododendrons. Back in 1981 a shipment of Vireya plant material was sent to this garden from the RFS. Clarice visited the garden in December of 1991 and found the Vireyas alive but not thriving. They are planted in the ground. The new Director of the Garden is trying to grow them as epiphytes. But the garden might be too warm, 62 to 85°F average. People traveling to the area should contact; OTS Headquarters, PO Box DM (Duke Station), Durham, North Carolina, 27706 USA.

From Luurt Nieuwenhuis

Vancouver, Wa USA

Dear VV,

August 3, 1992

Several years ago, I acquired a Vireya collection. The plants have all suffered from a hot summer with no rain. Quite of few have died. I've made some observations concerning the survivors that I would like to share.

Item 1: Many of the plants were in a heavy, high sand content potting mix. When they were watered, the water would stand in the pots for several minutes before percolating through. The most affected plants were repotted in to larger pots with a course bark dust. I only surrounded the root ball with the bark, and did not try to break up the root mass that was present.

A couple of years later, I undertook a large scale repotting project. The plants that were still in the heavy sand mix, even though they showed moderately rapid water drainage, all had small root balls, with few or no, actively growing rootlets. The plants that had been repotted into the bark dust all had much larger root balls, and all had an extensive network of white, actively growing rootlets penetrating the bark media.

The bark dust used for this initial potting consisted of "course beauty bark", in this case mostly douglas fir, with pieces up to 1 by 2 by 5 centimeters. I have since repotted the rest of the sand and peat based plants into a mix of 2/3 bark (somewhat smaller in size) and 1/3 Perlite. This mix drains water like a sieve, but takes twice as long to dry out as the sand peat mix that it replaced. The plants look very good to date.

Item 2: I have had several plants die from what I assume is phytophthora. The new growth starts to wilt on some stems on hot dry days, but perks up on cool days with lots of watering. The problem gets progressively worse, with more stems affected in the wilting, and more leaf drop. I have not been able to halt the process with Subdue or any other fungicide. Certain stems are involved at first because specific portions of the root mass feeds specific stems. Eventually the plant dies.

I have been able to save clones of these plants by promptly taking cuttings. I now know that the plants are invariably going to die when I see the new growth wilt in the presence of water. So, I take as many cuttings as I can get from the sick plant, even though the entire plant may then be denuded. The host plant might as well be discarded after this process because it will die anyway.

Item 3: The first major bloom in the spring on each of my plants usually results in beautiful, perfectly shaped flowers. This year (1992), we had an unseasonably hot spell during May and June (outside temperatures to 38°C, greenhouse temperatures to 45°C with high humidity). The buds that developed during this hot spell and opened later exhibited deformed petals when they opened; split edges, twisted petals, twisted stamens and anthers, etc. This happened to over a dozen different varieties (species and hybrids), many of which had bloomed normally earlier in the season. A few of these plants have bloomed normally on buds set after the hot spell.

I have noticed that the *R. Christianae* X *laetum* and the *R. dielsianum* that bloom in November usually hold the same perfectly shaped trusses through March as long as I keep the greenhouse temp. above freezing. For tropical plants they sure put on a better show at cooler temperatures.

Item 5: There are usually only two or three people who enter Vireyas in the Vireya categories in the Portland Chapter shows. This is because they are the only ones who have any sort of Vireya collections. As a result, the only people with knowledge and expertise about Vireyas usually have to excuse themselves from judging the Vireya entries. One of the recent judges complained about the lax trusses of some of the entries, even though they were perfect type specimens. Another was heard to mutter that Vireyas shouldn't be in the show at all because they "weren't" really Rhododendrons.

I see a real need for the development of judging criteria and knowledge about Vireyas, even among hard-core Rhodologists. I'd like to see my plants judged according to what they should be like, not how well they compare to *R. baratum*!

Luurt Nieuwenhuis
PO Box 2353
Vancouver, Wa 98668

Thanks for saying some of those things, Luurt. You are right, Vireyas do not get much respect at Rhodie shows, at least in the Northwest USA. I am the only one who ever enters Vireyas in the Tacoma Chapter shows. And I am tired of winning the prize for the "Best Vireya" year after year. But Life Goes ON.

Phytophthora root rot can be a real problem with Vireya Rhododendrons. I like your saying that you take cuttings as soon as you see problems. I do the same and have always had good luck. Yes, by the time you see root rot symptoms it is too late to save the plant. I use Subdue twice each year and have not lost a Vireya for about 5 years now. Growers of Vireyas need to understand about good drainage. Sand is usually not a good draining material because it stays too wet. I still like Orchid bark, Perlite, and peat in equal amounts for a potting mix. I still burn holes in my plastic pots with a soldering iron.

From Hugh Caldwell,
Dear VV,

Northern Florida
September 6, 1992

I wish to thank all of the Viners who have sent me Vireya cuttings and rooted plants. Also to all of the members who well sent material this fall. It was very kind of you all, and I really appreciate their kindness and help. I hope to have everything ready this fall for the Vireyas. The new greenhouse came in after the fire this spring (14' X 26"). I was able to beat the bent frames out while taking the old burnt greenhouse down. I am hoping to use them for a cold frame house to keep the bigger Vireyas in.

I hope that I will be able to find all of the species lost in the fire. Pete Sullivan sent me my first Vireya in 1972. I had a 20 year collection go up in smoke. John Swisher is alright after the big storm hit southern Florida. he got out of the Keys just ahead of the storm. He thinks that all of his Vireyas are OK.

Does anyone have *R. tuba* or *longiflorum* red form? I would like to get these again if I could.

Note a new address for Hugh

Hugh Caldwell
187 Brickyard Rd.
Middleburg, Florida 32068

Many people are asking where to buy Vireyas. As mentioned earlier in this Vine. Jan Oldham in NZ is selling Vireyas. Dick Chaikin says he has about 100 different forms for sale, by mail, Dick Cavender sells by mail. I have one of the wonderful new catalog's from Lucy Sorenson who owns "The Bovees Nursery" in Portland Oregon. She list 101 different Vireyas for sale including many species; all shipped by mail if you want.

Here is the list again of sellers of Vireya's.

The Bovees Nursery
1737 S.W. Coronado
Portland, Or. 97219
Phone (503)244-9341

Rostyn Nursery
211 Burrs Lane
Dix Hills, NY 11746

The Lyon Arboretum
Honolulu, Hawaii

Cape Cod Vireyas (Dick Chaikin)
405 Jones Rd
Fallmouth, Ma 02540
Phone (508)548-2233 leave a message

Red's Rhodics (Dick Cavender)
15920 SW Oberst Lane
Sherwood, Or 97140
Phone (503) 625-6331

Rhododendron Species Foundation
PO Box 3798
Federal Way, Wa 98063 (Members Only?)

Pukeiti in NZ sells Vireyas to members. Michael Cullinane in Levin NZ sells Vireya's.
Oz Blumhardt in Whangarei, NZ sells Vireyas, but we have not heard from Oz for a long time.
I am sure that there are many places in Australia where a person could buy Vireyas but I don't know where.

This is not too bad. We were able to get three Vireya Vines out this year. That is not as good as the four issues per year that we had been doing but we are still going and that's just fine. We do need your input, or there won't be a VV for long.

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