VIREYA VINE ISSUE # 24

FEBRUARY 1990

In VV23 I asked "if R. fallacinum was hard to root"? I received two answers and the opinion seems to be "it depends". Clarice Clark who was the propagator at the RSF said that the narrow leaf form did not root and that the broad leaf form did. Both of these forms were collected on Mt. Kinabalu and brought into the USA. Clarice also said that she was not successful rooting R. retivenium and yelliotii although I have been able to root both of them. So, Clarice says, "it depends". I am typing this on the last day of 1989 and have just been out to look at the Vireyas in my greenhouse. The 2 cuttings of R. fallacinum still look fine. (I should have pulled them out to see if they had rooted) Another note from Dick Cavender. He says that he has rooted fallacinum but it is slow and hard to get going. Dick had just talked to Jim Gerdeman down on the Oregon coast and Jim had bloomed the Paka Cave form of R. lowii. It has a full truss with lots of yellow flowers, almost orange in color. Jim selfed it and we hope to have some seed. This R. lowii is from a Frank Mossman and Dave Goheen expedition to the Mt. Kinabalu area a few years ago. Frank and Dave gave away seedlings of R. lowii to many people. I still have 3 plants growing and they look fine but are very slow.

Is it really true that Vireyas from the Sabah / Kinabalu area are slower and harder to grow that the species from PNG? I have seen this said in writings a few times and wonder if it really is true. I have a hunch that, "it depends". And all a person has to do is ask; right? In VV22 I asked or wondered if R. superbum ever gets flower buds. Now mine has 2 beautiful dark red flower buds. I hear that it takes forever for them to open up into flowers (???).

News is coming from our VV reporters in the field.

From Dick Cavender Sherwood, Oregon
Dear VV, October 25, 1989

I am writing to report on my visit with Robert Hirano at the Lyon Arboretum in Honolulu, Hawaii. We spent about 2 hours with him and he is doing very well with Vireyas. He is also most enthusiastic about these plants. He has planted several near the entrance building and they are about the happiest looking plants that I have seen. He is still interested in obtaining species, but they have a pretty good collection now. He also has many hybrids from Pete Schick and thinks several should be named. Like any public institution, the Arboretum is short of money and help. He has quite a few plants in containers that need to be planted out when time allows. All of the plants in this garden look great. None of them receive pampering and most fend for themselves. I did not see a chewed leaf or spot on any of the plants.

The best 'find' were Robert's plants of R. leucogigas. He has 5 or 6, one foot tall plants set out on a steep bank and they are the best looking plants of leucogigas I have seen. On close inspection we found the remains of 1 opened seed capsule! It looked like it was from an aborted truss that had only one flower. Bob said that he had not even noticed it in flower. Several of the other plants had what looked like flower buds and he promised to keep an eye on them. He will try to self the plants and save the seed. I told him that if they wanted to make some money that they should propagate R. leucogigas because I was sure that there would be interest in it.

The Arboretum is located in a steep valley behind Honolulu. The soil seems to be a clay like top soil about a foot deep over porous lava which provides good drainage. Bob said that they do not spray or fertilize and once the plants are set out they are "on their own". I noted that the plants in the greenhouse were very wet, soaking in fact. An automatic system does the watering and the house was steaming. Temperatures in the high 80°Fs and 100% humidity. He said that the only loss he suffered among the plants that I had sent over was R. atropurpureum. R. atropurpureum may not care for these conditions but every thing else was doing fine.

Robert is working with ornamental plants for landscape use in the Islands. He said that the University has encouraged the Arboretum to try to make money by selling new items to commercial growers. One of these days we might see Vireyas as landscape plants in Hawaii.

We also visited the "Tropical Botanic Garden" near Hilo on the island of Hawaii. This garden was developed by a private party to preserve tropical plants and is now open to the public. It is a non-profit enterprise and is worth a visit by anyone that is in the area..

Dick Cavender
Red's Rhodies
15920 SW Oberst Lane
Sherwood, Or 97140 USA

Robert Hirano received a small grant from the American Rhododendron Society a couple of years ago to grow Vireyas and report back. They do sell plants because I know of people who are growing Vireyas and that is where the plants came from. It is exciting to hear about R. leucogigas doing so well. It must be a great thing when in bloom (I do not have one). So many flowering plants do well in Hawaii, but maybe Vireya Rhododendrons will catch on and be useful landscape plants.

From Mitch Mitchell, Volcano, Hawaii
Dear E. White, December 4, 1989

Last year I installed "micro sprinklers" here in our rain forest garden. Many of my friends thought that I had a screw loose to put in a sprinkler system.. They no longer feel that way. We have not had a drop of rain since a week before Thanksgiving (Nov. 23rd) and the total for the month of November was only 1.8 inches. Through October we had nearly 170 inches of rain. Now that the drought has really locked in for a while, people have gone on "water discipline", and some are having to buy water at $70 per 1000 gallons. My sprinkler timers (attached to our catchment system) turns on the sprinklers in the greenhouse and outside for 5 minutes on Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays. So far it seems to be enough, but I am watching very closely.

R. A. Mitchell, Jr.
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The idea with "micro sprinklers" is, put water only where you need it, and put very small amounts on often, save on water bills, keep from washing nutrients through the soil, prevent disease from overwatering, very cheap to install, etc. Many growers and gardens have taken these sprinklers to heart and could not do with out them now. They were originally designed to be used under each apple tree and avoid watering the desert beyond the tree.

Mitch also tells me that he got telephone calls from 2 different Vireya growers in Hawaii and has been to visit with one of them. I try to get telephone numbers and put them into the Vine. Remember that the real goal of this Vireya Vine is to communicate.

From Brian Clancy Victoria, Australia
Dear VV, August 23, 1989

In VV #22, the Vine editor mentioned "a beautiful photo of R. macgregoriae on the cover" of the new book "Vireya Rhododendrons" by Mr. J. Clyde Smith. It is certainly a magnificent picture of some 80 trusses of "sunset orange" flowers, but not of the species macgregoriae. In fact it is a photo of the hybrid 'Sunny' which was raised by myself. I crossed a seedling plant of R. christianae (seed from Canon Cruttwell) with pollen from a cutting grown plant of R. macgregoriae (collected in New Guinea by Mr. Jury of New Zealand).

This hybrid proved easy to grow and most of the plants flowered at 3 years from seed. The most floriferious of the seedlings had 21 trusses, each with 14 flowers and provided an attractive show of "sunset orange" flowers. From this plant I exhibited a well-balanced spray of nine trusses at the Eleventh Annual Rhododendron Show, held at Olinda from Oct. 31 to Nov. 3, 1970. This exhibit won for me first prize, the Award of the Society's Certificate of merit (for an entry considered by the judges to be of exceptional merit) and the Special Pacific Rhododendron Conference Trophy for the best exhibit in the show. One of the first to congratulate me was Dr. Bob Withers and he asked if he could have the spray after the show. I agreed and Bob was fortunate that he was the first to ask as many others wanted it over the 4 days of the show. Subsequently, Bob told me that he had obtained 7 plants from my exhibited spray.

If Viners would look closely at base of the above mentioned photo you will see that the plant is growing in a fern log. This hybrid is one of more that 30 Vireyas that I planted in fern logs at Bob's home in August, 1973. From the picture you will notice that the fern log is automatically watered by a drip system and the results, in my opinion, demonstrate loudly.

Around the time the above mentioned "beautiful photo" was taken, Bob showed Wendy and Graham Snell this plant in his back yard one dark night with the light of a torch. Both were thrilled at the sight, as any Vireya grower would be.
Graham asked me if I still had the original plant an I said that I did. Wendy wanted to know whether "Torchlight Tangerine" would be a suitable name and I said no. Subsequently, an error occurred and my late friend Don Stanton was listed as the originator of the plant. However, I was informed by our Register, Frank Waghorn, that this was corrected in the 1977 RHS Year Book. It is very pertinent to note that Don Stanton presented a paper on "Vireyas in Australia" at the American Rhododendron Society 1972 annual Meeting in San Francisco. In his paper he stated. "Probably the best of our hybrids so far is from the cross of R. christianae X macgregoriae, yellow form. This is a very showy and floriferous plant grown by Mr. Brian Clancy."

Incidentally, the yellow form of R. macgregoriae utilized in the cross has only 8 flowers in the truss. When crossed to R. laetum the best seedlings had 22 flowers in the truss, whilst the best R. lochae X macgregoriae have 23 flowers. It should be noted that neither of these hybrids have been registered. Arthur's Choice was registered by myself at the request of the Registrar, Scotland. It is a F2 hybrid of christianae X lochae and is a distinct improvement on both parents. It also is very floriferous, flowers over a long period and I rate it very highly. As mentioned in a earlier letter to the Vine, the seedlings of my cross of R. Dr. Sleumer with R. zoelleri, Michael Black form continue to produce outstanding upright trusses at least 30 % better than Dr. Sleumer. I emphasize that I consider the Michael Black form to be the best zoelleri.

I also have a seedling of my cross, R. Pink Delight X R. intranervatum that is outstanding. The first truss had 13 - 3 inch flowers in a beautiful shade of pastel pink with a cream throat. The perfectly symmetrical truss was reminiscent of the hardy hybrid Alice. At this stage, I give it a five star rating and will only need an ounce of luck to win the top award at the next show.

Brian Clancy
31 Renown Street
Bentlleigh, Victoria 3204
Australia

Thanks for the nice letter Brian. Good hybrids do not really need to be big and bright, but they do need to be dependable in flower and easy to grow. Back in 1972 Don Stanton sent me a cutting of the lochae X macgregoriae that he grew. He said that it was very good and it turned out to be the best blooming plant I have. It does not have big flowers and is the typical lochae rose/red color but it blooms and grows real well. I really like species plants and believe that a new hybrid must be a whole lot better than either of it's parents (which is most often not the case).

I have never even seen a flower of R. intranervatum, and I do not have a plant of it, but I did have a cutting once that did not root. If the photo in "Vireya Rhododendrons" is an indication, then the flowers looks a lot like R. multicolor. R. intranervatum is very interesting plant because it looks like no other Rhododendron. I think that it has the opposite look of R. stenophyllum, which thank goodness is easy for me to grow and flower. I am sorry about the dumb mistake with the photo on the front of Clives book. The name is listed, after all, inside the book. I still think it is a special photo showing the normal, easily recognized characteristic of R. macgregoriae with the flat flower faces.

I have a letter from Hugh Caldwell who lives in Doctors Inlet, Florida. Doctors Inlet is just South of Jacksonville, which is located in the North East corner of the State of Florida. Hugh would like to try more of the large leafed Vireyas in his garden and would welcome cuttings from Viners. Their place is right at sea level and Hugh must grow all of his plants in raised beds to keep away from 'root rot'. He is thinking seriously about going to pure pine bark for a potting mix next year because of the free drainage / freedom from root rot.

Hugh says that while visiting other gardens he notices that they are using many different cutting mixes. He wonders what other Viners are using. Listed are a few of the mixes that he has noticed.

1) 100% pure perlite 2) 3 parts fine bark, 2 parts perlite, 1 part peat
3) 40% perlite, 60% peat 4) 60% perlite, 40% peat
5) 50% sand, 50% peat 6) 100% gravel dust and sand from a creek or river bed.

Hugh wants Viners to write in and tell what they are using for rooting cuttings. He also wants to try as many Vireyas as he can get to grow and to report back to the VV.

Mr. Hugh Caldwell
187 Brickyard Rd.
Doctors Inlet, Fl 32030

Hugh has looked up and written down for us many of the USDA #s attached to Vireya Rhododendrons that have distributed. Many plants came to growers only with a number so I am going to print some of this information.

USDA = United States Department of Agriculture, Plant Introduction (P.I.)

354282.446 Division of Botany, Botanic Garden, Lae. Tree to 5M; Flowers 6cm in diameter in terminal clusters of dark red, fading slightly on the outer edge of the petal, center marked with orange. Cultivated from cuttings.

354283.447 Tree to 5M, flowers 6cm in diameter. Pure yellow, fading on rolled edges. Cultivated from cuttings.

354283.448 Tree to 5M; flowers 7cm in diameter in terminal clusters. Petals pale rose shading to white in the center of the throat. Cultivated from cuttings.

354285.449 Division of Botany, Botanic Garden, Lae. Tree to 6M; leaves broader than other varieties; flowers 8cm in diameter in terminal clusters, pale rose, white and dark pink, with orange-red center; red stripe on petal reverse. Cultivated from cuttings.

354292 to 354295 Rhododendron aurigeranum

354292.13 Beenleigh Peak, 12.9 KM from Wau. 1,463 Meters, Terrestrial woody shrub to 2M; Bright orange flowers, 5 cm long, wild seed.

354293.13 Same as above but from wild cuttings.

354294.14 Compartment #2, Beenleigh Creek. Elev 1,189M, Terrestrial woody shrub to 2m; Flowers pure yellow to pale orange, wild cuttings.

354295.104 Mumeng, near river, terrestrial shrub; large orange flowers, wild cuttings.

354296 Rhododendron beyerinckianum, 610. Across Lake Aunde from Australian National University Research Station, Mt. Wilhelm. Shrub to 61cm; Twigs scruffy, young twigs and leaves densely brown scaled; Mature leaves 2.5cm long, gray on upper surface, flower tube curved 2.5cm, light red within, densely yellow scaled without, wild seed.

354297 Rhododendron christi, 524. Ekuam, 61 KM Southwest of Kundiawa.

354309 to 354313 Rhododendron herzogii

354309.83 Meri creek area. Terrestrial shrub, erect; flowers long and tubular, scented, white, limb expansion greater than ordinary, wild cuttings.

354310.555 Sugi, Sinasina Census Division, shrub to 1.5M, white flowered, wild cuttings.

354311.702 Tomba, along Mt. Hagen to Wabag Road, area recently cleared of forest. Elev 2,286M, shrub to 1.5M, leaves usually obovate, truncate, to 7cm, scruffy, aromatic; flowers to 8 in terminal clusters, tube 7cm, scruffy, pure white, anthers yellow, wild cuttings.

3543121.703 Tomba, along Mt. Hagen to Wabag road, area recently cleared of forest. Elev 2,286M, cuttings from nonflowering plants at the same location as P.I. 345311, wild cuttings.

354313.712 Tambul, along Mt. Hagen to Wabag road, shrub to 1.5M, leaves obovate to 5cm, slender tubed white flowers 7cm long by 3cm wide, interminal umbel, fragrant; leaves aromatic, wild cuttings.

354314 & 354315 Rhododendron inconspicuum

354314.518 Below Daulo Pass, toward Chimbu, elev 2,134M, woody shrub to 6M; leaves 2.5cm, flowers campanulate, 1.2cm long, pink, wild cuttings.

354315.553 Sugi, Sinasina Census Division, large shrub to 6M, leaves small, flowers 1.2cm in clusters, salmon pink, wild cuttings.

354316 to 354324 Rhododendron konori

354316.75 Edie creek, Gold mine tailings, elev 1,524M, terrestrial shrub, flowers white tinged pink. Wild cuttings.

354317.77 Edie creek, Gold mine tailings, elev 1,524M, terrestrial shrub. Wild cuttings.

354318.80 Meri creek, terrestrial shrub, flowers white with pink shadings, limb 13cm expansion, 7 petals, carnation scented, wild cuttings.

354319.523 Yula, along the road from Kundiawa to Gumine road. Shrub to 1.2M. Large terminal umbels of white flowers, faintly tinged pink, wild cuttings.

345320.537 Tagula, Kundiawa Ekuma road, shrub to 1.5M, flowers faintly pink, marked red at petal base, 10 to umbel, better type than average, wild cuttings.

354321.543 Along road, Kundiawa to Gumine. Shrub to 1.2M, flowers more pink than most. Wild cuttings.

354322.649 Mt. Kum, 20 KM south of Mt. Hagen. Elev 2,724M, epiphytic shrub, said to have pink flowers, wild cuttings.

354323.692 On road Mt. Hagen to Baiyer River. Elev 1,524M. Shrub with terminal umbel of large white flowers. Wild seedlings.

354324.693 On road Mt. Hagen to Baiyer River. Elev 1,524M. Shrub to 1.5M, large white scented flowers. Wild cuttings.

354325 & 354326 Rhododendron leptanthum

354325.37 On Mt. Kaindi, near telephone repeater station. Elev 1,524M, shrub, pink flowers, wild cuttings.

354326.78 Edie creek on mine tailings, Elev 1,524, shrub, wild cuttings.

354327.74 Rhododendron lindaueanum, Edie creek, by guesthouse, minute leaves; red flowers; terrestrial. Wild cuttings.

354328 to 354338 Rhododendron macgregoriae

354328.92 Meri creek, on mine tailings, elev 1,372M, terrestrial shrub, flowers yellow, wild plant.

354329.224 Aiyura Experiment Station toward Arona road. Small terrestrial shrub in grassland, pale apricot flowers, wild seed.

354330.244 Aiyura Experiment Station toward Arona road. Small terrestrial shrub in grassland, pale apricot flowers, wild cuttings.

354347.706 Tambul, near road, Mt. Hagen to Wabag. Slender, terrestrial shrub on scree slope; leaves long-lanceolate to 5cm; flowers terminal, flowers tube curved to 3cm by 0.8cm with yellowish scales toward the base, limb 2.5cm, wild cuttings.

354348.707 Tambul, near road, Mt. Hagen to Wabag, shrub to 61cm, differs from P.I. 354347 in having slightly larger purplish rose flowers, wild cuttings.

354349.709 Tambul, near road, Mt. Hagen to Wabag. Shrub to 1.2M, Slender; Leaves long - ovate, coriaceous; Brown tomentum on flowers as in P.I. 354347 but more purplish, wild cuttings.

354350.542 Rhododendron scabridibracteum; Dia, Gumine sub-district, Chimbu District, elev 2,134M, shrub to 1.5M; Flowers red, 6cm long, wild cuttings.

354351 to 354353 Rhododendron superbum

354351.396 Hillside below Oregenang Village, shrub to 1.5M; Leaves oblong 12 by 7cm, young stems and undersurface of young leaves scruffy; in bud, wild cuttings, "konori"

354352.508 Daulo Pass, Road to Goroka to Kundiawa, elev 2,438M, shrub to 1.5M, wild cuttings.

354353.558 Sugi, Sinasina Census Division, shrub to 2M, wild cuttings.

354354 to 354358 Rhododendron womersleyi

354354.575 North of Lake Piunde, Australian National University Research Station, Mt. Wilhelm, shrub to 91cm, leaves sessile, ovate, 0.6cm, thickly foliated; Flowers about 2cm long, dark red, wild cuttings.

354355.576 North of Lake Piunde, Australian National University Research Station, Mt. Wilhelm. Slightly larger flowers and more vigorous plant than P.I. 354354, wild cuttings.

354356.595 Australian National University Research Station, Mt. Wilhelm, elev 3,597M, shrub to 91cm; Leaves 1cm long, more sparsely set on the stems than in some plants; Flower 3cm long, tube white dotted, very slightly curved, wild seed.

354358.596 Australian National University Research Station, Mt. Wilhelm, elev 3,597M, similar to P.I. 354357 but with smaller, densely set leaves; Flower 2cm long, red, white dotted on interior of tube, wild cuttings.

354359 to 354361 Rhododendron yelliotii

354359.571 Australian National University Research Station, Mt. Wilhelm, on slope near guest house, shrub to 91cm; Leaves ovate 1.3cm long, young stems densely scaled brown, flowers 1.3cm, dark red, scaled brown on exterior, wild cuttings.

354360.611 Across the Lake Piunde from Australian University House at Mt. Wilhelm, elev 3,688M, shrub to 91cm, foliage dense along twigs, leaves ovate, coriaceous, obtuse, 2cm long; Flowers 2 or 3 terminally, 2 cm long, limb 1.7cm, dark red with yellow scales without, wild seed.

354361.613 Head of Lake Piunde on granite talus slope, elev 3,658M. shrub to 1.5M, twigs densely foliated; leaves ovate, truncate, 2.7cm long, coriaceous; Flowers narrow tubular, 1.5cm long, dark purplish red in terminal umbels to 7 flowers, densely yellow scaled without, wild seed.

Note: Meri Creek is also spelled Marie Creek (Mt. Kaindi)

Editors Note; I just received another postage stamp set with Rhododendrons from Bob Withers in Australia. If you are interested, the set is the 1989 Christmas issue from Papua New Guinea. There are 4 stamps in the set and the 35t value has R. zoelleri on it. Thanks a lot Bob for your thoughtfulness. Dr. Withers has become active in a newly formed Association. "The Ornamental Plant Collectors Association". Their main purpose is the preservation of old garden cultivars and worthwhile collections of plants of various genera. Bob is now the registered, collection holder of the Camellia species in Victoria, Australia. Good for you Bob, keep busy.

I also received a Christmas card from John Rouse with a color photo of R. zoelleri in it. This is by far the pinkest zoelleri I have ever seen. Seven flowers in the truss, very nice clear pink with a golden eye in the center of the flower.

From Barbara Campbell, El Cerrito, California
Dear VV, January 10, 1990

I have been meaning to send this to you since the mention in the VV several times ago (Barbara sent a copy of the label from an iron product). It really works for me. I could almost see the plants turn green. We bought a 100 pound bag at the California Chapter and then sold it off in 5 or 10 lb bags.

Barbara Campbell
527 Ashbury Ave.
El Cerrito, Ca 94530

The label from the Iron product that Barbara sent is "Vitatone" from Leffingwell Inc., a Uniroyal Chemical Company business. The label says "Vitatone Stabilized Iron is a water soluble concentrate containing 14.00% iron, 3.00% nitrogen, and a chelating agent that keeps the iron in solution, thereby, making the iron available to the plant through the root zone. Vitatone Stabilized Iron acts fast in correcting iron chlorosis in plants growing in alkaline of slightly acid soils. It may be applied as a soil drench or in the dry form followed by thorough watering".