

# VIREYA VINE

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SPECIES FOUNDATION

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E. White Smith, Editor

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*I often wonder if you Viners are interested in the above information. When I ask about it I usually get a yes answer. It is my belief that we are interested in who is growing Vireyas and where they live. Maybe you know some of these people and might want to contact them. If you need address or phone numbers I have them, just ask. You might also be interested in how financing is working with the Vine. The list of people above contributed \$426. Four of them sent in \$50. Five sent from \$25 to \$30. Seven sent \$20 and the rest \$10. Yes some people were just getting caught up from past years, but all believe the Vine is very important and like to support it. Thanks to you all. Fran and I really value your support.*

**Books:** Here is some more new information being printed about Vireya Rhododendrons.

A new book with a chapter about Vireyas is **“Growing Rhododendrons”** by Richard Francis. Published in Australia. It has a good list of 33 species and their descriptions. And almost 100 hybrids. I got my copy over the Internet from Amazon.com for about \$20US. ISBN = 0 86417 898 0

A great reference to the species is **“The Rhododendron Handbook, 1998”** from the Royal Horticultural Society. The Vireya section was written by our friend George Argent at the Edinburgh Botanic Garden. It has semi-technical descriptions of the species in cultivation. George also has included many color photos of Vireyas. The RSF has this in their gift shop for \$59.95US. Members get a 10% discount. ISBN # 1 874431 63 9

My wife Lucie and I have published a new work **“Vireya Rhododendrons, An Anthology of Articles From the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society 1954 – 1998”** by E. White Smith and Lucie Sorensen-Smith. 240 pages with about 95 articles. A few color photos, up-to-date species list, plus maps and distribution list. Lots of great stuff. We are selling this for \$20US mailed anywhere in the world. Outside of the USA it will go by slow boat but the postage cost is right. ISBN # 0 9629578 9 5

Our address is E. White Smith (make checks out to)  
1737 SW Coronado  
Portland, Oregon 97219 USA

Phone 503-244-9341 or 1-800 435-9250 or E-mail [bovees@teleport.com](mailto:bovees@teleport.com)

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Some News: Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust garden in New Zealand is getting a new Conservatory to be added to the Covered Walk. This will make more room for the Vireyas to grow. Hope to hear more about this.

There may be a special meeting of Vireya nuts from around the world, courtesy of the Hawaii Chapter, American Rhododendron Society on the Big Island in Jan/Feb 2000.

International Rhododendron Conference: Melbourne, Australia. October 12-15 2000. More to come on this.

From Lindsay Davies  
Dear Vireya Vine,

Palmerston North, New Zealand  
February 1999

I feel a bit guilty for not responding to your requests for contributions to Vireya Vine over the years. But the fact is that Sue and I are best described as supporters rather than doers in the wonderful world of vireyas. We have a 9 acre property devoted to temperate zone Rhododendrons of which we have thousands (we are into plant breeding and collecting species). We keep about 40 vireyas in pots for a winter flower display in our conservatory. We are not really into vireyas because we are in a medium frost area in central NZ (North Island) and winter frost temperatures here are about 2 or 3 degrees Celsius, too cold for vireyas. As we need most of our winter greenhouse space for raising temperate Rhododendrons we are unable to keep a big collection of vireyas in the greenhouse.

Our 40 vireyas are a combination of easy, reliable, old favorites (e.g. *R. laetum*, Silken Shimmer, Java Light) and new hybrids (e.g. Peach Glow, Christopher John) which we buy in from four NZ vireya nurseries and pot on as they grow in size. Our experience with vireyas is that they are easy to grow and flower and we do not seem to have the adventures/misadventures reported by some correspondents to the Vireya Vine.

In case you are interested, our vireya management is as follows: the plants spend 'winter' (the six coolest months) in an unheated twin-skinned plastic greenhouse which is sufficient to keep the frost out, and spend 'summer' (the six warmest months) in a shadehouse under 40% shade. In winter the plants get occasional hand watering as required, while in summer the plants get automatic overhead mist irrigation four times daily. We use a very free draining potting mix of 50/50 pumice/peat, with the pumice consisting of a 50/50 mixture of 7 mm and 3 mm particle sizes. Fertilizers incorporated in the potting mix are just a standard recipe from the temperate Rhododendron trade. Osmocote is applied to pots twice a year (a small handful per plant each time for big plants). These cultural conditions for vireyas are essentially the same as what we use for raising our temperate Rhododendron seedlings, grafts and cuttings; i.e. we don't have any special deals for the vireyas. As the vireyas come into flower in autumn/winter we take them into the conservatory room in our house, and with the temperate Rhododendrons flowering outdoors for about 6 months we have flowers most of the year.

PS

Several people have told me about the extra cold on the US west coast this winter. I hope that the vireyas come through OK. In NZ we are still in a summer that is

warmer than usual and many regions are now experiencing dry crops, restrictions on water use, fire alerts, etc., with no end in sight. On top of it all there was a very brief snow fall in hot, dry parts of the South Island a few weeks ago so the weather is really mixed up. Hopefully we will be back to normal by mid winter.

Lindsay Davies  
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New Zealand  
E-mail [gardiner.davies@ztra.co.nz](mailto:gardiner.davies@ztra.co.nz)

From Bill Moyles  
Dear VV,

Oakland, California  
February 24, 1999

E-mail message from [wmoyles@pacbell.net](mailto:wmoyles@pacbell.net)

In San Francisco last week (Friday) Karen Morebeck passed away. She will be missed. She, along with Jack Spring at Strybing Arboretum, kept Vireyas going during a period when all could have been lost. Through her efforts there were always Vireya plant sales and countless Vireyas have been distributed. She made a contribution to Vireya culture at Strybing that continues. You never know what will turn up! Fortunately, she never met a Vireya that she didn't like.

From Hansjorg Brentel  
Dear Vireya Vine,

Austria  
April 1999

Trip to the rhododendrons of Irian Jaya

A few years ago I happened to receive information about the "Vireya" species from the American Rhododendron Society. Because I could not find any literature concerning Vireyas in Austria, I asked the German Rhododendron Society for help. Mr. Eduard Moser of Chemnitz, Germany was very helpful. He said that in an Australian and New Zealand book about rhododendrons I could find some useful information.

By accident-I found "*Rhododendrons in Indonesia*" written by Dr. Sleumer in Holland. Since my wife and I always liked hiking and traveling, we decided to spend our holidays on the various islands of Indonesia.

Our first trip was to Mt. Kinabalu in Borneo, where we had difficulties finding the plants we were looking for in the lush green of the mountain forests. It

was an unforgettable experience to see *R. lowii* in full bloom. Trips to Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi and Papua New Guinea followed. In doing so we obtained a good general overview of the islands. Finally in January 1999, we made it to Irian Jaya/New Guinea, an area that is home to about 160 different species, a “Vireya dreamland”.

After 40 hours of exhausting traveling we finally got to Jayapura, where we went through all the formalities necessary for a flight to the highlands. The next day we flew in a Fokker aircraft to Wamena in the Baliem Valley. This very wide valley situated at a height of 1,600 m, at the foot of Mt. Trikora (4,760 m) offers a wide variety of trekking tours. Our goal was Lake Habemma, which is located at a height of 3,200 m. It is home to a lot of small growing rhododendron species, among them “*caespitosum*” the smallest of them all. We were very disappointed to learn that Lake Habemma has been closed for tourists since a hijack took place a few years ago. The bribe demanded by the police was beyond our means.

Paul Smith from the Royal Botanic garden, Edinburgh, wrote about the Vireyas in the Ibele Valley in the *RHS Yearbook of 1994*. This is why we decided to change our route and organized guides and carriers for our new destination. The Baliem Valley, which was first discovered in 1938, has still remained quite untouched. The men of the tribes “Danis” and “Lanis” are mostly naked, only wearing a peniscane. For this reason our carriers are also mostly naked. We started our trip after a short car ride to the Ibele Valley from where we want to get to the Dani village, Tailarek, in 2 days. The Dani tribe does not only cultivate the valleys but also the steep hills of the surrounding mountains. They grow sweet potatoes, bananas, sugarcane, peas, beans and tobacco.

Our carriers cooked rice and vegetables for lunch in the shade of the trees at the river. On a strong branch above the river I counted 10 different orchids, among them a *Dendrobium* species with hairy yellow panicles. After lunch we climbed higher and higher up the mountain, and I try to discover the first vireyas in the deserted fields. Rhododendrons grow very quickly in the deserted fields, but so far we have not seen any. We camp in the teacher’s house in Ibele.

The next morning we spot the first yellow blossoms of *R. macgregoriae*, which are very common here. A few 100 meters further up we see a huge rhododendron (3 meters high) with big leaves and new felty brown shoots. A little later we also find the blossoms, which have a diameter of 12 cm, some have a pink spot inside, others are completely white, *R. superbum*. It is a great view and the smell is breathtaking. Hundreds of them are growing in bright sunshine, they are bushy and in great shape. A little higher up we find the white trumpet-like blossoms of *R. inundatum*. In between them are a lot of natural hybrids of all different forms. It is very hot and the sun is burning down from the blue cloudless sky. We get to a meadow where the grass is ½ a meter high.

It is covered with *R. maius*. Among the many sweet smelling white blossoms I was also able to discover a pink blooming species.

We nearly overlooked a species with small leaves, which was growing up to 2 m with red 2 cm long tube-like blossoms. Maybe it is *R. vitis idaea*, which is known to grow in this area. I am not a botanist and it is hard to identify all the different species of rhododendrons in this natural environment. We crossed a little brook with crystal clear water, which springs from the rhododendron forest.

A little bit higher up I discover another kind of rhododendron, whose leaves are a little bit smaller than those of the *superbum* and which has big white, very intensely smelling blossoms. Maybe it is the *R. gardenia*, which was discovered here about 50 years ago? After a 2 hour hike we get to the village, Tailarek. On the way we come across a lot of *R. macgregoriae*.

Our carriers often sing a rhythmical song that is answered from the opposite side of the valley. We crossed the river Bele with the help of a suspension bridge made out of lianas. We spent the night in the house of the teacher next to the village church. The majority of the Danis are Christians. The next day we return to Wamena and take cuttings from different plants. After one day of relaxation we organize a taxi and try once more to get to Lake Habemma.

A little bit outside of Wamena, on the softly rising hills, we find a rhododendron with white trumpet-like blossoms and brown stamens. It has round oval leaves, but we cannot identify the species. Thousands of them grow here together with *macgregoriae*. We drive for about 1 hour on a gravel road towards the lake. Then we get out of the car and hike for 2 hours. Suddenly we see *R. haematophthalmum* with 5-6 cm long, lightly red and inclined blossoms in full bloom. We tried to get into the forest which is not an easy enterprise because of dead trees, bushes and moss are all over the floor. We found a small trail, but on some parts we sink deep in the moldy ground. Rhododendrons 3 meters high with red blossoms grow everywhere between the trees.

In a bright spot in the forest we see a beautiful bushy plant, which is about 30 cm high. It is *R. wrightianum* with crimson hanging blossoms and dark green leaves. It is very hot and our guide tells us that it did not rain in the Baliem Valley last year.

I think of the rhododendrons in my greenhouse, which I keep very cold in the winter at only 8+ degrees during the night. Here at a height of 2,000 m the temperature never falls below 20+, even during the night. The sky gets cloudy and it started to rain for the first time in 6 days. However, we have to return to Wamena.

After a short bathing trip to Biak, an island in New Guinea, we return to Austria with a lot of seeds in our luggage. We hope that a few of our cuttings take root so that we have a memory of our trip to Irian Jaya.

Hansjorg Brentel  
Schloglstrasse 30  
6060 Hall in Tirol  
AUSTRIA

Wow, with his letter to the Vine, Hansjorg sent along four photos of a few plants found on this trip. One photo showed a -- large plant with roundish leaves and a shiny leaf top, he wrote *R. superbum* on the back but Lucie and I have never seen one like that. *Superbum* usually has lots of dark scales on the leaf top. Maybe they have been washed off by heavy rain? The other plant in that photo he labeled *vitis idea* and we think he is right. Another photo showed a exciting white flowered plant that we do not know(*R. inundatum*), but would sure like to meet someday. A third picture was of what they called *R. macgregoriae* and it probably is but looks different in the photo from what we know. Great stuff though. His last photo is of *R. haematophthalmum*, another species that we have never seen.

Now we want to know how he grows his plants in Austria, how many he has and where he gets them from. Is there a source of *Vireyas* in Europe? Also I think that Viners would be interested in the problems getting into some of the native *Vireya* countries.

Every one of you Viners should be ordering seed from Bill Moyles. There are sometimes new species and many hybrids offered by Bill's seed exchange. You must write to him to get his list. Also think about sending him some seed to distribute. Learn how to "hand pollinate" in order to produce good seed.

Bill Moyles -*Vireya* seed exchange 4243 Norton Ave., Oakland, CA 94602-

E-mail      [wmoyles@pacbell.net](mailto:wmoyles@pacbell.net)

You must write to Bill to get seed. He has very good seed and really needs to give it away. (Free outside the USA)

## **VIREYA NURSERIES**

**The Bovees Nursery (Lucie Sorensen-Smith)**  
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