

VIREYA VINE

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

From Martin Monthofer
Dear VV,

Bremen, Germany
January 2007

The Multiplication of Vireyas

Many of you have already wondered how to multiply Vireyas and so be able to keep the population. Here is a little guidance. Let us start with the sowing of seeds. The sowing comes after the harvest of a mature capsule. When is a capsule mature? It is mature when the husk starts “peeling”. Now comes the part requiring the most effort, cleaning the seed. The seed is in several valves and has to be freed from them. You have to work very carefully to **keep the seed clean** from debris of the capsule. If parts of the capsule are sowed with the seeds mould grows and endanger the whole sowing. If the capsule hasn't completely opened yet, let the capsule dry in a warm place for one day more. The advantage is that the seeds fall out almost by themselves. If you don't sow immediately after the cleaning, bag the seed and be sure to identify what the seeds are. For intermediate storage the seed bags are put into the fridge till sowing.

Now let us prepare for the sowing. What do we need for successful sowing? The size of the pot should be chosen according to the quantity of the seed. I always take 7cm square plastic pots. (7 x 7 x 7 cm, which is nearly the same as your 3" square pots). Furthermore we need Lekaton (this is natural clay growing stone, specially made for hydro culture) as a drainage, as well as coconut fibre as the substrate for sowing. A layer of Lekaton, which should be one or two cm high, is put into plastic pots for drainage. The coconut fibre is put onto that to just below the rim of the pot so that you still have room for watering. The substrate is moistened without being thoroughly soaked.

Sprinkle the vireya seed evenly on the substrate and moisten with water using a spray bottle. It is really important to label the seed with its name, the date, origin and so on. Then the pot is covered with cling film and closed with an elastic band. Humidity helps get good results with germinating and the cling film helps with keeping the humidity up and the seeds from drying out. After sowing the finished pots are put into multiplying installation intended for seeds and controlled regularly.

Now to multiplying by cuttings. I use the young shoot of this year as a cutting. The young shoot is cut when it starts to lignify (means new growth that is not too leggy and still soft). This is usually in autumn. The cutting of material also helps the mother plant branch and grow compactly.

Before treating the cuttings the working place has to be fitted out.

We need the following: a knife for taking the cuttings, a rooting hormone, pots, Lekaton, labels, a pen for labeling, cling film, a substrate for the cuttings and water. First the pot is filled with Lekaton and onto that the substrate. The substrate should be loose, pervious to air and retaining water for example, coconut fibre or a mixture of peat and sand with perlite. The size of the pot should be chosen according to the need, i.e. if you want to put one or more cuttings into one pot. The treating of the cuttings ought to be immediately after the cut. If this is not the case, the cuttings are moistened, labeled and put in a plastic bag into the fridge until the treating.

First, the numbers of the leaves are reduced with the exception of three or four, which are cut in half. This is for reducing the surface for less evaporation. The cutting is re-cut diagonally because the old cut has to be freshened up as it is dried and not ideally suitable for rooting. Use a knife because the cut with a knife is neater than scissors. Now a one centimeter long, thin cut is done to the cambium layer at the lower part of the cutting. This cut is good for forming adventive roots. You can use hormones for rooting but don't have to because Vireyas root reliably without them. If you do use hormones, be sure to read the label for proper strength and procedure.

Finished cuttings are put into the substrate. They are put into it as deep as the cutting is long. When putting in the soil press down lightly. Label the pot with all important information. Finally the pot is watered, so the substrate has the necessary dampness. If you have a bed for multiplying at your disposal with sufficiently high humidity, the pot can be put there without being covered with cling film. When cultivating on a windowsill the pot is covered with cling film and closed with an elastic rubber band. The cutting without any roots will not dry out because of low humidity. The cling film can be taken off when there are enough roots. After rooting successfully the cuttings can be thinned out. It is important that labeling is done for a guarantee in the future, otherwise the important information will get lost very fast.

I hope to have given a little help and wish you great success on multiplying your Vireya.

Martin Monthofer, Bremen, Germany

From Jane and Peter Adams
Dear VV,

Hawaii, The Big Island (Hawaii)
March 2007

Thought I'd drop a line to give an update on how our sunny vireya bed experiment is panning out as written about in Vireya Vine #80.

The first set of plantings have been in the ground about a year now, and I can really see which are settling in and which are having some trouble. I'd say there are 3 categories, and so here they are:

1 -- Clearly unhappy or dying. This group has really only 2 members to date. Tropic Alpine Ruby: we've lost 2 of 4, and it looks like a 3rd may not survive, though the two surviving ones bloomed a couple of months ago. Cinnamon Pink: losing 2 out of 4 plants, and even though the other 2 are alive, they don't look to be thriving.

2 -- Looking better after a slow start. Vladimir Bukowski: may lose one of 4, but the other three look to be hitting their stride. Flamenco Dancer: showing good new growth and aggressive flowering! Great Scent-sations: one is languishing, but the other has been blooming for a month or so. Tropic Tango: coming along nicely with good new growth, and bloomed in the past month.

3 -- Hardly skipped a beat. Kisses, of course. Princess Alexandra, of course. Harry Wu: getting lovely new growth close to the ground and bushing up. Jock's Cairn: wow, covered with buds and blooming beautifully with very good foliage. Lucie Sorensen, looking great and getting nice new growth close to the ground. Popcorn, of course. Terebinthia, very bronzed up, and has bloomed a number of times. Baram Bay: beautifully bronzed, and is ready to bloom a second time since planting out. Kamrau Bay: looking great and blooming nicely right now.

Of the group put in the ground in September, most are doing OK, but we've lost a couple (probably transplant shock, as that happened immediately). We had a two day wind storm about 6 weeks ago that rattled everything, and many of these plants were almost blown out of the ground. We went around and secured them back into their spots, but it probably set a number of them back. A number of other plants were blown over and had to be staked as well, so vireyas weren't the only ones affected. Many of the vireyas have been blooming and look happy, so we're hopeful that no permanent damage was done. Looking out at the stock plant area, and seeing 10 or 15 different vireyas in bloom at any time, is definitely a joyful feeling. We're a little concerned about rainfall, but then, a week with little rain feels like a drought here! We're clearly on a lower-than-normal rain pattern.

Blooming now in the stock beds: Pink Swan, *R. viriosum* x *R. zoelleri* 'Island Sunset', Princess Alexandra, Terebinthia, Lucie Sorensen, Great Scentsations, Tropic Tango, Jock's Cairn, Sirunki Lake, *R. laetum* 'Stryings Best', Satan's Gift x Flamenco Dancer, Fire Plum, Red Prince x *R. viriosum* (H028), Narnia, Highland Arabesque, Show Stopper, Kamrau Bay, Popcorn, and Simbu Sunset. Lots of species doing well in the greenhouse, and a few in a display bed that are doing well, though young to be blooming.

Hope to see everyone for the Western Regional in Sept. 2008 here in Hilo.

Jane Adams
White Cloud Nursery, Hawaii
e-mail at jane@whitecloudnursery.com

RHODODENDRON lowii (Subsection Vireya)

Daphne and Gavin Clark, Dunedin “You flowered it in Dunedin”? This quizzical inflection greeted my excited call to a North Island vireya enthusiast. Why do northerners tend to assume that the deep south of New Zealand is a land of perpetual ice and snow?

Rhododendron lowii is one of the twenty-five species growing on the slopes of Mt Kinabalu, Sabah (Borneo) and according to the Sabah Parks Publication No.8 1988 “*Rhododendrons of Sabah*” by G. Argent, A. Lamb, A. Phillips and S. Coilenette and is one of Kinabalu’s truly remarkable plants, having the largest individual flowers of any Bornean *Rhododendron* and one of the largest umbels of flowers in the whole genus... umbels 8-15 flowered, the flowers erect and spreading up to 350 mm in diameter. These magnificent flowers are of a clear yellow flushed with apricot, sometimes deliciously scented. Its enormously broad leaves are generally obovate to a broadly pointed apex, 100-200 x 45-100 mm covered, when young, with brown scales giving it a delightful olive green colour turning to a deep dark green on maturity. Its growth is somewhat unusual with one stem (called a cane) probably as a result of its growing environment “in moist forested gullies from 2,700-3,650 m, in partially shaded constantly moist soil”. It can attain a height of 10 metres.

We received our small compact plant in 1999 with only a growth bud surrounded by four large leaves. We planted it in a square plastic container 35x35x30 cm with extra drainage holes drilled through the base and additional ones drilled part-way up on the sides. All vireyas must have plenty of drainage.

For the next four years growth was forever upwards on the single cane at the rate of over 350 mm. per annum, with no lateral movement from dormant buds. During this time we tried to find out as much as we could about growing *R. lowii* in cultivation, but the only material available was in the “*Rhododendrons of Sabah*” already mentioned. Snippets from this publication indicated that it did not appear to be successful in cultivation, although it had been grown for nearly twenty years and at that stage, 1988, had not been reported as flowering in cultivation. We now know that *R. lowii* has since been flowered in cultivation. Some of the places are: Pukeiti, where it flowers annually; Tauranga (Dr. Binney); and Dr Argent has grown and flowered it in the Vireya House at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. (Note, one clone grown from seed collected by Mossman and Goheen has flowered at Bovees in Portland, Oregon EWS)

The Royal Horticultural Society’s publication ‘*The Rhododendron Handbook*, 1988’ has a section ‘*The Vireya Rhododendron*’ by Dr G. Argent which proved to be not only very interesting but also extremely helpful. Details of compost, conditions and methods for growing all vireyas were given. *R. lowii* was described as a lanky shrub of sometimes very long unbranched canes up to 6m in length. In cultivation it is very different being slow and often rather contorted and shy to flower. Not altogether encouraging but with the utmost care maybe, just maybe, it would flower!

By 2003 our plant did appear ungainly with its long cane and large green leaves and it became known as our “rubber plant”. We continued watering early in the morning and it was given liquid feeding with Phostrogen. Care had to be taken to keep the afternoon sun from the plant as the large leaves can be burnt by the sun’s rays.

Frost was a concern (as with all vireyas) despite having a terrace which is partially covered and virtually frost-free (occasionally 3 to 4 degrees only) we were always careful to protect the vireyas with frost cloth at night-time.

Early in 2004 *R. lowii* had produced, from the base, two more shoots which had lovely healthy leaves. On the topmost tip of the long cane, one bud growing among the large leaves didn't look like the usual leaf bud. It did have the appearance of a flower bud but having heard from another grower that what was thought to be a flower bud turned out to be just another leaf bud, we were rather skeptical about it.

With the onset of more wintry weather we decided to bring the container indoors. It became a juggling act of taking it outside on warm days, in again at night-time and keeping it indoors during inclement weather. This entailed balancing warmth with adequate circulation of air. From experience we knew that this could be difficult because our early attempts to grow vireya rhododendrons had been in our conservatory - with disastrous results. One of the necessities is maintaining constant air circulation. While indoors, *R. lowii* received regular watering particularly on the leaves, as well as regular feeding. Care was essential to prevent mould and white fly although the latter unfortunately did appear on the undersides of some of the large leaves. They were sprayed off with lukewarm water and each leaf meticulously wiped with a soft cloth. During this time our bud was slowly expanding from the size of a small walnut to the size of a table-tennis ball and our skepticism was rapidly turning to anticipation.

With warmer temperatures in September we moved the plant outside to our partially covered terrace where it would receive great air circulation as by now the flower bud was expanding daily, measuring 70 mm high by 90 mm diameter. Three days later it had grown 10 mm taller and was 220 mm in circumference.

In October, daily temperatures were 18-20 degrees Celsius and we shifted *lowii* around the garden according to the conditions of light, sun and shade. It had the morning sun on the terrace and shade among other rhododendrons during the heat of the day. The bud was now expanding very rapidly and had reached 90 mm high and 260 mm in circumference and was showing very definite signs of erupting. The bracts fell away and to our amazement we saw that each floret was encased in a fine gossamer bract through which a pale lemon colour could be seen. Nature is truly wonderful in the many ways in which it protects its flowers. As these delicate bracts peeled off and each floret emerged, a total of 33 flowers formed the whole truss, which measured 880 mm in circumference. It was a very lovely sight, the colour of the flowers changing from the pale yellow to a deeper yellow and finally into a glorious apricot-orange, together with a delicate perfume.

Much to our delight, *R. lowii*'s flowering was perfectly timed for the Dunedin Rhododendron Festival, held from 28-31 October 2004. It was fully in flower during that time and was the "piece de resistance" among our rhododendrons. It was much admired and photographed by the visitors to our garden. The lovely truss lasted 28 days. With its 33 flowers, it is similar to those growing in the wild. In cultivation, trusses are usually smaller, with 8 to 15 flowers in each truss and we therefore feel very privileged to have been able to grow this unique plant and to see the beauty of its flowering - without having to wait 20 years!

Now we must look at its future. Of the 33 flowers, about six seed capsules are showing signs of having been fertilized. After collecting the seed pods on maturity, the two upper lateral shoots will be removed for cuttings and then we have been advised to gradually reduce the cane (measuring about 2

m) back to dormant growth buds. We have also been told that cuttings could be taken from the two basal shoots, thus encouraging multi-branching.

Despite the rather negative attitude held by some rhododendron growers, we have proved, together with other vireya enthusiasts, that vireyas can thrive (with reasonable care and attention) in the deep south. We began growing them, starting with three species, about 30 years ago. Since then we have developed a collection of both species and hybrids. *R. lowii* became the ultimate challenge and it has been grown, with much tender loving care, mainly outside at latitude 45 degrees south in a container. And it flowered - in Dunedin.

Gavin and Daphne Clark
47 Every At.
Andersons Bay
Dunedin, NZ

From Eric Annal,
Dear Vireya Vine

Edinburgh, Scotland
February 2007

First flowering in cultivation of *Rhododendron densifolium* K.M. Feng

R. densifolium is a species in subgenus *Vireya*. In Dr. George Argent's newly published monograph -- *Rhododendrons of Subgenus Vireya* -- he states that *R. densifolium* was recently introduced into cultivation but has not yet known to have flowered. At the time of the publication this statement was correct but on October 6, 2006 the first of six flower buds opened on my plant making it the first plant of this species to have flowered in cultivation.

Although my plant is as yet only 20cm high (8 inches), this species is described as growing up to 1.3m in the wild with neat green foliage and yellow flowers. It is superficially similar to *R. vaccinioides* which has been cultivated for more than 70 years, but that species has white to pale pink flowers. *R. densifolium*, like *R. vaccinioides*, will probably remain a botanical curiosity rather than an important horticultural introduction, although the plant does have an appeal to those who delight in the petite rather than the gaudy.

Dr. Argent's book provided an invaluable source of information during the development of the flower buds. When faced with a healthy green flower bud starting to turn brown, it is hard not to fear the worst. However Dr. Argent clearly states that during their development the green flower buds turn brown before opening thus giving me the reassurance that my plant was flowering according to plan. Unlike most vireyas, the umbels on *R. densifolium* contain only one flower bud which is enclosed in bracts. It is these bracts maturing and then dying which cause the bud to apparently change in colour from green to brown. It was still a great relief when the dead bracts fell away leaving yellow buds, each of which soon opened to produce a beautiful flower.

Eric Annal
36 Hillview Crescent
Edinburgh, Scotland UK
EH12 8QG

Thanks for the info Eric. Good for you. It is always exciting when something new blooms even when it not the first time in cultivation. R. densifolium belongs to the group of Vireyas native to the mainland of SE Asia (China, SE Yunnan). It is said to be very similar to R. emarginatum but with consistently smaller leaves which gradually broaden upwards to near the apex.

The plant I really like in this small group is R. santapau. Our plant is big enough after many years to put on a fine show. We are also going to plant a R. kawakamii outside into our landscape and see if it really is a bit cold hardy. Eric has redone his greenhouse and he tells me that everything is doing much better. How about telling us what you have done. EWS

*Back in 1988, The Sabah Parks published a smallish book about Rhododendrons of Sabah. 145 pages describing 35 species Rhododendrons native to Sabah. It also included maps, list, drawings and lots of other useful things. This small book has been sold out for quite a while. **BUT** there is now a replacement for it and the replacement is much improved. Full sized 10 x 7 ½ inches. 280 pages with all that you might want to know. It describes 42 species now. Multiple very good photos of almost all of the species described.*

The name of this new book is ‘The Rhododendrons of Sabah Malaysian Borneo’

I have 7 copies and will sell them to Vireya Vine people for \$70US plus postage. USA only please.

***ALSO the Vireya species book ‘Rhododendrons of Subgenus Vireya’ is again available.** A reprint. I think I have 8 copies coming by surface mail from the RHS. Don’t know the price of it yet but will list the price on our web site at www.bovees.com USA only please.*

You can also get this book direct from the Royal Hortical Society in London. £55 and probably + shipping. www.rhs.org.uk

Or from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Cost?? www.rbge.org.uk

Or from Natural History Publications (Borneo). \$69US + DHL shipping + some bank charges. www.nhpborneo.com

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

VIREYA NURSERIES

The Bovees Nursery (Lucie Sorensen-Smith)
1737 SW Coronado (E. White Smith)
Portland, OR 97219 USA
(503)-244-9341 or 1-800-435-9250
E-mail info@bovees.com www.bovees.com
Catalog on the internet (Mail Order)

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Glendoick, Perth Mail Order
Scotland, UK PH2 7N www.glendoick.com
Phone Nursery 073 886 205

D. & P.J. Brown
Vernon Road
Puna, Tauranga E-mail brownz@actrix.co.nz
New Zealand Phone (07)552-4966
www.homepages.ihug.co.nz/~brownnz

Mark Jury
Tikorangi, RD 43 E-mail jury@xtra.co.nz
Waitara, North Taranaki
New Zealand

Vireya Valley Nursery
Woori-Yallock Road
Cockatoo, Victoria 3781
Australia

Neil & Kathryn Puddey Nursery
PO Box 126, Woolgoolga, NSW Mail Order
Australia E-mail npuddey@bigpond.net.au
www.vireyaworldwide.net.au

White Cloud Nursery, Pete & Jane Adams,
PO Box 1387 Phone 808-250-1780
Pahoa, HI 96778 Mail order
www.whitecloudnursery.com

Rhododendron Species Foundation
PO Box 3798 www.rhodiegarden.org
Federal Way, WA 98063 USA
(253)-838-4646 Mail Order
E-mail rsf@rhodygarden.org

Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust
Carrington Rd. RD4
New Plymouth E-mail pukeiti@pukeiti.org.nz
New Zealand web site at www.pukeiti.org.nz

The Vireya Venue
2 Clifford Street www.vireyavenue.com
Maleny, Queensland 4552
Australia Phone (07)5494-2179

Pacific Island Nursery (Sherla Bertelmann & Richard Marques)
P. O. Box 1953 E-mail pacislenursery@interpac.net
Keaau, HI 96749 (808)966-9225 Mail Order
www.pacificislandnursery.com They also handle the Vireya seed exchange. WorldWide.

Multiflora Enterprises William Skimina
PO Box 556 Phone 760-723-8886
Bonsall, CA 92003 www.multifloraplants.com Mail Order

VIREYA VINE
RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION
P. O. BOX 3798
FEDERAL WAY, WA 98063