VIREYA VINE

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REMEMBER, the year date on your mailing label indicates the last time you contributed to the Vireya Vine. From Jose Almandoz Dear Vireya Vine, San Sebastian, Spain January 1994

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Greetings from Spain. I am very happy to be a little part of this great 'Vireya Family'. I have been a member of the American Rhododendron Society for some years and I was struggling like mad with tricky alpine Rhodies and cool loving species (mostly imported from England and Scotland, because here in Spain the Rhododendron scene is virtually nil, and the choice in garden centers goes not much farther that 'pink', 'red', or 'white' Rhodies; usually lanky, unnamed old hardy hybrids with much ponticum blood of European origin). Recently I discovered Maddeniis, oh boy, they are my plants!!! Then, thanks to Bill Moynier I got bitten by the 'Vireya Bug', and Bill Moyles didn't help much in the cure, but insisted till I'm steadily becoming a 'Maddenii and Vireya addict'. To answer the question, "can I grow Vireyas outside or do I need a greenhouse?" I will answer that I still don't know. I certainly would need one if I lived in the interior, but I live on the coast. I may try some mature plants outdoors. I like to experiment with plants supposedly tender. At the moment the 'rabbit' I'm experimenting with, is a beautiful Strelitzia nicholai, and so far it is doing fine. I live in San Sebastian, a beautiful seaside city on the northern coast of Spain, just 20 kilometers from France. Our climate is temperate, humid (rainfall 1,500 mm per year, almost 60 inches, always with high air humidity) and windy, with mild and wet winters (frost are very rare along the coast), and long warm summers. The maximum temperatures are 32°C or even 34°C a couple of days every summer when the dry winds come out of the south. Usually there is enough rainfall as to save on watering, although dry spells are not uncommon (July being the hottest month). Temperatures as low as 2 and 3°C can be reached on some winter nights. But more than the cold I am worried about the lack of sunlight, because of the rainy and cloudy days prevailing in the winter, and I am not prepared to offer artificial lights. Phoenix, Musa, Citrus and Washingtonia, for example, can be seen growing outdoors. In carefully selected sites outdoors, in half shade and protected from the heavy winds, I have been able to grow Cymbidium orchids, Alocasia, Gardenia, Stephanotis, and Clivia, so I guess I could risk it with Vireyas. I shall start with sturdy, little plants, at least two or three years old.

My Vireya collection is a bunch of newly rooted cuttings and lots of tiny seedlings from seed received from the ARS Vireya Seed Exchange: It must be the great work done by Bill Moyles, keeping the seed in top fresh condition. I don't think it is a matter of being extremely lucky - but I find Vireya seed from Bill Moyles, very easy to grow. The sowing method I use is the one Bill recommends in the leaflet he includes with the seed, and it works great with all Rhodies. Because I can not find "No-Damp-Off sphagnum moss", I substitute straight peat moss; (German, Irish or Russian are the ones usually available here) 3 parts peat moss and 1 part perlite.

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I fill the containers to near the rim, sterilizing the compost surface with boiling water, and then leave it to drain and cool down till it's just warm and sow the seed. I cover the pots with thin polythene and keep them under fluorescent tubes. I use the lights in pairs, one 'Grolux' and one normal 'daylight'. The only problem is to decide what to do with so many seedlings. You have to be very brave to throw some away, but space has it's limits!

Well, I was saying that all of my plants are still newly rooted cuttings or seedlings not taller than a couple of centimeters. At least for this winter, I'll leave them under cover in a cold frame. Let's wait and see how they cope with low light levels. I shall be very careful about watering! In my very little experience I've already had to fight against thrips and what I think is powdery mildew, and I am experimenting with the insecticides and fungicides available here. In spite of all this I still enjoy Vireyas as I enjoy trouble. I can't wait to see the first flowers. I am a bit jealous of you Americans, Australians, and New Zealanders, who enjoy such a vast choice with all those wonderful hybrids and species available; with all your groups, plant exhibitions and meetings. I feel a bit isolated ever here, but hopefully someday I'll manage to start some Vireya interest, at least amidst the 'keen gardeners', be it in this area or, better still, in Southern Coastal Spain, where the climate is similar to Southern California, much more suitable to Vireya culture than my own, here in this rainy, cold and windy Northern spot. For my part, I shall be enjoying the Vireya Vine, please keep up the great work.

> Jose Almandoz Zurriola 4 20002 San Sabastian Spain

Great letter Jose. You will make it. Many of us Viners live in low light level areas and have little problems with that.

Do watch the water. My plants seem to go dormant when it gets real dark and cold here in Washington State but it hasn't hurt them yet. Our dark days are quite often broken up by bright cold days in the winter. Remember that Vireyas, in their natural lands get 12 hours of light per day. Probably two or three less than those 12 hours for a while doesn't hurt too much. They seem to take the long 16 or 17 hour days also so you should be OK.

Something you might want to try for mildew is 'Baking Soda' - Sodium Bicarbonate. 5 to 10 tablespoons per US gallon, or 1 to 2 % by weight by volume or 75 to 150 milliliters per US gallon or 5 to 7 teaspoons per US quart, and on and on and on. Remember that the experimental work using Sodium Bicarbonate has only been done on roses and a few other plants, not Rhododendrons. It is said to be useful to control powdery mildew and other things with out using ""chemicals"". With all respect to Leslie Riggall in South Africa, who tries and encourages us to do other things. I can't get frogs to stay in my greenhouse, but there are some at the RSF and Lucie Sorenson at The Bovees Nursery in Portland Oregon has both frogs and salamanders in her Vireya greenhouse and she protects them.

Today is September 19, 1994 as I am typing this portion of the Vine. This morning I spent a few hours at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden working with the Vireya collection. I applied the fungicide 'Aliette' to the stock plants and to the rooted cuttings that had been transplanted into containers this summer. Why do I use this type of fungicide? Because Vireyas do not like wet feet and it is troublesome and difficult to completely control watering of the plants. With the fungicide protection there is much less chance of trouble from the Phytophthora root rot. If a person is able to keep all of his plants in the same size containers and to always use the same potting mix, it would be easier to control watering or overwatering. BUT. That is just not how it works, is it? The fungicide Aliette is a 80% wettable power which is sprayed on the foliage. The other fungicide which works real well with root rot is Subdue. Subdue is used at 6 drops per US gallon and applied to the soil of a container or to a ground planted plant. These chemicals should be alternated to keep from developing resistance. At home on my Vireyas I use one of these fungicides each spring and fall as the plants go outside and back into the greenhouse. A few years ago I had grown three nice plants of R. commonae to about two feet tall and they all died from root rot. I was very upset with myself for letting that happen and protect my plants now with Subdue or Aliette. I don't like to use these materials but I also don't like losing plants to root rot. Sorry Leslie.

The only real rule I know about Vireyas is "don't let them freez" - however I am not sure what this really means. Some of the plants will take a couple of degrees of frost what ever that means. Here in the USA I suspect that some species will stand +29 to 30°F but not all of them. As I have said before; people who live in the far north or the far south have very good luck with Vireyas because we know that they need a greenhouse or inside protection in the winter. We never leave them outsideduring the winter months, <u>never</u>. Because they die and are Gone Forever.

From Lucie Sorensen, The Bovees Nursery Dear VV,

Portland, Oregon June 1994

It is pay-back time for all the years of enjoying and learning from the VV issues filled with readers reports of plant descriptions and cultural practices, both successful or not successful. These reports made it clear that there is <u>no single</u> <u>method</u> of growing Vireyas.

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Many other factors are involved, some of which are the geographical location, the growing structures being used, and the amount of time the grower can spend with the plants. I don't recall that the commercial part of Vireya growing has received much attention in the Vireya Vine so that will be the focus of this contribution.

Our small specialty nursery become involved in Vireyas beginning in 1979 through the generosity of collectors. The first plants were from Carl Deul and Bob Ticknor, then a large group came from Peter Schick, some from Dick Cavender, another large group from Arne Jensen, the Rhododendron Species Foundation, Bill Moynier's lovely hybrids, and most recently some choice gems from our editor, E. White Smith.

These Vireyas have captured our affections in a major way with their year around blooming and interesting foliage. From our collection of over 300 clones, we currently list 100 plants in our catalog. Our customers include some members of the American Rhododendron Society, but the majority are from the general plant growing public. Many are already growing orchids and other tropical plants, in home greenhouses, sun rooms, or outside in Southern California, Hawaii, and Florida.

Some of our practices may be of interest to VV readers. Our approach is based mainly on what will be easy and as fool-proof as possible, both for the first time customer and also for ourselves! We provide a six month guarantee with all of the plants we sell, along with detailed instructions, and a years supply of our special fertilizer. Since there is very little published information about growing Vireyas, such as the books on Orchids and Rhododendrons, our four pages of growing instructions, history and descriptions of natural habitat are aimed at bridging that gap.

We ask customers if they are growing other plants successfully inside during the winter and in that way we are able to screen out less desirable environments or suggest solutions. Our emphasis is on three basic rules passed on to us by our original collector friends. <u>#1 don't over water.</u>; <u>#2 don't over feed</u>; <u>#3 don't overpot.</u> We also urge that the plants be moved outside as soon as frost is no longer a threat, and try to follow our advice to open up the greenhouse , and to move the big plants outside (at Bovees we actually remove quite a lot of glass from the ends of the greenhouse because we can't move all of the plants to the outside). Portland summers have been dry and warm for the last eight years and our drought still seems to be in effect. Humidity is often low, and although the days may be in the 80's and 90's, and occasionally in the 100's, the nights are usually cool. Across from our greenhouse in a partially shaded area, the big leucogigas/konori/phaeopeplum hybrids are enjoying the summer along with the large species plants of R. crassifolium, lowii, konori, hellwigii, blackii, and suaveolens.

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The greenhouse is covered with 50% shade cloth from June 1st to late September to reduce heat build-up. During the winter a natural gas heater is set at 40°F min., but we also have back-up kerosene heaters because of the occasional power failures during winter ice storms. We use only a very pure grade of kerosene and have never had a problem even after continual operation for two weeks or more.

Disease and insect problems have been minimal so far, with aphids and weevils occasionally appearing. Orthene or Mavrik have been our choice in the past, but we will also be using Margosan-O in the future. It is a new botanical insecticide derived from extracts of the Neem tree. For rust and powdery mildew we have been using Bayleton with excellent results, but are planning to experiment with a combination of Sun-Spray oil and Bi-carbonate of Soda (we are not yet certain of the exact proportions). Fans are in operation continually as a disease prevention measure. If the need arose, we would use Subdue and Aliette for Phytophthera (root rot).

For the first 2-1/2 -3 years we grow the Vireyas in tall narrow bands, (after rooting them). The bands are in two sizes; 5-1/2" tall X 2-7/8" square or 6" tall X 3-1/2" wide. These bands insures excellent drainage and produces a long firm root ball that moves very well into a gallon pot during the latter part of the third year. Our potting mix is 50% non-organic material (pumice and perlite) and 50% coarse peat moss and moderately fine bark. Many people use a much coarser, chunkier bark but this works for us and our watering program. Watering is done by hand when the majority of the pots in a section are light in weight. We do not usually mix pot sizes. To extend the periods between watering and to make it easier for the dry pot to accept water, we use Super-Sorb (a synthetic copolymer water absorbant) in the mix, and drench the pots with Aqua-Gro 2000L (media wetting agent) twice a year. Our five year old plants without Super-Sorb are nearly always dry, while younger plants with Super-sorb are much easier to maintain. During the colder winter months we do very little watering and no fertilizing.

I realize that there is some controversy about the value of Super-Sorb. However, in our circumstances, with limited labor and time, and a four year period to observe the results, we like it. Customers need to be warned, however, so that they don't overwater. Our special fertilizer is the main key to our growing program. It is based on organic nitrogen (cottonseed and alfalfa meal) plus all of the other ingredients of a complete fertilizer including trace elements, calcium and iron chelate. It is not very water soluble which makes its effect slow and long-lasting. Our instructions advise applying this fertilizer three times per year but we get adequate results with only two applications a year. It is very gentle and the super-phos seems to promote blooming. I have not said much about propagation (it is very easy) or about bloom frequency. R. gracilentum blooms 11¹/₂ months out of the year. Other plants bloom two or three times per year or more. June, July and August seem to have less blooms than the other months, but still enough to keep us happy. The winter months of November, December, January, February, and March are glorious.

This year we have begun more aggressive marketing with very enthusiastic results. A Sunday morning feature on the Ed Hume TV Show in early March brought astonishing response. A common theme seems to be "why haven't we ever heard about these beautiful plants?" Appearances at local Yard and Garden shows in both Portland and Seattle had the same effect, especially when large plants of laetum/zoelleri hybrids with their brilliant red-orange and gold flowers were displayed. Surprisingly, the tough blooms held up through three days of checking by visitors to see "if it is real."!!

Catalogue is \$2.00

Lucie Sorensen, The Bovees Nursery 1737 SW Coronado Portland, OR 97219 (503)-244-9341 or 1-800-435-9250

Also try Cape Cod Vireyas (Dick Chaikin) 405 Jones Rd. Fallmouthm MA 02540 (508)548-2233 leave a message

Red's Rhodies 15920 SW Oberst Lane Sherwood, OR 97140 (503)625-6331

Your editor is going to the International Rhododendron Conference to be held in Burnie, Tasmania, Australia on October 25th. There will be many Vireya people there and I should have a great report for you in the next Vine. I also am going to spend almost a month with Keith Adams in New Zealand and we are going to see some great Vireya collections and meet some new Vireya growers. EWS

Conversion Tables

Area

I square centimeter = 0.155 square inches I square meter = 1.196 square yards Iha (hectare) = 2.471 acres I acre = 0.4047 ha I acre = 43,560 square feet 640 acres = 1 square feet 640 acres = 1 square mile or 1 section 144 square inches = 1 square foot 9 square feet = 1 square yard I side of a acre is 208.71 feet long

Cubic Measure

1 cubic inch = 16,387 cu. cm 1 cubic foot = 1727 cubic inches 27 cubit feet = 1 cubic yard 1 cubic foot = 0.0283 cu. m

Length

1mm (millimeter) = 0.0394 inches 1cm (centimeter) = 0.3937 inches 1m (mcter) = 39.37 inches or 1.28 yards 1,000m = 3,937 feet 1km (kilometer) = 0.6213 miles 1 inch = 2.54cm 1 mile = 1.6093km 1 mile = 5,280 feet

Temperature $^{\circ}C \times 9/5 + 32 = ^{\circ}F$

I cubic yard = 0.7646 cu. m

There has been some extra work done at the Species foundation. Lucie Sorensen and I have volunteeres to maintain the Vireya collection. We moved all of the stock plants out of the greenhouse into a shade house and repotted most of them. They like it outside. We also transplanted all of the rooted cuttings from flats into containers. Out of hundreds of transplants only one has died. There are a lot of older plants ready for sale next year and many more cuttings in the cutting beds. Clint Smith, the propagator has done wonders at the RSF. He has propagated thousands of Rhodies this year and there should be enough for all of us.

Think about using tall containers like they do at Bovees. It really works. I know that Dick Chaikin at Cape Cod Vireyas also likes deep ones, and I have been converted at last.

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