

VIREYA VINE

ISSUE # 42, May 1995

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RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION

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E. White Smith, Editor

NOTE::: May 11, 1996 12:30PM, Oban Scotland, right after the 51st annual meeting of the American Rhododendron Society. A meeting of the International Vireya Group has been called. We will have lunch and speakers. It would be real nice if you would let us know if you plan to attend. This is being arranged by Dick Chaikin of Boston/Cape Cod Vireyas.

Contributors to the Vine since Issue #41

Donald Allen	Washington State	Patricia Muller	California
Australian Rhododendron Society	Victoria Branch	Bill O'Neill	Washington State
Patricia Bender	Washington State	Sheldon Ofshe	New York
Dahl Tropicals	Washington State	Eugene Pflug	Washington State
Dee Daneri	California	Frances Plunkett	Washington DC
Frank Doleshy	Washington State	Nan Ray	California
Art Dome	Washington State	David Scott	Massachusetts
Ralph Eells	Washington State	Herb Spady	Oregon
Keith Elliott	California	Charles Trommer	Hawaii
Stan Eversole	California	Philip Waldman	New York
Simon Farrell	New Zealand	Jack Wilson	Australia
Margaret Grimes	Washington State	Scott Vargara	Washington State
A. Grinevicius	Canada	Chuck Zentgraf	California
Kenneth Gross	New York		
Hank Helm	Washington State		
Cheriel Jensen	California		
Adele Jones	Oregon		
Barbara Johansen	Washington State		
Melba Johnson	BC Canada		
Leon Kubala	Texas		
Margaret Leuhe	Washington State		

You might wonder why I put down Washington State in the above list. I really do try to keep the Vireya Vine understandable. I found out while I was in New Zealand last November that most people don't have a very good idea about where places are in the USA.

Many people thought I was from the United States national capital, Washington DC, and I was always careful to explain where Washington State was so that they could better picture it in their mind. Even then some people didn't know where it was and I explained that Washington State was between California and Canada on the west coast of America. Please, no reflection on the good people from New Zealand. I bet that most Americans don't know where New Zealand is. Want to bet?

I often read things that leave me confused because the person writing the piece assumed that the readers knew about the subject. We often don't. My goal has always been to not do editing or changing with letters printed in the Vine, BUT, I do try to make the subject matter understandable to our world-wide Viners by rewriting a sentence to make it more understandable. I could also answer most of the questions asked in letters but much prefer to let you Viners answer them. After all, this is a newsletter, and a newsletter is meant to have input and feedback from the readers. We get very few letters to the Vine and it troubles me. I really do not wish to do much of the writing like I have done in the past, but I will if you don't write in. Please write. Your personal experiences in growing Vireyas is appreciated by other Vireya people.

I have really enjoyed meeting Viners from around the world over the years. I bet I know at least 200 of you, but probably can't remember your name. Every time I go to a meeting or function I meet another person I have only known from our mailing list over the years and it is a great thrill to put faces with the names. If each person who has told me, or written on their payment/contribution to the Vine, "how much they like the Vine", would have written a letter instead, we would have material to print for a long, long time. Anyway, I love you all and am going to keep doing the Vine, and on and on and on.

There are still questions coming my way about the Vireya Book that Tom Tatum was doing. I have offered to help Tom work on the book but Timber Press in Portland Oregon is very slow corresponding with me and Tom hasn't sent much for me to do. So, who knows if it will ever get done. I am not going to write a book myself, but something does need to be done.

The following letter to the VV has some questions about Lucie Sorensen's letter in VV 40 and I am going to send it to Lucie and ask her to respond in writing which she will be happy to do.

From Frances Plunkett
Dear Vireya Vine,

Washington DC USA
February 6, 1995

Just a few words to express my appreciation as a beginner for all the information that turns up in the VV as well as a chance to share other folks' adventures.

I have less than a dozen Vireyas at this point and will never have room for a whole lot of them. At long last I now have a sun room where I can winter the plants over with adequate light and sit in the sun and enjoy their bloom and fragrance—well, maybe next winter. *R. loranthiflorum* was lovely last fall but has not come back into bloom, and the rest of the plants seem to be just marking time at this point. My nighttime temperature doesn't go below 50°F (10°C), and daytime is between 60 and 80, depending on how sunny the day is.

Perhaps the limiting factor is the length of day rather than the temperature, but then why do Vireyas bloom heavier in the winter than in the summer? When do they bloom in Australia and New Zealand?

At least I have attractive contrasting foliage with *R. brookeanum*, *orbiculatum* and *stenophyllum*. The latter, I confess I acquired to confound my gardening friends, and it certainly does! I double potted last summer (outside) with moist sand between the pots to keep the soil temperature down, and it seems to have helped get everything through our dreadful summer weather in good shape. After reading Lucie Sorensen's recent contribution, I suspect that I am watering too frequently now that growth has slowed down, and will try switching from once a week to once every two weeks.

I wonder if others, who are not nursery professionals have some of the same questions I have about what certain terms mean and where to get certain supplies. For instance, Lucie mentions coarse peat moss—what is it, and is it different from the Canadian sphagnum peat available at garden centers? Is there any difference between Super-Sorb and the other synthetic water absorbents that are widely available? Where can Aqua-Gro be obtained? And so forth.

I am looking forward to seeing Portland for the first time in May and hopefully lots of Vireyas.

Frances Plunkett
1105 D St. SE
Washington D.C. 20003
Phone (202)543-0309

Thanks for the letter, Frances. You will be seeing some Vireyas in Portland at the 50th Annual Meeting of the American Rhododendron Society. If you are looking for me, just sign up for one of the tours to Bovees Nursery and I will be in the Vireya Greenhouse. I also will have a special lapel badge for Vireya Vine subscribers, so be sure to ask me for one. It should be a great Rhododendron time for all. Portland is a wonderful Rhodie city and the committee has a special program planned.

From Lucie Sorensen

Portland, Oregon

Dear VV,

March 7, 1995

Dear Frances, Thanks for pointing out a very real problem that plant people often experience, and that I was unaware of when I wrote to the Vireya Vine about our growing practices. The problem is that certain recommended products may be difficult or impossible to find or may be sold under a different trade name, depending on where you live. One way to solve this problem is to consult a local nursery or a nursery supply business. Another source of information would be to bring up your questions at an ARS meeting, or at other plant societies. Your questions were referred back to the Vireya Vine which is probably the best way to go! So now I will clarify my statements as much as I can.

Re watering: I rely on the "lift the pot" method to determine when to water. Light weight means time to water. During the cooler winter months, the plants are kept in a cool greenhouse and do not dry out as quickly as in the summer.

Re coarse peat: It probably isn't carried at a garden center. Try a nursery supply company. We had to try several places before finding the right kind for our needs. It usually is much more chunky than fine peat, and may even have small sticks in it. Ask for chunky peat.

Re Super-Sorb: I don't know about other brands of polymers but probably they work in similar ways. Experiment to find out how much to use. We find that our plant roots grow into and around the small water-swollen particles which do not release their water unless the potting mix becomes dry.

Re Aqua-Gro: Ask for a wetting agent. Some last longer than others. We find that one application lasts approximately 3 to 4 months.

While all these products are of value in certain situations, the most important cultural practices to remember for growing Vireyas successfully are: 1) don't over water, 2) don't over fertilize, and 3) don't over pot, and of course, use a porous, fast-draining mix. I hope I have cleared up some of your questions, and will be looking forward to seeing you at the American Rhododendron Society Convention in Portland in May.

Lucie Sorensen, Bovees Nursery
1737 SW Coronado
Portland, OR 97219
(503)244-9341

Another good place to find special materials is a greenhouse supply company. There are many of these places around selling to people who grow plants with the hydroponic method. They often sell pots, flats, plastic sheeting, fertilizer, perlite and things like that at reasonable prices. Look in your telephone book and make a few calls. And then tell us about what you have found out.

*While at the International Rhododendron Conference in Burnie, Tasmania last October, I had the chance to ask George Argent, the Vireya Rhododendron expert from the Royal Botanic Garden at Edinburgh, about the difference between *R. acuminatum* and *R. rugosum*. His answer follows. BUT, George has a few copies of the "An Account of Rhododendron in Malesia, by Dr. H. Sleumer". This is the real species book about Vireyas. They are unused but do have library stamps. They are hard covered. George gave me one of these books while we were in Tasmania and I was thrilled to say the least. He says that they will cost \$35US including postage for enthusiasts. If you want one DO NOT WAIT. He might like to have US cash?*

From George Argent
Dear Vireya Vine,

Edinburgh, Scotland UK
March 14, 1995

I have for a long time maintained that *Rhododendron acuminatum* has not been successfully cultivated. Recently an odd *Malayovireya* flowered at Edinburgh which caused me to re-examine the problem of identification of this species versus the closely related ones from Borneo. The most common confusion in collections is with *R. regosum*. The two species are superficially similar because they both have rugose leaves. But they are easily separated if the leaves are examined with a hand lens as the scales are quite different in shape. They are dendroid in *R. rugosum*, often touching but easily rubbed off and not forming a complete layer on the underside of the leaf so that you can see the leaf surface proper. In *R. acuminatum* the scales are umbrella shaped and overlapping, so that the underside of the leaf at least is completely covered by persistent scales (see illustration). *R. rugosum*, though rather slow, grows easily in cultivation, has pink flowers with minute white hairs on the outside of the corolla tube whilst *R. acuminatum* has orange flowers with a glabrous or sparsely scaly tube.

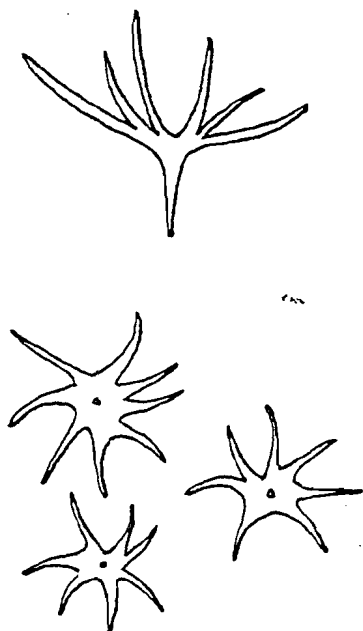
More difficulty is encountered with identification of some of the forms of *R. fallacinum*, *R. variolosum* and *R. durionifolium* which have similar scales on the leaves and orange flowers with variously scaly flower tubes. The leaves of *R. acuminatum* are long-petiole with the leaf stalks more than 12mm long and the veins on the underside of the leaves are strongly raised to within a third of the distance between the midvein and the edge (often right up to the edge).

On the other closely related species the veins are usually only raised up to half the distance, mostly much less. The leaf stalks are also much shorter, rarely as long as 10mm except in *R. variolosum* which has much smaller leaves on Mt. Kinabalu. The flowers of *R. acuminatum* have a tendency to hang, whereas *R. fallacinum* and *R. durionifolium* are usually in an erect umbel or if more sparse are at least horizontally placed.

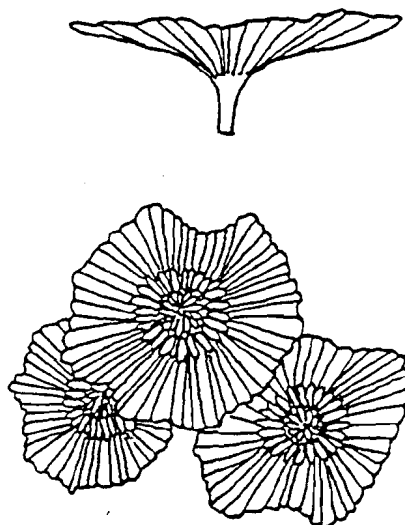
R. acuminatum remains one of Mt. Kinabalu's endemic species, having been found nowhere else up to the present. It was a species very much reduced in population size by the intense drought on the mountain in 1983. It has been repeatedly tried in cultivation as seed and seedlings are usually abundant, but I have yet to be convinced that anyone has grown it much beyond the seedling stage let alone to flowering. I would be pleased to have information to the contrary and would be happy to identify leaves from wild origin plants from Borneo, preferably knowing the precise location of the original collection and in as complete and mature a state as possible. It remains a real puzzle to me why two species growing side by side on Mt. Kinabalu (*R. rugosum* and *R. acuminatum*), one is easy in cultivation and the other apparently impossible.

George Argent
Royal Botanic Garden
Edinburgh, Scotland EH3 5LR UK

R. rugosum



R. acuminatum



From Fran Rutherford
Dear VV,

Port Orchard, Washington State
April 1, 1995

Winter weather in Puget Sound is very unpredictable. January was unseasonably warm with record setting high day temperatures. We even had six clear days. The first two weeks in February were also warm and most of my early blooming rhododendrons were showing color or were in bloom. Then came February 14th and the temperature dropped over night to 22°F in Port Orchard and 14 degrees at the Species Foundation. This lasted only two days but it was long enough to freeze the flowers. This was followed by heavy winds and power outages. Fortunately, my power was only out for a few hours so no harm was done to the Vireyas in the greenhouse.

I am seriously considering installing lights in my greenhouse for use during the winter months. My greenhouse receives very little sunlight during the winter due to cloud cover and the over one hundred foot tall trees on my property lines. My hope is that lights would increase the bud set and increase the frequency of blooms. With some exceptions, most of my species as well as hybrids bloom only once a year and remain almost dormant during some of the winter months. If somebody has had the same problems and has experimented with lights, I would appreciate hearing from them.

Right now, two of my favorite Vireyas, *R. Ne Plus Ultra* and *R. loranthiflorum*, are in full bloom on my porch. *Ne Plus Ultra* is still the most outstanding red Vireya I have seen. *Loranthiflorum*, a species, has white flowers, is a heavy bloomer and has a very pleasant scent. Both are very easy to grow and flower at an early age.

Last year, I gave a talk on growing Vireyas to the Juan De Fuca Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. Although, there was considerable interest in growing Vireyas, most felt they did not have adequate facilities for growing them during the winter months. One member had purchased a yellow flowered *R. macgregoriae* from the Species Foundation several years ago. She said it buds well every year but the flowers turn brown every year and drop off. I believe she keeps it in the house during the winter. I outlined, for her, the various reasons for buds failing to develop properly but she insisted this was not the problem. When I returned home I reviewed my records on my yellow flowered *R. macgregoriae*s. To my surprise I found that mine, grown in a greenhouse, were behaving the same except I always have some bloom. I would be interested in knowing if others are having the same problem with the yellows and have been able to correct this problem. I have several plants of pink flowered *R. macgregoriae* grown on from cuttings taken on Mt. Yakopimanda in PNG. These plants are very floriferous and never have any problems. They bloom once a year.

Rooting Vireya cuttings is usually a simple task and most any method is satisfactory, although obtaining an adequate rooting system can be a problem. However, some of the species are almost next to impossible to root using standard methods.

The method below maybe a solution to these problems. I am going try it on some of my-slow-to root species and will let you know how it turns out. Perhaps some of you have already tried it and will let me know the results.

PACIFIC HORTICULTURE: (Spring 1995) "Exposing cuttings to a combination of hot water (49 degrees C for ten minutes (120.2°F)) followed by a basal treatment of .8 percent indole butyric acid (IBA) produced greater root length and weight than when plants were untreated or exposed to only one of the treatments. Plants tested in Hawaii included Plumeria 'Donald Angus', Dracaena fragrans 'Masangeana', D. deremensis 'Warneckii' and 'Janet Craig' and Gardenia jasminoides. All respond to the treatment. In addition to enhancing rooting, the treatment stimulated numbers of shoots on Anthurium andraenum 'Maria Seefurth', Codiaeum variegatum pictum, Dracaena marginata, D. fragrans, Cordyline terminalis, and plumerias. Hort Technology 4(2):159-62"

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