

VIREYA VINE

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RHODODENDRON SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN

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E. White Smith, Editor

From Russ Redler
Dear Vireya Vine,

Jefferson, Louisiana
May 26, 1993

I enjoy reading about the successful growers of Vireyas and Rhododendrons. My plants all died, and I was ready to stop buying them, but bear with me.

In early spring I attended the New Orleans Horticulture Show at City Park's Botanical Gardens. The orchids, bromeliads, and tropicals in the glass conservatory were beautiful. There were outdoor tents of displays, bonsai, and a large area where all kinds of plants were for sale by nurseries and private growers. Under one of the many, huge Live Oak trees dripping with Spanish Moss, was a display of flowering Rhododendrons in containers which brought me (and most other people) to a screeching halt! These plants were for sale in 1, 2, and 3 gallon size, black plastic pots. Even the one gallon size had flowers on them. I spoke to the two growers (Lloyd Cotton and John Thornton, of C&T Nurseries, 2313 Washington Street, Franklinton, Louisiana, 70438), and they said that their nursery was about 50 miles north of New Orleans. They plant in pure pine bark bits, which is sold in the area as summer mulch. No added peat or Perlite. Mr. Cotton told me that he had donated about 50 Rhododendrons to the park about two years ago. He said to walk to the end of the long Wisteria arbor and I would see the Rhododendrons in bloom, under a giant oak tree.

He had excavated the soil and planted the Rhodies in the pine bark mulch. I asked if they could "take the July and August heat?" "Yep", he said! There they were, all in bud and bloom, whites, pinks, reds. I was astonished! The rain waters them he told me. He did not know about Vireyas. Oh, what he could do with Vireyas if he had a greenhouse.

Fired up, I ordered six Madennii hybrids and six regular Rhododendrons from a California nursery; also some nice Vireyas from Dick Cavender. These plants are potted in the pine bark mulch, and I am seeing six inches of new growth on most of them. No more fir bark, peat moss, or Perlite mixes for me, even though it works for others. I hope this good luck lasts, and thought I had better drop these few lines of possible "hope" for Rhododendrons and Vireyas in the deep South. We shall see.

Russell A. Redler
304 Jefferson Hights Ave.
Jefferson, La 70121

From Herb Spady
Dear VV,

Salem, Oregon
May 29, 1993

On three occasions at various seasons of the year, I have had the opportunity to visit the peat glass house at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. Regardless of the season, there was always an interesting and often magnificent display of Vireya Rhododendrons. The beauty was not only in the flowering, but they were displaying spectacular new growth. I have seen the following Vireyas in flower; *R. alticola*, *anagalliflorum*, *bagobonum*, *burtii*, *crassifolium*, *goodenoughii*, *gracilentum*, *jasminiflorum*, *konorii*, *leptanthum*, *rarum*, *salicifolium*, *sumatranum*, *suaveolens* forma *roseum*, *sessilifolium*, *vitis-idea*, *superbum*, *wrightianum*, *inconspicuum*, *retusum*, and *stenophyllum*.

The *R. konorii* was especially memorable as it is a large plant and filled the greenhouse with fragrance. Especially dramatic new growth was seen on *R. polyanthemum* and *rugosum*. *R. ericoides*, that totally unreal Rhododendron, was growing happily. The plants are grown in peat blocks. The collection at RBG includes about 100 Vireya Rhododendrons and the peat house always has a representative selection.

There are many other genera in the cool conservatory. On my last visit several plants of *Dimorphanthera kamperiana* were heavy with flowers. The "jade" plant, *Stronglodon macrobotrys* was also in bloom and was featured as the plant of the month. There was a five foot tall plant of *R. hongkongense* that, unfortunately was not in flower.

A visit to the peat house at the RBG is a must for any Vireya enthusiast who is in the area. In fact it deserves a special visit.

Herb Spady
9460 Sunnyview Road NE.
Salem, Or 97301-9060

Thanks for the info Herb. That is just what we need. If everyone would report what they see we would all be better informed.

From Leslie Riggall
Dear VV,

Kloof, South Africa
July 8, 1993

One must admire the determination and persistence of growers such as Walt Mills, battling to grow Vireyas in North-East America.

As I enjoy a much more favorable climate (both for me and for my Vireyas), I can not offer a solution to his chronic "brownout". However I share his belief that fungus is the cause. It seems that plants grown in an unfavorable climate which is unnatural to them, have no resistance to fungi existing in that climate, even though they may be completely resistant to fungi in their own local environment. For example, I had disastrous results when introducing here, hundreds of different temperate Rhododendrons, which I have abandoned with very few exceptions. Only Maddeni's, Vireyas and a few other really tender Rhododendrons are happy in my climate, and are free of fungal disease.

I was interested in Walt's reference to tiny flies which appear at the time of germination. They appear in large numbers in my propagating shade-house, and I am sure they arise from, or are strongly attracted to, the finely sifted shredded pine bark which I use for Rhododendron seeds. However I have seen no evidence that they are harmful.

There are other tiny flies which are very harmful, such as the colonizing winged aphids, white flies, and thrips. I would suggest that biological control of harmful insects is preferable to using powerful poisons, such as Malathion, which kills everything, including the beneficial insects in the greenhouse.

For tiny flies sundew plants are very effective, trapping hundreds in each plant. In England the common sundew was too small to be effective, but an easy way to obtain an attractive and very effective sundew is to purchase the South African species *Drosera capensis* from Marston Exotics, Marston Mill, Spring Gardens, Frome, Somerset, England. *Droseras* are cosmopolitan, but even if a suitable species exists in your own country, it might be much more bother to obtain it from the wild than to order the cape Sundew from Marston. This plant has a 6 inch (15 cm) rosette of long red tinted leaves covered with very sticky hairs. It is attractive and interesting, and the dainty pink flowers produce seeds which are eager to grow for you. Many of these seeds germinated naturally on some old deteriorating planks in my shade house bench.

Marston also supplies other carnivorous plants such as *Dionaea* (Venus flytrap) and *Nepenthes* (Pitcher plants). I encountered these when collecting Vireyas in Borneo. The huge *Nepenthes rajah*, with a quart size pitcher (more than a liter), is endemic only to Mt. Kinabalu, and it can capture and digest prey up to the size of rats and mice. Carnivorous plants add a great deal of interest to a greenhouse, as well as reducing the pests that feed on your plants.

They are selective and will not devour beneficial praying insects, because the nectar they secrete attracts only plant feeding insects, and has no attraction for preying insects, or predators such as spiders.

Another way to reduce the spring flush of tiny flies is to collect an egg cocoon of a large orb-web spinning spider in autumn, and place it high in your greenhouse. Hundreds of tiny spiders will hatch in the Spring and spread all over the greenhouse, making perfect little orb-webs. Those that survive and remain will later catch mosquitoes, houseflies, moths and other winged enemies.

Are there mantis species in your region? These are voracious killers of other insects, and should be placed on your plants. There are many predator types of bugs, such as the Assassin bugs, which kill plant pests including other species of bugs which suck the sap of plants. The closely related Damsel bugs are mostly small and include aphids in their diet. The ladybug (ladybird) is not a bug at all but a beetle, and both the adults and larvae feed entirely on aphids. These pretty little beetles are easy to catch and should always be introduced where aphids exist.

There are many parasitic wasps which prey upon insects, including the difficult to control scale insects. The Chalcid wasps, for example, are produced in laboratories specially for controlling pest such as aphids and caterpillars.

For larger pest such as moths, bugs and vegetarian beetles, worms and slugs, frogs and toads are very useful. Whenever one is encountered it should be placed in the greenhouse. They soon become tame. We had a large tree frog which insisted on living on the side of the kitchen sink, in an old house we used for office and storage. Each day we put it outside and each night it came back in through the louver window, as it could climb on glass easily. Another garden friend which is easily tamed is the hedgehog, and it is a curious fact that although it consumes hundreds of beetles it never eats carnivorous beetles, only vegetarian ones.

There is a theory that hedgehogs distinguish the beetles by the difference in the smell. It is true that our spiny friends have a very keen sense of smell, but it is possible that there is a very simple explanation, that vegetarian beetles move slowly, and that fast moving carnivorous ones are unlikely to be caught by the rather slow moving hedgehogs. This brings me to the advice of an old English gardener, on the subject of distinguishing beneficial small creatures in the garden from harmful ones. He said "If it moves fast I want it, and if it moves slowly I don't want it". A simple example would be the fast moving carnivorous centipedes, compared with the very slow moving vegetarian millipedes.

A slow worm, which resembles a small very smooth and shiny snake, but which is actually a legless lizard, is very friendly and feeds entirely on slugs (dangerous to germinating Rhododendrons) and other greenhouse pests.

In my opinion such interesting creatures in the greenhouse are more desirable than modern poisons.

Leslie Riggall
Fern Valley Botanic Garden
Igwababa Road
Kloof 3610, South Africa
Tel. Durban (01) 7641882

Yes the carnivorous plants are fascinating. I have an old fish aquarium in my greenhouse with them growing happily in it. At the first part of June this spring I was with a group plant hunting in South Western Oregon. We came upon a bog full of Darlingtonia (Pitcher Plants) with R. occidentale growing both on the floating bog and on the banks. R. macrophyllum was also growing just up the banks from the water level. A wonderful place to wander around and find neat little plants.

From James Gears
Dear VV,

West Chester, PA
August 23, 1993

I just bloomed a plant that I started from seed in 1988. The seed was from the ARS Vireya seed exchange, which is handled by Bill Moyles in Oakland California. The cross is R. laetum X zoelleri X [(aurigeranum X Dr. Sleumer) X leucogigas]. There were five flowers in the truss and they were yellow with the tips of the petals tinged an orange/red. It was a long wait for the first bloom, but well worth it.

I have several Vireyas growing in my greenhouse, but they are shy to bloom. Maybe if I started using foliar fertilizer, that would help?

James D. Gears
Parkersville Rd., R.D. 6
Chester, PA 19382

That is a "heavy duty cross", and yes I think that foliar feeding does help. Just use a little bit of fertilizer though, and do the spraying often, like twice a day.

From Brian Clancy,
Dear Vireya Vine,

Victoria, Australia
August 20, 1993

I refer to Luurt Nieuwenhuis' letter in VV Issue #36 concerning the dubious judging of Vireyas in flower shows (a virus we have here in Australia also). Luurt also was wondering about R. nieuwenhuisii. Search no longer, R. nieuwenhuisii has been grown at the RBG Edinburgh since 1978 and flowers twice a year.

This information is contained in the Sabah Parks Publication #8, 1988, entitled 'Rhododendrons of Sabah' by George Argent et al.

'Rhododendrons of Sabah' is a tremendous buy at about \$15 and is a must for all keen growers of Vireyas. It contains 145 pages of Vireya information, 93 colour plates and 50 black and white photos plus 11 line drawings. This book is educational and exciting to read. *R. nieuwenhuisii* is illustrated with a delightful colour plate, described as pale yellow (by Vireya standards), with narrow lanceolate leaves. However, Dr. Sleumer, in his monumental classification of Vireyas, describes *R. nieuwenhuisii* as having deep bright yellow flowers. In the RHS London Species Handbook 1980 it is listed as not in cultivation.

In an effort to produce a compact, free flowering, dwarf, yellow hybrid, in 1987 I used pollen from the red flowered *R. rubineiflorum* to cross with *R. 'Sunny'* (*christianae* X *macgregoriae*) and with *laetum* X *aurigeranum*. According to Canon Cruttwell, *R. rubineiflorum* is the smallest Rhododendron in the world! It was initially described and illustrated by Lyn Craven in the "Notes from the RBG Edinburgh" Vol. 38 No. 1, pages 141-144, 1980. The resultant dwarf hybrids are exceptionally compact with many stolons shooting from below. The hybrid with *laetum* X *aurigeranum* has been flowering for two months and has 78 flower buds. The plant is 7 inches high and 11 inches across. The hybrid with 'Sunny' is 16 inches wide and 8 inches high with 130 flower buds.

The flowers are 1 1/4 inches across and come generally in fours but, to date, all in a tangerine colour. To achieve the yellow flowered dwarf, I am growing *R. lineare* (also from Borneo and closely related to *nieuwenhuisii*) to cross with the *rubineiflorum* hybrids.

During May and June of this year, I flowered the first two plants of 'Dr. Sleumer' X *superbum*. The plants were just two years old; the cuttings being put down in March of 1991. The plants were just 18 inches high. The first to flower in May had a magnificent truss of 12 flowers with a rich carnation scent. The individual flowers were 4 1/2 inches across with mostly five petals and a few with six petals, all reflexed similarly to *R. superbum*. The creamy white flowers were edged with lavender pink and the truss and scent were so good that it would be difficult to improve with further hybridizing.

The second *R. superbum* hybrid to flower had a nine flowered truss in a deep pink colour with a yellow star like throat and I have back crossed this to *superbum*. As the name implies, *R. superbum* is a spectacular and highly rated species. It's main drawback in my opinion is that it can take up to 15 years to flower.

Brian Clancy
31 Renown St.
Bentleigh, Victoria, 3204
Australia

Good stuff, Brian. My plant of R. macgregoriae X rubineiflorum is 4 inches high and 5 across with 22 flower buds. It blooms orange. But I also have a plant of (macgregoriae X laetum) X anagalliflorum that is 7 inches by 7 inches and it has 55 flower buds getting ready to open. This plant has white tinged pink flowers and wonderful red new foliage. These are great things and are just what we need if Vireyas are ever going to be very popular as house plants. I also bloomed two different superbums this summer and that is a real joy because of the long wait.

The Rhododendron Species Foundation (also known as the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, and I am confused also) asked me to list some Vireyas for sale . They do ship during the mild weather and ship outside of the USA with the proper paper work from you. BUT, they can only sell and ship to members. I am including a membership form for you to use. The numbers are RSF accession numbers.

R. aurigeranum 78/104	\$7.50;	bryophilum 80/141	\$10.00
christianae 82/208	\$7.50;	commonae 79/035	\$7.50
dianthosmum 83/063	\$7.50;	jasminiflorum 78/102	\$7.50
konori 79/030, 80/143	\$7.50;	laetum 80/144	\$7.50
orbiculatum 83/070	\$7.50;	stenophyllum 85/046	\$7.50
suaveolens 80/004	\$7.50;	zoelleri 80/150, 83/071	\$7.50

The following list is in addition to those listed in the 1994 RSF distribution catalog.

R. armitii 87/037	\$15.00;	brookeanum 82/210	\$15.00
caliginis 98/003	\$10.00;	carringtoniae 87/040	\$10.00
christii 83/055	\$9.00;	leptanthum 87/042	\$9.00
praetervisum 87/045	\$10.00;	rarum 85/001	\$10.00
suaveolens 87/051	\$9.00;	soliterium 88/051	\$10.00
saxifragoides 88/050	\$30.00;	vitis-idaea 87/052	\$12.00
blackii 88/044	\$10.00;		

Please write for information about shipping charges and availability of plants.

October 12, 1993

Frank Doleshy a long time Vireya and Rhodie friend just called on the phone. He reported to me that Dr. Sleumer has died. Dr. H. Sleumer was born on February 21st, 1906 and passed away in Holland on October 1, 1993 at the age of 87. There will be an extensive obituary in the winter issue of the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society. Us "Vireya Nuts" are indebted to Dr. Sleumer because his was the only printed work on Vireyas for many years. We would really have been lost without his book.

RIP

Yes, Please enroll me as a member of the Rhododendron Species Foundation.

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