

# VIREYA VINE

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RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION

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E. White Smith, Editor

From Red Cavender  
Dear VV,

Sherwood, Oregon  
December 15, 1990

Now I don't want to complain, but where is this big collection of Vireyas at the Tacoma Conservatory? In the first place no one ever heard of a Conservatory in Tacoma. It is not in the phone book, or on a map. When I did determine the location, everyone I asked gave me bad directions. When we finally did find it, NO VIREYAS!!!! Lots of Mums, but no rhodies! I think you have been pulling my leg all this time. The conservatory has to be the best kept secret in town.

On the subject of Vireyas, I think I mentioned that I had bloomed *R. ericoides*. I sent some pollen to Jim Gerdeman and he put it on several things. The only one that took was on *lochae* X *pseudonitens*. Couldn't do better as that has been one of the hardiest of the crosses. Jim called yesterday to say that the very few seed he got had germinated! He figures these plants should be hardy into the low 20s. Should be interesting foliage as well. I tried selfing 2 flowers but it does not look like it took. It is hard to tell as everything is so small.

I have been doing a few crosses this past year. On the lines of looking for new foliage and flower shapes, I put *R. javanicum* on *R. carringtoniae*, and 'Calavar' on *R. goodenoughii*. The first are just sprouting and the second are now fair sized. I also did a couple of crosses onto *R. stenophyllum* a couple of years ago. One plant of *R. dielsianum* X *R. stenophyllum* has bloomed so far, nothing great however. It is an obvious cross as the foliage is similar to but wider than *R. stenophyllum*.

In Bill Moyles seed list there was a cross using *R. intranervatum* on *R. hellwigii*. Sounds great but my seed did not produce. John Rouse did the cross and I would like to know if he has any problems getting pollen off *R. intranervatum*. I have tried and tried with no luck. Nor have I succeeded in getting anything to take on *R. intranervatum*. I find this most frustrating as I think it has great foliage and should make an interesting parent. How about it John? Lets hear from some growers in Australia or New Zealand.

Speaking of Australia, is there anything to the rumor that the Australian Rhododendron Society is in trouble. If true, I am very sorry to hear it. Also heard that there is another Vireya newsletter being published in Australia. I know of the one in New Zealand by Michael Cullinane. A friend has been subscribing for me and sending it on. Have only received 1 for 1990 however. I know that E. White has trouble getting material for the V.V. and I am not sure there is really enough for 3 newsletters. I understand from Lucy Sorenson at Bovees, in Portland that there will be an article in the December 'Sunset' magazine on Vireyas. She said they called in September and wanted to photograph things in bloom. Not the best time of year for bloom to say the least. Why don't they plan ahead a little?

Glad to read that E. White is finally succeeding with *R. fallacinum*. I am about to whack on mine again. Wish it would set good buds. All the ones last year just fell off. But not until Steve Trout and I both got some interesting pictures of them. *R. fallacinum* should be an interesting parent as well. I don't recall seeing it used anywhere. I hope growers in Australia do better with it than I do.

Hugh Caldwell called from Florida the other day. We have been exchanging plants for several years now. I would love to meet him in person. Hugh is generous beyond belief. He has completed my collection on Eastern native Azaleas as well as sending me several Vireyas that I have lusted after. He said he would root me a cutting of 'Marshall Pierce Madison'. Eat your heart out E. White! I sent him some species today. Hugh has a good collection of Vireyas, he lists over 130 species and cultivars.

Jack Wilson in Forest Hill, Australia, has sent me a several packets of Vireya seed. I have a few plants from seed his daughter collected on Mt. Wilhelm in June 1989. They don't look like anything I am familiar with. He said a photo shows flowers similar to *R. phaeochitum* but my plants are definitely not *R. phaeochitum*. I also have some tiny plants of what may be a form of *R. brookeanum* from Mt. Kinabalu. Jack said the pods were collected green, "The collector is a good plantsman but knows very little about Vireyas". Jack was able to get some germination but no one else he gave them to has, so I guess I am lucky. Jack writes that he is contemplating a visit for the 1991 Convention. Hope he comes. Jack and his wife, Dorothy, visited a couple of years ago, and they had us to dinner when we were in Melbourne in 1984.

Jack also sent some seed of *R. lochae* last year. I quote.. "This seed has been provided by Harold Shepherd from plants of two new forms collected in North Queensland in 1979 by an expedition of members of the Australian Rhododendron Society of which he was a member. They are quite distinctive from the traditional from which has been grown in Australia for many years". I have only a very few plants from the seed and they are too small to make any statement on their character. Does anyone have any more information to share about other forms of *R. lochae*?

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*You are right Red, the Conservatory at Wright Park does not always have Vireyas on display. The greenhouse crew move plants back and forth to the Conservatory as needed. I am trying to get them to keep one area for these plants open. I also went down there and saw only mums on display. In mid December they had about 12 Vireya plants in bloom and they were all R. laetum and aurigeranum species and hybrids (all yellow). Conservatories are always hard to find it seems. I don't know why but in many cases I think that city's have grown up around them. Conservatories and public display greenhouses are very expensive to operate and do not get the public attention that they deserve. Any Viner that is in or near Tacoma can call me anytime and I will show them around. Home phone (206)752-1625, Work phone (206)591-5295, anytime.*

*The greatest thing that I have gotten from doing the VV over these years are the people that I have met, and some who I know very well from letters. Hugh Caldwell and I have been sending plants and cuttings across the USA for many years and even though I have never met Hugh, I feel like I know him well. It is very gratifying to me to hear that Viners are communicating with each other. That was one of our main goals when we started the VV. Hugh sent me a cutting a few years ago of R. 'Marshall Pierce Madison' and it bloomed last fall. WOW is that nice, I mean real good.*

From Karen Morebeck                      San Francisco, Ca  
Dear Vireya Vine,                      Oct. 17, 1990

Tim Lukaszewski and I have been working together for the last two years at Strybing Arboretum essentially doing detective work on the Vireya collection. Our goals are to give back to the Arboretum those plants that have been lost during hard frost years as well as offering new hybrids or selections to the collection. We also propagate Vireyas to raise money for the Arboretum at sales throughout the year. We are enlarging the species collection and hope to get some space to hybridize.

We do this work as volunteers along with other Viners - Jack Spring and Doreen Spellmann. Since we are neophytes, we decided to go right to the top about Vireya growing. Pete Sullivan has shared his wealth of information and has allowed us to pick his brain. Pete is teaching us to "think like plants".

At this time the Vireya collection at Strybing Arboretum nursery is quite impressive. We have 45 species and hundreds of cultivars, all growing vigorously. We hope that all of the Viners who come to Oakland for the 1991 American Rhododendron Society convention will take time to visit the Vireyas at Strybing.

A. Karen Morebeck  
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&  
Tim A. Lukaszewski  
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Berkeley, Ca 94702

*Thanks people. It is good to know that people do help and volunteer at public gardens. We need much more of this type of thing. For people who do not know; Strybing Arboretum is part of the Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. They had just finished with a major new planting of Proteas last time I was there. Strybing has one of the best Magnolia collections in the world. A real special place in this dirty - high speed world. I would think that Strybing will be included on the tours of the American Rhododendron Society Convention next spring. I will be looking for you folks to show me around.*

From Roland Perry  
Dear VV,

Los Gatos, California  
October 22, 1990

Recently, I requested a current plant listing from the Vireya Specialities Nursery and was saddened to hear from the Moyniers that they have decided to discontinue their Vireya nursery business effective immediately. We Vireya people have lost a national treasure! We will miss their superb plants, but most of all we will miss their expert advice so freely shared.

The first bloom of a plant is always a thrill. This was true last week when R. phaeocephalum X leucogigas came into bloom. The strong fragrance and size of the truss is capable of calling attention from 10 feet away. It looks much like the photo of R. phaeocephalum on the back cover of J. Clyde Smith's book 'Vireya Rhododendrons', except for some red lines in the throat.

I highly recommend trying the seed program that Bill Moyles handles with great expertise. Bill is a lot of help to us novices. I have over 50 seedlings in various stages of growth thanks to his help. Someday I hope to see the variations in the seed populations as they bloom for the first time.

Roland H. Perry  
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Los Gatos, Ca 95032

*For sure Roland, more people should take advantage of the Vireya seed program. If I understand it right only the Americans pay a fee for the seed. Bill sends seed to other countries, air mail, at no cost. Many of us are sorry to hear about the Moyniers going out of business. They are very nice people and helped many people get started with Rhododendrons.*

From Fran Rutherford  
Dear Vireya Vine

Port Orchard, Washington  
December 1, 1990

It has been a little over four years since I returned from Papua New Guinea. For those who are contemplating a similar trip, I will describe what has happened to my cuttings since then. Perhaps you can profit from my failures and successes. Before you go, it is very important you have in your possession all the necessary papers to allow you to bring cuttings back. A letter of introduction from a recognized Botanical Garden is not mandatory but very helpful. If possible, go with someone who knows the area from past trips, understands local customs, and has established a rapport with local agriculture officials.

Except as noted below, all cuttings collected rooted easily. As long as you keep them moist and well ventilated in the field and in route home you should have few losses. All of my losses came after the cuttings were rooted. Most losses were from phytophthora and/or root rot, sudden cold spells and pure carelessness. I would recommend you start using SUBDUE (Metalaxyl) on a regular basis after the cuttings are well rooted. Refer VV #26 Clarice Clark's letter on how to use fungicides. If you are going to be gone from home for a few days and the forecast calls for wind and a drop in temperature be sure the plants are protected. I used several potting mixtures for my cuttings and each had a different water retention factor. The result was some plants received too little water and others too much. I would recommend using only one mixture and it should have a low water retention factor to decrease the chance of root rot. Keep your small plants in an area where they cannot be overlooked when watering. If you have the space, give each plant adequate growing room and you will be rewarded with more shapely plants.

The experts keep telling us that vireyas are not subject to a resting winter period and continue to grow all year around. This may be true in the tropics and for most species in cultivation. However, I find that many species only put on new growth once a year. Some of my well rooted cuttings have taken a year or more before new growth has appeared. Be patient.

As soon as your plants are large enough, start taking cuttings. I did not follow this advice on the theory that the plants would come into bloom faster. This has not proven to be the case and I have lost some "one of a kind" clones. Actually, cuttings taken from the original cuttings have adapted better to my growing conditions.

Graham Smith climbed Mt. Giluwe and returned with quite a few cuttings of *R. SAXIFRAGOIDES*. I was given one cutting which I was able to root on my return. Unfortunately, it did not develop the large tap root which you see in most photos of this species and the general root structure was weak. No new growth appeared for three years and I applied fertilizer in an effort to stimulate growth. The plant soon died.

*R. BLACKII* is very slow to root and grow.

*R. BEYERINCKIANUM* grows more rapidly than most species. Mine bloomed after three years. *Beyerinckianum* is very floriferous and a good plant to add to your collection. My only loss has been from root rot.

I was able to bring back several rather large branches of *R. CALIGINIS*. I was impressed by the growth habit of this species and was eager to obtain pollen. I just might obtain a good house plant by crossing it with other species with a more impressive flower. I removed about a dozen small branchlets (1 to 1 1/2 inches) from the main branch. These rooted easily but the roots were very small. I became impatient and tried to force growth. This was an error and all died. I also rooted four multibranched plants. These rooted quickly and grew rapidly. We had a hot spell followed by a sudden drop of temperature to 32 degrees. Unfortunately, I was gone for a day and the plants died. Apparently, 32 degrees is the lower temperature limit for this species.

I returned with three cuttings of *R. GRACILENTUM*. Each plant differs in leaf size, number of scales, and placement of scales. Apparently, this is not unusual for this species. It is a very easy species to grow well and blooms in three and a half years to four years from cuttings.

Unfortunately, the tags on *R. COMMONAE* were blurred so do not know the exact location of the parent plants. We took some from the Kain swamp which were from plants with other than the standard red color. So far, all blooms have been red. It grows quite rapidly and most have good plant habit. The few that I have lost have been from root rot.

*R. SUPERBUM* was collected as an epiphyte on Mt. Giluwe from the same small grove as the plant photographed on page 39 of "Vireya Rhododendrons" by J. Clyde Smith. The three cuttings were very slow to take root and produced no new growth the first two years. Plants are now in good shape and all have new growth each year. No blooms.

A cutting of *R. SOLITARIUM* was taken from the summit of Mt. Kaindi and was in transit for over five weeks. No problems rooting this cutting and it has developed into a sturdy multibranched plant. It has yet to flower.

*R. HERZOGII* cuttings are easy to root and growth is quite rapid. A cutting taken from Niguma, a small village on Mt. Wilhelm, first flowered this June and remained in bloom for two months.

I took several cutting from a plant of *R. WOMERSLEYI* on Mt. Wilhelm (about 9,000 ft level). Plants have proven to be vigorous growers and first bloomed in 1988. Plants require frequent pinching to branch well. A good conversation plant to have in your collection.

*R. PHAEOCHITUM* and *R. CULMINICOLUM* are easily damaged by sudden changes in weather. Unfortunately, my plants were putting on excellent new growth when a sudden cold snap hit, severely damaging the new growth. Plants remained dormant for the next two years but now appear to be recovering.

My *R. PLEIANTHUM* cutting took a long time to develop an adequate root structure before putting on new growth. So far, the plant only puts out new growth once a year and is dormant the rest of the year.

*R. RARUM* is subject to die back of branchlets but this does not harm the plant. My plant first flowered in November 1990.

*R. RARUM* X *R. DIELSIANUM*, a natural hybrid, grows far more rapidly than either parent. While there is no significant improvement in flower quality, the plants are more floriferous.

Fran Rutherford  
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Port Orchard, Wa 98366

From Charles Trommer      Ninole, Hawaii  
Dear VV,                      Dec. 21, 1990

I noted the interest in a recent Vireya Vine about naphthalene acetic acid (NAA). As a chemist I keep a supply on hand to make my own rooting compounds with.

In its pure form it is a power. For propagation uses it can be combined with talc and 5% Benlate (Benomyl) in a wet mix, it is then dried and ground to make a powdered product with an extended shelf life. To make a liquid dip product of it, simply dissolve the NAA with a small amount of ethanol or acetone and then bring it up to the volume with water. The shelf life of the solution is limited, but liquid dips are very effective.

Concentrations of NAA used can vary from 0.1% to as high as 4.0% depending upon the ease of rooting of the specific plant. Generally a concentration of 0.8% will root most plants effectively. Paste products can be made but they are messy to handle. As can be seen, 0.8 grams of NAA will make 100 grams of final product so that the pure form goes a long way.

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**NOTE FROM E. WHITE SMITH; VIREYA VINE BOOK READY!!!**

*In VV 27, I announced that the Vireya Vine would stop production after # 30. There have been a few people who wrote and said that they hoped it would not happen. We might still do the Vine, but only when we get enough letters to put an issue out (could be only one per year).*

*Most Viners know that I have been working on a Vireya Vine Book. Well it is done and printed. 110,000 + words, 127 + pages, maps, list, names, cover, bound. AND IT IS READY NOW. Prices are \$18US post paid in the USA. \$21US overseas from the USA, post paid. Outside of the USA please send a bank draft in US funds. It will be mailed as "bound printed matter" which will be slow surface mail, but keeps the cost down. This project is mine alone. Please make checks payable to me. I only have 150 copies and hope to get most of my money back some day. At times I thought that it was a dumb thing for me to work so hard on the book or to produce and finance it my self. BUT it needed to be done and now you can all have a copy. Maybe some day they will be collectors items and we shall all be rich.*

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