
The Vireya Venture

Issue No. 55 December 2004

The Vireya Venture is back!!!

Hello. This is the first issue in a revival of The Vireya Venture (**TVV**) – the newsletter for Vireya enthusiast in Australia.

I was reading the latest issue of Vireya Vine, the newsletter on Vireyas produced by E White Smith of the Rhododendron Species Foundation in Washington, USA, where White stated that his newsletter was now the last Vireya newsletter in the world! The remaining other newsletter in New Zealand had stopped and **TVV** newsletter in Australia had stopped earlier this year.

I decided that we just couldn't let this happen and that Australia needed to continue producing its own newsletter. So here we are.

I was disappointed that **TVV** was suspended because it was one of my two sources of regular information on people and events related to Vireya Rhododendrons – the other being the Newsletter of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society (VB ARS). I had always found **TVV** very interesting and its focus solely on Vireyas matched my personal interests over the past 15 or so years. Its absence would leave a hole that needed to be filled.

After a couple of days thinking about it, my wife Janet and I decided to try to redress this problem, so we volunteered to revive **TVV**. The committee of VB ARS gave us its blessing and sent us the mailing list, so here is the first issue of the revived newsletter.

We hope you like what we are trying to do.

Graham & Janet Price, Editors



A hybrid of rarelepidotum x javanicum produced by Graham Snell and grown by Graham Price.

A Brief History of TVV

TVV began in September 1990 with an introduction and Issue No.1 by its first Editor, Wendy Snell from Maleny in Queensland.

As Wendy said in her introduction: *"The Vireya Venture was mooted to bring together Australian Vireya growers and enthusiasts by way of a 'newsletter'. With your support and interest it will be able to bring you the latest information and news from Vireya growers all round Australia. Its distribution will include as many Vireya growers as possible, as well as interested members of the Australian Rhododendron Society, particularly those who are unable to attend their various Branch meetings in person, but who feel that there could be much gained from such an exchange of information."*

While Wendy looked after the early editing and coordination side of **TVV**, J Clyde Smith and friends in Wollongong NSW looked after its production and distribution. For Issue No.5 in October 1991 J Clyde Smith took over as Editor with Wendy providing comments on articles and Neil Webster handling its distribution.

Clyde continued as Editor up to Issue No. 38 in January 2000 when Neil Puddey in Woolgoolga NSW took over as Editor. Neil continued as Editor up to Issue No. 54 in April of this year (2004), which was the last issue produced.

Thank you Wendy, Clyde, Neil and your helpers for the great job you all did over many years. We hope we can keep up the standard you have set. We will try.

Revised Contents and Style for TVV

The success and continuity of previous issues of **TVV** was dependent on like-minded Vireya enthusiasts contributing letters, news items, information, questions and comments on what is happening in the world of Vireyas, in your garden and/or district. However, it seems that several publications on rhododendrons are in a similar situation - continually searching for more contributions.

E White Smith, Editor of the Vireya Vine in the USA stated in the September 2004 issue of his newsletter that the Vireya Vine gets very few letters and he was asking for more. Similarly, Barry Stagoll, Editor of The Rhododendron, the journal of the Australian Rhododendron Society, stated in the 2004 volume that he was requesting contributions in order to enrich the magazine.

For a small newsletter like **TVV** to join the throng and be dependent solely on contributions from readers seems like courting disaster. So, we have decided to try something a little different.

Your contributions will still be essential to **TVV** and we will actively solicit articles. But, please don't wait for an invitation. If you have any news to pass on please send us a letter, an email or just a brief note. Anything about your Vireyas will be of interest - what you like and don't like, your successes and failures, your desires and hopes, it will all be welcome. Tell us what you are doing and what you think!

Janet and I will try to provide as much as we can, but we just don't do enough with Vireyas to continually fill a newsletter. Also, we only have a balcony where the sun and wind play havoc with everything but the hardiest of plants (and I won't stoop to cacti).

So, what will be different? We will solicit advertisements from nurseries specialising in Vireyas so you can be informed of what new varieties are available. Also, we will try to adopt the tactics of newspapers and appoint reporters to go to meetings, displays and presentations involving Vireyas and ask them to write articles about what happened. And, we will have feature articles about selected Vireya topics so as to pass on information to enthusiasts.

We have decided to try to adhere to several principles regarding the style to be used in coming issues of TVV.

1. We will include photos in colour, where we can and where it will contribute some benefit to the story.
2. In general we will reprint contributions in whole and as we receive them, except for corrections of spelling and changes in layout to suit the newsletter. Please forgive our errors and oversights.
3. We will print articles that are controversial, but we will not print anything that might be defamatory.
4. We prefer contributions and photos sent by email (address below) but hard copy letters are also very welcome.
5. We will distribute this newsletter by ordinary mail, but to save on postage and get quicker delivery we prefer to use email. If you have a computer and are connected to the internet please send us your email address.

Please send email contributions to:
lithic01@bigpond.net.au

Please send letters and other hard copy to:
Graham & Janet Price
208/283 Spring St Melbourne
Victoria 3000
Phone: 03 9639 4493
Fax: 03 9639 5480

From Graham and Wendy Snell

Wendy and I moved from Melbourne to Queensland in April 1988, settling in Maleny, which is 30 or so Km inland from the coastal town of Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast. Maleny is a relatively rural town at the southern end of the Blackall Range and overlooking the Glasshouse Mountains. The area is all volcanic in origin and very fertile.

Being sub-tropical, rainfall is quite high and reliable (normally) and falls mainly during the summer months. Our elevation is around 400m (1000ft) and, with a bit of care, one can pick a site that is frost free, or nearly so any way. Also, normally, the elevation from the coast means the humidity is far less than in the more coastal belt and also summers are cooler.

That word 'normally' creeps in as there are times when it can be humid, it can be too dry, it can be too hot, but on the whole both locality and climate are as close to perfect as we would wish and as near to "Vireya Heaven" as any place in Australia, in my opinion.

Vireyas can be grown in the open, preferably with a little dappled shade and, while keeping an eye on drainage, the plants could be treated as normal garden plants. In other words it is heaven for Vireya enthusiasts too! In many ways this area is very similar to the highlands of PNG climatically and quite a number of expatriates from PNG settle in this region in their retirement.

We moved up to Maleny to set up a wholesale nursery (calling it "The Vireya Venue") specialising in the propagation of Camellias and Vireyas. This was much as we were doing in Melbourne, however we soon found that Camellias did not respond so well for us up here, so that gave me the excuse to concentrate on Vireyas.

It did not take too long to build up a small market for our plants and with an outlet in the wholesale market in Brisbane, as well as local demands, it kept us quite busy for 7 or 8 years. Then came the GST and some competition from larger operators, so



discretion dictated retirement and the Vireyas became a hobby. This took the pressure off and life became much more fun!

My interest in hybridising, which started some 27 years ago, continued throughout these earlier years in Queensland, but once retired I was able to direct more time and effort in this direction. Also, having sold the wholesale nursery, we were able to move to a smaller, more accessible position, and establish a small, but easily managed hobby nursery. We now get a lot more visitors, both social and Vireyafiles, and the collection of Vireya Hybrids continues to grow.

Regrettably, my collection of species suffered from neglect during our early years in Queensland. Making a living out of Vireyas left no time to maintain a species collection, but as there is little or no demand or interest in the species in this neck of the woods, it is still best to put one's efforts into garden hardy plants anyway. The public interest in Vireyas for the garden is certainly increasing a lot in this area so my hobby is likely to keep me occupied for some time to come.

One very interesting fact that emerged when we moved from Melbourne to Queensland was that the intensity in the colour of many of the Vireya hybrids grown up here increased, and pictorial labels printed by MACBIRD FLORAPRINT from photos I took in Melbourne did not do the plants justice in Queensland.

Despite all the activity where we are at present, we are considering one further move. We have family in Toowoomba and it

is quite likely that some time in the future, we will move once more to join them there.

Needless to say, the nucleus of my *Vireya* stock will go with us, as I feel I shall be able to continue the hobby there just as well, but for the time being our address is: -

Graham & Wendy SNELL
2 CLIFFORD ST, MALENY,
QUEENSLAND 4552
Ph. 07 54942179

Visitors always welcome

What I am doing with *Vireyas*

To help start the ball rolling for this new series of TVV I thought I would tell you a little of my history with *Vireyas*.

My focus on *Vireyas* began in the mid 1980's after an initial interest in *maddenii*. I was gathering a small group of species and a few hybrids when in 1989, for work reasons, I had to move from Melbourne to Perth, Western Australia. I sent about 40 *Vireyas* to Perth with a freight company and they arrived in good condition. A year later I purchased several species and hybrids from Graham and Wendy Snell. Together, these formed the foundation of a small collection.

The semi-desert climate in Perth is unusual for *Vireyas*. Sunlight is very strong and it gets very hot and dry in summer (eg. 46.8°C on my first day there). *Vireyas* need good shade protection and they need regular watering. I used bore water with a high iron content, which seemed fine. The dry air meant almost no disease problems and WA insects didn't seem interested in *Vireyas*.

As plants got larger I planted them in the ground in specially prepared beds rich in organic matter and with only a little of the local Perth sand. Together with a wide array of palms and ferns they grew very well and I was rewarded with almost continuous flowers from one or other of my *Vireyas*. My interests kept increasing and I dreamt of interesting other people in W.A.

I began hybridising among my collection, recording each cross in a 'stud book' and slowly adding information about when seed was sown, seedlings re-potted, their growth habits and condition. My general plan was to produce big bright flowers, but too often I just had to use what was in flower because there were virtually no other *Vireyas* in W.A.

by Graham Price

Again for work reasons I had to move back to Melbourne in 1996 so I re-potted the plants I wanted to keep. My son and I drove back to Melbourne with about 100 largish *Vireyas* and 250 small seedlings loaded into a covered 6' trailer towed by my car.



Permits are required to take plants to and from WA so everything had to be inspected and sprayed. The trip back was very hard on the plants because of the continuous shaking and vibration of the trailer which threw the soil out of the pots. After 3 days of driving and 3,500 km we finally got back to Melbourne, where it had all started for me with *Vireyas*.

We rented houses for the next few years so the *Vireyas* remained in pots. I made friends with the Head Gardener in the Botany Department at Latrobe University here in Melbourne and he kindly let me use an abandoned shadehouse. I had an office at Latrobe so at least I could walk over at lunchtime and do something with the plants. I refurbished the shadehouse and installed a watering system, re-potted the plants into fresh soil mix and resumed hybridising, making use of the Uni's seed raising beds.

I became a little too successful. The number of plants increased and they grew bigger so the space increased. I eventually occupied five shade houses and had about 600 mature plants and 400 small seedlings. Overcrowding caused problems with rust and insect attacks – I was constantly busy. Because of the increasing workload I began culling the inferior ones and slowly got rid of several hundred. But there were always

more new seedlings reaching maturity and demanding bigger pots and more space.

Then, in 2002 the Head Gardener at La Trobe retired and I was asked to move out of several of the shadehouses to give students some room. Eventually they want me to move out of all the shadehouses.

Again I was desperate – what to do! We thought about buying a house with a garden but we liked our apartment in the city and didn't want to change. So I decided to donate my plants to the VB ARS. Bill Taylor, President of the Victorian Branch, accepted my offer and in June-July I moved about 450 plants up to the National Rhododendron Garden at Olinda. There are another 300 to follow.

The plan is to plant the Vireyas in the ground in small, densely-planted garden beds and to monitor their progress over the coming years. We will cull those that are inferior and take cuttings of anything with potential for future distribution to Society Members.

For the next few years I must be content with looking after only the few Vireyas that I brought home. Conditions on our balcony are very difficult, particularly with strong winds. Consequently I will be trying to convert some plants to live indoors, in a sunny corner of our living room. I will write something about this in a later issue of TVV.

So, my enthusiasm for Vireyas is continuing and I will deal with each situation as it develops. I am presently preparing a catalogue of all my hybrids and I hope that one day I will be able to return to hybridising, though probably it will be on a smaller scale than in the past.

And, once the plants are in the ground up at Olinda I will have to go up there every few weeks to photograph the flowers and select the better ones. I have also found some spaces around our apartment building where Vireyas might do OK, so I will give them a go here in Melbourne's CBD as well.

Viva Vireyas!

Graham Price

The following is an advertisement for a new mail order business specialising in Vireyas which is operated by Russell & Sharon Costin in northern NSW.



VireyasOnline' is a new Internet-based service specialising in the production and dispatch of some 140+ varieties of Vireyas (some species but mostly hybrids). Based at the 'Limpinwood Gardens Nursery' in the centre of the ancient 'Mt Warning Volcano' west of Murwillumbah in northern NSW the business, nursery & gardens cover an area of 21 hectares and are operated by Russell & Sharon Costin.

A large purpose-built 'Vireya Rhododendron' in-ground shadehouse is designed to show how versatile Vireyas can be and shows the correct soil preparation needed to ensure healthy, happy plants. Nursery visit by appointment only. Open-days for viewing the nursery and shadehouse will be announced on the website.

You will enjoy quality service of orders and all plants are dispatched in good condition with the utmost care given to their packing to ensure they reach you healthy and happy. Sizes from 100mm to 250mm pots.

The VireyasOnline website contains a catalogue of plants available that can be searched by name or colour. Helpful information is also provided covering most aspects of care and maintenance, including Site Selection, Mulching, Fertilising, Pruning and Pests and Diseases.

Full instructions for ordering, via the Internet or by Fax, are provided and payment can be by credit card, money order or cheque. We also offer on-line specials of 6 plants in different colours and sizes.

Address: 263 Limpinwood Valley Rd, Limpinwood NSW 2484 Tel: 02 6679 3353; Fax: 02 6679 3143; Email: info@vireyasonline.com.au; Website: www.vireyasonline.com.au.

Choose your Vireyas on-line by colour—white, orange, yellow, pink or red.



SPARE TUBESTOCK OF VIREYA SPECIES

By Lyn Craven



Many years back, I offered members (of the *Australian Rhododendron Society – Ed*) spare plants of vireya species. Either that, or maybe I offered to propagate species that people were after. Whichever was the case, I do remember that there was a very strong showing for plants of ‘Hunstein’s Secret’, a line of *R. leucogigas*. This was very embarrassing for I was unable to satisfy the demand. Since that time, I have been busy with other things and have been neglectful of propagating.

This is a risky business, as several species in my greenhouse were represented by single plants, e.g. *R. ericoides* and *R. christi*, species that are far too interesting and beautiful respectively to lose. My objective is to have a minimum of two plants of each accession but various things had worked against my realising this goal.

This last twelve months or so, I have become much more proactive and have commenced a cycle of renewal in the greenhouse, culling larger plants (to the tip, believe it or not*), propagating, pruning, etc. As I am not an expert propagator, averaging only about 95-98% success (and vireyas are so easy it should be 100%), I always put in more cuttings than I need. Usually I put in 4-6 cuttings but occasionally I take more (up to 10-15 of some things, such as *R. ericoides*). Consequently, I am generating surplus plants and I am offering these to TVV newsletter members.

The need to be equitable, in the event of demand outstripping supply, is important and I have decided to offer such surpluses on the following basis:

1. First call is for the species collection at Olinda, and for Emu Valley if the people there are interested.
2. I will wait a month or so after distribution of this newsletter for people to get their requests in. Then it will be necessary for me to be somewhat arbitrary and I propose randomising requests, on a geographic basis, and supplying those plants I can.

3. Where I have insufficient plants to satisfy demand, I will move the unsuccessful requesters to the top of the list for the next surplus. Also, as far as cutting material and hotbed space are available, I will endeavour to take additional cuttings to fill “back orders”. The plants mostly will be ex 50 mm tapered tubes, or for the smaller and less vigorous species, in the tubes.

4. For despatch, I propose using the Australia Post 3 kg express post satchels. These will allow several plants to be sent in one satchel; the plants will be protected with adequate packing. Despatch will not be in the worst of the summer, although these days I expect it is rare for mail bags to be left out in the sun for any length of time. Recipients will have to bear the cost of the satchel, currently AUD \$9.50. If people can arrange for plants to be collected, that is fine.

The species currently in surplus and available are:

aurigeranum	sessilifolium
christianae (the Sunset form)	
viriosum (ex Thornton Peak)	
dianthosmum	williamsii
pauciflorum	

and there will be others in about three months time.

There will be an additional (non-cash) charge for this service: recipients are requested to share cuttings, plants, seed, etc with their fellow gardening enthusiasts – whether novice or expert. Many generous people have thus helped me develop my collection, and it is appropriate that this debt be repaid by further spreading these

delightful plants around the horticultural community.

Lyn Craven
26 Saville Close, Melba. ACT 2615
email: lyn.craven@csiro.au

PS. *If anyone lives, or knows of people living, in favourable climates within easy reach of Canberra (such as the NSW S coast), I would be happy to see these discards go to a good home. All the plants need is potting on or planting out, and they will then throw new growth from down the stems and become perfectly presentable.

Lyn

Photos of the Vireya species Lyn is offering to readers of TVV.

All photos from Chris Callard's website: www.vireya.net



R. aurigeranum
(photo by W Moyles)



R. sessilifolium
(RBG Edinburgh)



R. christiana
(photo by R Currie)



R. viriosum, Devil's Thumb form
(photo by R Currie)

NB! Lyn is offering the Thornton Peak form of *viriosum*, which is a little different.



R. dianthosmum
(Photo by R Currie)



R. williamsii
(photo by R Currie)



R. pauciflorum
(photo by H Helm)

“Flowers on Sticks”

I am not a Vireyaholic, but my husband (Graham Price) clearly has a passion for them. I don't really know why he likes Vireyas so much. To me they look like “flowers on sticks”. One or two showy bunches of flowers sitting on thin wooden branches with relatively few green leaves.

I understand that someone once described a group of particularly tall and lanky Vireyas as “grown in a well”. I could only agree if the ones I have seen are anything to go by.

Graham reacted to my casual description of “flowers on sticks”, which I made several years ago, by engaging in what he describes as “extensive and consistent tip pruning” and “wholesale cropping”. He is committed to showing me that Vireyas can be different.

By Janet Price

As he explained it to me, apparently Tip Pruning is done as the plant is growing from small seedling to mature bush. Every time an apical bud sprouts as a single shoot he breaks it off. It subsequently shoots out from secondary buds to produce 2, 3 or 4 branches instead of the one that would have grown. This stops them becoming leggy as their ‘growing energy’ is split between several branches instead of just one.

He is not happy that his tip pruning might delay flowering but he prefers this to having to endure my uncharitable comments.

Wholesale cropping is Graham's way of transforming mature plants from tall and leggy to short and compact. First he puts the plant in a position where it gets lots of sunlight on the lower section of its main

stem. Then he cuts off about a quarter to a third of the top branches, making sure to leave at least one growing tip and leaves on each branch. He also breaks off any new sprouting shoots at the top.

He feeds the plant a reasonable amount of 'stimulating' fertilizer and waits about 2-3 months when he cuts more branches off the top. Eventually the plant sends out new shoots from dormant buds low down on the main stem where the sunlight strikes.

As these new shoots develop he continues to cut off old upper branches, making sure to leave a growing tip and some leaves on each branch so as to feed the new shoots below. Apparently if all the upper leaves are removed new shoots at the bottom of that branch will stop growing and die.

Eventually, as the new lower shoots become larger and stronger with vigorous leaves he cuts the old branch or main stem back to just above the uppermost new shoot that he wants to keep. He has shown me plants he has cut right back from a metre high to about 20cm from the soil, which have shot out and produced many new low shoots with strong green leaves.

He then Tip Prunes these new shoots to make them branch out as well. Within a year or so the new branches produce flower

buds and he has a small dense bush with lots of leaves and flowers.

As I sit here in our lounge, I am looking at six differently coloured Vireyas along the opposite wall, all inside taking refuge from the strong winds on our balcony. They look wonderful and is a "flower on a stick". It is obvious that what he is doing is working.

Do other Vireya enthusiasts manage their plants in the same way? Is it the only way to get compact bushes with pretty leaves and lots of flowers?

I've learnt one lesson from all this – be careful of what you say about Vireya plants, particularly around an enthusiast. Still, we have got better looking plants now. Another thing – does this method work with roses, which I much prefer? Sometimes they too look like "flowers on sticks". I'm just asking!

Janet Price



Janet, and our beloved Pug Minnie



Left - The vireyas in our lounge room. The pink one is a ring-in, a phalaenopsis orchid.

Useful Contact Information

Internet sites

www.vireya.net

www.vireya.co.uk

www.vireya.co.nz

www.vireya.co.uk

www.vireyaonline.com.au

www.pacificislandnursery.com

www.pukeiti.org.nz

www.bovees.com

Australian Vireya Nurseries

Neil & Kathryn Puddey Nursery,
PO Box 126 Woolgoolga NSW 2456 Australia

Vireya Valley Nursery
Woori-Yallock Rd, Cockato Victoria 3781 Australia

Limpinwood Gardens Nursery
263 Limpinwood Valley Rd, Limpinwood NSW 2484
Australia

To Those Who Are Interested

This issue of The Vireya Venture is being sent to you because you were either a recipient of previous issues of the newsletter or a person known to be interested in Vireya rhododendrons. Our objective is to distribute it to as many interested people as possible.

We need to establish a new mailing of newsletter recipients and we invite you to sign up and join the group. There will be four issues each year, in December, March, June and September and the next issue (No. 56) will be produced in March 2005. We hope you will find the newsletter of interest.

The Vireya Venture newsletter is produced by my wife Janet and me as a 'labour of love'. Distribution via the Internet will be free to anyone who would like to receive it. Please tick the appropriate box and write your email address on the form below and post it back to us.

Postal distribution of this newsletter will cost money and we have to ask for a suitable donation so we can keep sending it to you. An annual donation of AUS \$2.00 will be sufficient for Australian residents and AUS \$5.00 for those located overseas. A larger contribution will of course be gratefully accepted but is not necessary.

RESPONSE

Yes, I (we) would like to regularly receive The Vireya Venture newsletter.

My name and contact details are:

Name:

Address

.....

Country

Telephone: Fax:

Please send the newsletter by Email to:
(please write your email address)

Please send the newsletter by ordinary mail to the address above. Please tick if you want
this option

I enclose AUS \$..... as my donation for postal distribution of the newsletter.

CONTRIBUTION

Yes, I/we would like to contribute articles or news items to the newsletter.

You can expect me/us to send you something around:
(please insert a date)

COMMENTS

If you wish to make any comments or offer advice about The Vireya Venture newsletter then we will be please to hear from you, either now or at some later date.