

VIREYA VINE

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E. White Smith, Editor

The new Vireya species book ('Rhododendrons of Subgenus Vireya' by George Argent) is now out and many of us have a copy. I ordered 35 copies and have sold them all. If picked up here at "The Vireya Vine Oregon Field Office" at Bovees Nursery in Portland they cost \$65. I also mailed them at \$70 postpaid to anywhere in the USA. I tried to make about \$2.00 for each copy and might have come out even because a couple of copies went to Hawaii and one to Puerto Rico which ended up costing quite a bit more to mail. That was fun and I was very happy to be of service to our VV people. I have 8 more copies ordered but do not know when they will get here. The book is sold out now and they are getting ready to do a second printing which will include a few mistake changes. I think I will get the same low price from the RHS. If you want a copy you need to get on my list. Send an e-mail or letter to me at Bovees Nursery, 1737 SW Coronado, Portland, OR 97219. Please, USA only and no money at this time.

O great mystery of life, at last I have found you??? In November of 2005 a group of researchers went into a remote part of Papua (the Indonesia part of the island of New Guinea). They found and reported what was assumed to be a new Vireya species, and showed a photo of it on the BBC web site. Some of us who saw the photo said right away that it sure looked like R. konori to us (we even had a big plant of konori in bloom at the time). And then in the June issue of 'The Plantsman' from the Royal Horticultural Society, there was an article with a photo about the "" new species. Then a couple of week later my wife Lucie Sorensen-Smith came up to the office with a nice big plant in bloom and said "look at this", "doesn't this look like that new species"? The RHS article said that the plant seemed to resemble R. pachystigma, a species known only from a type collection, and not in cultivation. R. konori and pachystigma are in different sections in the new book and then when I got a leaf under the microscope the scales were different. The scales were not R. konori type but could easily look like what was described for pachystigma. The other difference is that konori has a pink or white flower tube and this mystery plant has a very pale orange tube. Our blooming plant had a label with a New Guinea forest service number from Dr. Sleumer.

About 25 years ago I belonged to a small group of people, mostly in Seattle, who got together a couple of times a year at members' gardens to look at and talk about Rhodies. We were expected to take a small gift plant to the person whose garden we were visiting, which was always a hard job because these people had a lot of rare species. At one of the meetings at Frank Doleshy's home I took a small Vireya plant and he gave me back a Vireya plant. Frank was also a Vireya guy like me but had many more species.

The plant he gave me is the same one we had in bloom and that was in question, with the label about NG forest number, the name konori with a ?, and Sleumers name. So Frank Doleshy had either gotten a cutting from Sleumer or had grown seed from Sleumer. Frank did know Dr. Sleumer and Sleumer did send things to him. And 25 or so years later it bloomed here at Bovees.

I pressed a flower and a leaf and sent them off to George Argent at the Edinburgh Botanic Garden in Scotland and he answered by e-mail, "could be and will check further". I also sent him some very nice digital photos of our plant in bloom. We are still wondering and thinking about this plant. And then to top it all off we had a second plant of the same thing bloom this summer with the same kind of label, also from Frank Doleshy and it looked just the same. Was it originally from a rooted cutting or from another different seedling? We will never know but it sure makes a person wonder.

Lucie even had a one year old rooted cutting that we were able to send to the Edinburgh Botanic Garden collection, enclosed in a Vireya plant order for Eric Annal in Scotland. E White Smith, VV editor

A question on the internet was "are there any Vireyas that are resistant to phytophthora root rot"? And my answer was ---

At Bovees Nursery we grow over 700 different clones including maybe 130 different vireya species and we do not know of any plants that are resistant. Very good drainage and being careful with watering seems to be the way to go. Now, after saying that, there are other things you can do to help protect your Vireyas. The chemical 'Subdue' can be used as a soil/root drench and it does work. Also I like 'Aliette' which is a wettable powder material that is sprayed on the foliage and it also helps. The problem with both of these materials is that they are not available to the ordinary gardener, but you need to ask around and see if some one will give you a small amount. You do not need much, with Subdue you only use +- 10 drops per gallon of water. We use both on our stock plants but not on plants that we sell because we do not think that it is fair to have plants treated from here and then the protection will wear off for the customer. Good drainage is the best way to go. AND DO NOT overpot vireyas. Overpotting causes wet roots systems that do not dry out fast.

Over 30 years ago Bob Badger in Seattle gave me a small amount of Subdue in a baby food jar and I used it by the drop for years when I grew Vireyas in Tacoma. EWS

Well this is just GREAT. I have NO letters to the Vine to print for you to read, SO I am going back 20 years or so and finding some interesting stuff.

From Brian Clancy

Melbourne, Australia

Dear VV,

March 30, 1983

About myself, I am only a backyard gardener who has been growing Rhododendron for 31 years and Vireyas for 25 years. As I write I am sitting in the sunshine in front of R. laetum with 8 sumptuous flowers. I won the Award of Merit with R. laetum at our annual show in 1966 and it was one of the happiest days of my life. This was appropriate as the name laetum derives from the Latin word, laetare, which means rejoice.

My *R. laetum* was the most photographed *Rhododendron* in the show. Two of the judges, both hardened by periods in the Antarctic, wars and much pure whiskey came back after the judging and stood in front of my *R. laetum* for about 3 hours contemplating its beauty and magnificence. It is probably hard to believe but a different *Vireya* plant sits on my kitchen table every week of the year. I recently flowered *R. zoelleri* X *javanicum* for the first time on a 3 year old plant. The flower was a beautiful shade of orange. Last week I flowered *R. Dr. Sleumer?* X *javanicum* for the first time and the 8 flowers were like a bright sunset. In bloom this week is a 3 year old seedling of *R. christiana* X (*macgregoriae* X *javanicum*) and the first truss has 21 florets of orange colour. Next week I will be flowering one of Pete Sullivans crosses (*R. zoelleri* x *R. lochae*) x *R. zoelleri* / *R. aurigeranum* / *R. zoelleri*) for the first time. This seed came through several hands and I only germinated 5 seedlings. This cross strikes like weeds from cuttings and grows on fast.

Currently I am preparing to give a lecture in *Vireyas* at be delivered on April 15th. The slides will be from Arthur Headlams classics, excepting for one of my daughter Geraldine as a radiant bride carrying a bouquet of the happy *Rhododendron R. laetum*. At the lecture I will be providing 50 *Vireyas* as door prizes, including *R. superbum*, a selected *R. leucogigas* hybrid and seedlings from my current stock which should all flower for the first time next year.

Brian Clancy
39 Renown Street, Bentleigh 3204
Australia

From Graham Smith New Plymouth, New Zealand

Dear *Vireya* Vine, May 23, 1983

The history of *Vireya* cultivation here at the Pukeiti *Rhododendron* Trust goes back about 20 years when John Womersley sent some material direct from Papua New Guinea. Unfortunately the time and expertise were not available then and they all perished. When I came to Pukeiti early in 1969 no *Vireyas* existed and indeed there was little interest in them anywhere in New Zealand. Nobody really understood their cultivation at that time. An enthusiastic member went into commercial *Rhododendron* growing in the early 1970's and through contacts in Australia began importing *Vireyas* and trying them under glass. Most of these were hybrids from Tom Lelliot and were amenable to the experimentation forced upon them. The survivors grew and spare plants began to arrive at Pukeiti for another round of "trial and error". At this time we only had one small glasshouse and a small shadehouse to put them in.

Right here a note about Pukeiti's climate would be appropriate. We are on the west coast of the North Island at 1,200 feet. To the west is the Tasman Sea some 8 miles and to the east is Mt. Egmont, a dormant volcano over 8,000 ft. We are classed as a warm temperate rain forest which is not a bad description when you hear that we have over 130 inches (3,300mm) of rain each year. Frost vary over the 900 acres, but in the open areas we can go as low as +21F (-6C) air temperature. Therefore *Vireyas* need some shelter from the cold. Trials have shown that many can survive outside where the bush canopy provides a frost free environment. Of course with our high rainfall and mild summers, growing epiphytes is no problem and the *Vireyas* respond to this treatment.

By 1975 the collection had grown to over 100 plants and was becoming overcrowded. 1976 was Pukeiti's 25th Jubilee year and we were looking for a major project to commemorate the occasion. I pushed for a display glasshouse to house the *Vireya* collection and to provide the first public display area for these exciting plants in New Zealand. The idea was excepted and we found the ideal sponsor for the building in the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. The result was a fine 40 foot X 20 foot aluminum framed house, built on a natural slope. We landscaped the inside with a series of terraces supported by tree fern logs. Water was introduced by a series of ponds, cascades and streams to give humidity. The collection was planted out and looked rather thin and small in the new surroundings. Two years later I was cutting them down to keep the growth in check.

The plants in the display house have grown exceptionally well. Most of the plants have been planted in the natural volcanic loam with a bucket of peat added. To make full use of the space in the house some plants have gone into the sides of the retaining walls, on top of tree fern stumps and in baskets suspended from the roof. Watering is done by overhead spray lines and the plants get a good soak once a fortnight in the summer but only once every 6 to 8 weeks in the winter. The flower display is continuous but is stronger in the winter and early spring. Naturally the collection did not stop there. In fact it increased even more rapidly. Through the Stanley Smith Trust we were put in touch with Paul Kores and he sent a fine collection of plants from New Guinea. Dr. John Rouse has sent a large number from Australia. More recently collections from the wild have come from New Guinea, Sabah, and Sarawak. We now have about 150 different *Vireyas* and the room is running out again.

One area has been set aside in the bush for *Vireya* planting. Growth has been good and flowering acceptable, though in both cases, not as prolific as in the drier, warmer atmosphere of the display house. A severe storm brought many trees down last year and the *Vireyas* outside had a lot of damage. They are recovering and seem to have great powers of rejuvenation even when frosted back to the main trunk.

Pukeiti has started to distribute *Vireyas* among its members in New Zealand. We feel that they have a great future in this country's warmer regions. A very recent visit from John Womersley confirmed that growing conditions here at Pukeiti closely resemble Papua New Guinea and that our collection ranked amongst the very best. (and John Womersley is also gone)

Graham F. Smith, Curator
Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust
R.D. 4, New Plymouth
New Zealand

From Stan Eversole, M.D.
Dear *Vireya* Vine,

South of San Francisco, California
October 6, 1983

I like *Rhododendrons* with character and with that in mind I want to discuss one of my favorites, namely, *R. aequabile*, which I raised from seed collected by Dr. Peter Valder in Sumatra. It is so scaly that the leaves are almost chocolate brown. It is so temperamental that it has to be grown in the loosest and airiest media; for me, very coarse *osmunda* fiber. No plastic pot for this temperamental one, but a pulp pot with multiple holes in the sides and chunks of broken up styrofoam blocks in the bottom for drainage and air at the base.

When watered it receives Peter Schick's "prescription" of very dilute high phosphate but complete fertilizer with trace elements. Then it is happy and is so characteristic that one can recognize it at a glance. The flowers are orange-yellow, about 2 inches across, 2-3 to a truss. I have distributed many seed and seedlings because it is a rare plant hereabouts.

(*Stan Eversole was the source of
our good R. aequabile at Bovees*)

Dr. Stan Eversole
Palo Alto, California

From Bill Mearns
Dear VV,

Wollongong, Australia
August 1, 1983

To the list of hybrids add R. D.B. Stanton, registered by Royal Botanic Gardens Kew from seed supplied by Don Stanton. The cross was R. lochae crossed christianae, a beautiful red. It was planted in the newly revamped temperate house at Kew last year for the opening by the Queen, in May, just after the Conference at Edinburgh. Find enclosed some more seed for you to give to those interested. All are crosses selfed (F2s), and should prove interesting, our experience with F2 crosses has been that they have larger flowers than the original F1s and have proved strong growers. We have also been crossing back to both parents, none of which have flowered yet.

Since I last put pen to paper some very interesting plants have flowered for the first time. R. konori, pure white, 5 inch flowers, pink pistil, and good texture that lasted outside for over one month. R. lochae x leucogigas, a lovely deep pink with up to 12 flowers per truss, very strong grower with beautiful foliage. We selfed R. triumphans, the seedlings are all identical with the parent, not only are the flowers the same but the growth is the same, so is it a hybrid or a species? To put the records straight the late Don Stanton found the R. triumphans in an orchid growers glass house and bought the whole plant for 5 pounds, which was what the gentleman originally paid for it. He did not know whether it was a species or what. When Don brought it home it was almost dead and it was a miracle that it survived at all. It was more dead than alive but by careful attention it survived and after time it was planted out in the garden. Then cutting material was distributed to Australian and overseas growers. Another lovely first bloomer is R. jasminiflorum x christianae x pink seedling, it has lovely pink petals with a white tube and dark stamens, 8 flowers to the truss.

In our Rhododendron Park we have over 200 Vireya species and hybrids, some are over 7 feet tall and blooming their heads off. The soil is volcanic with plenty of humus in it.

W. F. Mearns. (Bill) (Bill is gone now but remembered)
Mt. Pleasant. N. S. W.
Australia, 2519

From Ian Wilson
Dear Vireya Vine,

No. Wales, U.K.
July 27, 1983

We are located just above 53°N but with maritime conditions and warmed by the Gulf Stream. I have only recently caught the Vireya virus after about a decade's exposure to the common Rhododendron bug. Two species, so far, have favored me with their flowers, lochae and laetum. They spent about five months outside this summer and are kept warm in a pool enclosure the rest of the year where they seem to enjoy the humidity.

The laetum plant was certainly not very happy when kept in the house over one winter - leaves went brown and dropped.

I have about thirty lots of seedlings growing, but none yet more than a few inches high - the growth rates that have been mentioned in recent notes in the 'Vine' seem just amazing, but they acted as a spur. Now I am using artificial light to extend the day and I'm giving regular foliar feeds and the differences are very pleasing.

Nearly all of these seeds have come from generous people whose names have already appeared on your pages. First with Mrs. Esther Berry acting as the kind distributor and recently Peter Schick has been sending quite a variety. Unless the pool enclosure is to be lost to swimming as it gets taken over by more of these tender beauties (and there could be some complaints about that! Nearly the whole garden outside has been taken over by more hardy members of the genus so my wife and family are perhaps naturally suspicious of my new intentions!). I shall soon have to say "Enough". Of course, if some vireyas should prove able to stand our normally relatively mild winters under unheated glass, with the lowest recorded in an unusually severe winter about 27°F, then that sad decision could be postponed awhile.

I have tried selfing the *R. laetum* plant but it refuses to respond to its own pollen. Having seen the recent exchange of ideas on "outcrossing" vireyas with rodies from other sections I tried this with the only one flowering at the time to fall in a possible category. This was *R. oldhamii*, quite a nice compact plant with brick-red flowers, from Taiwan, and if I understand the new classification, then I think it is in the Tsutsutsi group (the old obtusum in part). Well the capsules developed and I have just sowed some of the seed and now I wait. Assuming some of the seed is viable, it may be hybrid with the pollen from *R. oldhamii* contributing fully. But perhaps the foreign pollen has only acted as an 'activator' without contributing any genes to the seed, which will then be pure *laetum*. This 'apomixis' phenomenon has been reported in other *Rhododendrons* and I wonder whether there is experience of it in the *Vireyas*.

This *Vireya* Vine, published over 5,000 miles from where I write, is an extraordinary organism. I see the name of another enthusiast given as Brother Vincent of North Wales. Thank you all for donating seed so freely and best wishes.

Dr. I. B. Wilson
Menai Bridge. Anglesey. U. K.
North Wales.

From Os Blumhardt, North Island, New Zealand
Dear VV, August 21, 1984

I first met *R. lochae* in the early 50s, when an apprentice in New Plymouth NZ, and was given a seedling not long after. This was the only *Vireya* I had till about 1970 or so and being a "compulsive hybridist", I tried to cross it with a few lepidote *Rhodos*, but without success. Some crosses appeared to take and pods did develop for a while and then dropped off. I figured I might be able to trick the plant into ripening some seed for me by first crossing it and then a day or two later selfing the same flowers and so getting perhaps enough selfed seed developing to make the pods stay on until maturity. Hybrid seedlings, I figured, would be fairly obvious. *R. lochae* normally only flowers in the autumn, so I didn't have much choice for pollen parents. About 1964 I carried out the above trial with pollen from an out-of-season bloom of *R. virgatum* and succeed in getting seed. One of the resulting seedlings was an obvious hybrid. It has 2-3 bell shaped orchid-pink flowers per cluster on the tips and in the axles of the leaves.

Unfortunately this hybrid plant is very prone to root rot. I and people that I have given it to, keep losing it, but I keep repropagate bits. It has also not gained much in hardiness and seems completely sterile. I call it 'Little Pioneer'.

Having heard about the *Vireya Rhodos* on Mt. Kinabalu in Borneo, I went there in May of 1979 and spent five days in the Kinabalu area. I brought back about 12 species and also a number of natural hybrids. I had permission to take a few cuttings of species, but when I came to *R. lowii*, with great shoots like lettuces, and not many per plant, I decided to try for seedlings. This is how I came to get the natural hybrids, as I pulled small seedlings where they were growing on the steps of the track. Some were of types that I had not seen in mature plants. Three of these hybrids are different crosses of *R. stenophyllum*, one is *R. lowii* x *rugosum* and some were crosses or intergrades between *R. rugosum* & *R. buxifolium*.

R. stenophyllum and *R. retivenium* have flowered and I also have buds for the first time on *R. rugosum*. Some plants like *R. lowii*, *R. buxifolium* *R. fallacinum* are very slow. I lost *R. ericoides* with die-back. I have also flowered *R. quadrasianum* var *cuneatum* and the plant which is called *R. quadrasianum* var *villosum*, but which is to me so distinct it would have to be a species (different?). The latter is a cute little shiny-leaved plant that looks nearer to *R. ericoides* than *R. quadrasianum* and is almost always epiphytic at lower altitudes more than the other, which is normally terrestrial. Both of these plants have proved very difficult to cultivate, being very prone to root-rot.

I aim to get a satisfactory stock plant of each established by grafting them onto something more reliable, such as *R. macgregoriae* or *R. inconspicuum*. I have made a few successful grafts on *R. macgregoriae* when I was given just one cutting. In these cases I took just a single leaf and made a veneer graft (or would you call it a chip-bud with a leaf attached?).

I made a second trip to Mt. Kinabalu in April 1983 and brought back 4 more species and two more natural hybrids, as well as some orchids and other plants collected in two places outside the National Park. Plants in the wild were mostly on ridges, on banks of the streams or epiphytic. Some of the healthiest plants we saw on my second trip were on hungry clay on road side banks, in full exposure to the sun (though they would get shade or cloud cover for part of the day). In cultivation here they seem to prefer full sun on a warm aspect and preferably on raised or sloping ground. Our garden is on a low ridge of volcanic ash and is almost frost free in most years. My wife and I run a small nursery specializing in Camellias, Magnolias, Azaleas and *Vireya* Rhododendrons, for which the demand is snowballing. The demand for these plants is centered on a *R. laetum* X *R. zoelleri* hybrid (crossed by Tom Lelliott, raised by Ewen and now registered by us as *R. Tropic Glow*) of which we can't get enough yet.

As mentioned before, I am a "compulsive hybridist", so our place is cluttered with seedlings of Rhododendrons, Magnolias and Camellias. Some worth while results have been achieved. I grow *Vireya* seedlings to blooming in containers, pick the winners (if any), sell the majority in bloom and throw out or graft new varieties on to the poor ones.

Oz Blumhardt (Oz is also gone now to the great *Vireya* garden
Whangarei in the sky, but is not forgotten by many of us)
New Zealand

See Chris Callard's wonderful Web site at www.vireya.net

Get into this group and let's talk about Vireyas www.groups.yahoo.com/group/vireya

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