

VIREYA VINE

ISSUE #66, JULY 2002

PUBLISHED BY THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE RHODODENDRON SPECIES
FOUNDATION

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E. White Smith, Editor

From Ray Steele
Dear Vireya Vine,

Devon, England
February 2001

My wife and I have just returned from New Zealand (an annual visit to see the family) but it also presents an opportunity to see vireyas, of course. In fact, a stopover in Malaysia to break the journey enabled us to see some vireyas growing in the Cameron Highlands. Here they were growing under pretty humid conditions at the top of vertical banks created by road building.

I was reminded that E.F. Allen lived and worked in the Cameron Highlands before returning to Britain where he continued to grow vireyas and gives an account of his methods and recommendations on which to grow in an article in 'The Plantsman' vol. I Part I, June 1979.

In New Zealand we visited John Kenyon (whose book set me off on the vireya trail) and David Brown. Both of these nurserymen were growing vireyas to mouth-watering perfection. As Peter Cox says in Vireya Vine 64, light levels play an important part in vireya's flowering and one is aware of the sun's intensity when in New Zealand. However, there may well be an element of "horses for courses" as no doubt, some will do better than others in reduced light conditions. Certainly here in a dull and drizzly North Devon, 'Pink Seedling' has been covered with flowers for two or three weeks now. However, no doubt latitude and day length has a part to play. Nevertheless Veitch in the last century was writing "we have shown vireyas in flower at every one of the fortnightly Westminster shows this year".

Most untypically we encountered a good deal of rain and cold in various parts of New Zealand. We found Dunedin extremely cold (we were even driven to see Lord of the Rings on one cold wet morning!). On visiting Gavin and Daphne Clark we were treated to a wonderful display of vireya species. These were all being grown outside though some protection was being given at times, as required. As we left shivering in the icy blasts, I could not but think "if this is Dunedin's summer, what is it like in winter and perhaps I should try some vireyas outdoors here in North Devon!"

Heading Northwards to warmer climes we paid a visit to Dr. Melva Philipson whose interest is vireya species and who expressed concern at the threat to the continued survival of some species. As every gardener knows the best way to ensure that you do not lose a treasured plant is to propagate and give them away so that when you lose it you can get a replacement. Shouldn't this apply to threatened vireya species?

By one of those happy strange coincidences, we found ourselves staying in accommodation next door to David Binney and so we were treated to a truly remarkable collection of vireyas, mostly species and some of considerable stature, growing I suspect more strongly than they do in nature. Someone will no doubt be able to tell me whether this is indeed the case. Do vireyas respond to TLC?

The Rhodo' 02 Conference at Edinburgh May has a generous helping of vireya talk and I am hoping to meet others with the bug from wherever they may come.

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From Fran Rutherford

Port Orchid, Washington

Dear VV,

March 2002

If you have a computer and have not yet joined the Yahoo vireya group, I suggest you give it a try. Lots of good information on growing vireyas, photos and opinions. Also it is free. A recent discussion on potting mixtures and fertilizers for container vireyas was very interesting. Obviously, there is no one best mixture or fertilizer and if you are happy with your current mixture and fertilizer, there is no real reason to change. For those who do not have access to a computer, the following information may be of help.

In the past, the standard mix at the "The Royal Botanic Garden" (Edinburgh, Scotland) has been 60% quality peat, 25% fine bark and 15% chunky bark. The size of the bark varies thumbnail size to fines. Bark is one quarter thick or less. To this mixture they added magnesium limestone (240 gms per 1/10 m³ {cubic meter} and fritted trace elements (60 gms per 1/10 m³). They are now going to an all bark mixture. They fertilize every two weeks with Vitafeed 1-1-1.

The standard mix for all rhododendron at the "Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust" (New Zealand) is one part sterilized loam, one part peat and one part untreated pine sawdust for all rhododendrons. A standard 5-5-5-crop fertilizer is added plus a small amount of trace elements and dolomite. For vireyas, the only major differences are in the container rather than the mix. Species, which are totally epiphytic, are grown in a non-soil mix.

The Standard mix at the "Rhododendron Species Foundation" (Seattle, Washington) is two parts pumice, two parts chunky peat moss and one part medium orchard bark. They fertilize with Miracid 30-10-10. Miracid has the advantage of increasing soil acidity and all nitrogen is derived from ammoniacal nitrogen and urea nitrogen.

"Pacific Island Nursery" (Hilo, Hawaii) uses a mixture of coconut chips and a coarse grade of perlite in a ratio of 7:1 or 5:1. Using this mixture, they obtain exceptional root growth in six months. They top dress (fertilize) with Nutracote 13-13-13 with minors which is a time release fertilizer. Once a month they apply a 5-1-1 fish or seaweed fertilizer with a sprayer.

"Bovees Nursery" (Portland, Oregon) uses a mixture of 1 part coarse peat, 1 part perlite, 1 part Oregon pumice, 1 part orchid bark (very clean bark with no fines), plus some coconut chips. They also add some "Super-Sorb which is a water absorbent copolymer. Bovees mixes its own fertilizer. It is based on organic nitrogen (canola seed meal and alfalfa meal) plus all of the other

ingredients of a complete fertilizer including trace elements. They recommend applying this fertilizer three time a year.

For years, "Southern California Rhododendron Chapter" recommended a standard mix of 1/3 coarse peat, 1/3 fir bark and 1/3 perlite.

A sampling of other successful growers follows. Chip Lima (San Francisco) potting mix is 33% ½ inch red lava, 33% 1 to 2 inch fir bark chunks and 33% potting soil or rhododendron mix. Chris Callard (UK) uses 70% fine bark and 30% peat. Bill Moyles (San Francisco) mix is 1 part coconut chips ½ inch, 1 part coconut chips ¼ inch, 1 part fine fir orchard bark, 1 part medium perlite, 1 part horticulture perlite, 1 part pumice and one part milled sphagnum moss. Dick Chaikin (Florida) potting mix is 50% pine mini nuggets, 30% volcanic rocks and 30% peat. Jesse Dela (Southern California) mix is 1/3 perlite and 2/3 peat.

It is obvious that Vireyas can be successfully grown in a wide variety of mixes. In my trip to Papua New Guinea in 1986, I observed Vireyas growing extremely well on rotting logs, in fresh running water with almost no soil (not outstanding plants but they were quite old) and *R. commonae* growing on raised tussocks in the Kain Swamp.

I have used most all the fertilizers listed above with excellent results. It is essential that whatever fertilizer you use that it contains all the necessary trace elements. My best results have been obtained with a combination of frequent foliar feeding (1/4 strength) during the growing season and a base fertilizer in pots. Research by Robert Ticknor at Oregon State University indicated, at least for standard rhododendrons, that a fertilizer formulated with slow release nitrogen with a descending ratio of N.P.G. such as 10-6-4 was most beneficial. Work done by Dr. George Ryan at the Washington State Experimental Station in Puyallup, Washington has shown that adequate nitrogen is very important for flower bud formation

Far more important than mix or fertilizer, is mastering the art of watering. Vireyas will not tolerate over-watering or a soggy mix. When I water, I add water until it comes out the bottom of the pot. I do not water again, until the mix is slightly damp to the touch. If the water flows down uniformly through the mix, I am happy. If the water puddles or flows only down the sides of the pot, I then know I have a watering problem or a root bound problem.

Fran Rutherford
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From Graham Snell
Dear Vireya Vine,

Maleny, Queensland, Australia.
April, 2002

Graham Price's letter has raised a couple of points in my mind which may be of general interest, hence my writing to the VV rather than a more direct approach within Australia. Firstly the control of Rhododendron Rust. I, also, was plagued with rust on the Vireyas while in Melbourne, but the move some 2000Km. to the North solved that problem. Obviously the warmer climate did the trick as I have not seen any sign of Rust since the move. Incidentally, that just about goes for Powdery Mildew too. I have only seen that once in Queensland, in a very dry situation where the Vireyas were very neglected.

The obvious conclusion is that Rust is a cold weather problem, or cold and wet, where as Powdery Mildew is a summer problem, with hot, dry weather predominating.

Vireyas, in their natural habitat, enjoy the reverse, ie. the hot weather is usually wet, and the cooler weather, dry! Incidentally, while in Melbourne, I used "Copper Curit", (or copper oxychloride) with quite good success against Rust.

The move to Queensland has not been entirely without its problems, and this is where someone out there might be able to help. The warm to hot and wet summers, combined with over head watering, has led to a high incidence of Petal Blight. This, I had no trouble controlling with a liquid form of Bayleton, but that has, apparently, been withdrawn from the Australian market. A less concentrated powdered form is available, but this is only partially effective, and the necessary frequent use leads to a white deposit on the leaves, and can dull the appearance of the flowers also, (not good for displaying, or selling). Other recommended chemicals, Triflorine, and Mancozeb are not effective. Can anyone suggest a better method of control of Petal Blight, other than moving back to Melbourne, that is?

Graham Snell

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Does anyone know why liquid Bayleton was withdrawn from the market in Australia? Don't think we ever had it in liquid form in the USA. We use the granular form dissolved in water. EWS

From Lyn Craven

Melba A. C. T., Australia

March 2002

Note:: It probably is not customary for a newsletter like the Vireya Vine to print obituaries, but John Rouse was a very important person in the Vireya Rhododendron world. I think that the information in this short story of his life is interesting and educational. E. White Smith, VV Editor

John Layton Rouse

Physicists, biologists, financiers and horticulturalists were among those gathered in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia on Wednesday 20 March 2002 to give thanks for the life of John Rouse and extend their sympathy to his family. Such was the diversity of his interests and achievements that John could well be said to have simultaneously led several full lives without appearing to stretch himself.

John was born on 21 April 1925 and grew up in Melbourne. He left school in 1943 and joined the Royal Australian Air Force where he was given training in the early radar technology of the time and, at the age of 18, was posted to a radar unit in north Queensland. Not content with only doing his bit in the armed forces, in his spare time John completed the three years of a university Mathematics degree so that upon discharge at the end of the war he was able to rapidly obtain his Honours degree. His strong interest in physical matters led him to complete a Master of Science degree in 1952.

Physics then dominated his academic work and John took the lead in the team that designed and built the world's first Variable Energy Cyclotron.

His degree of Doctor of Philosophy was awarded in 1957 and the then Dr Rouse joined the permanent staff of the Physics School of the University of Melbourne. John remained in Physics until his retirement. He was an outstanding academic and a good teacher and respected supervisor of graduate students.

John followed his father in becoming a trustee of the Baker Foundation, a philanthropic foundation that gives significant support to medical research at the University of Melbourne. (Such was his dedication to science and the advancement of knowledge that John gave his body for medical research). John was influential in having the Baker Foundation broaden its scope into other biological areas and the Foundation is now a primary supporter of the Australian Research Centre for Urban Ecology, a centre that John played a key role in establishing.

His expertise in horticulture and science fitted him well for becoming a trustee of the Maud Gibson Gardens Trust, a trust which supports activities at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

In the 1960s John developed a particular interest in the genus *Rhododendron* and he became a specialist in sect. *Vireya* species, which thrived in his Toorak garden. Given his enquiring mind, perhaps it was inevitable that his passion for rhododendrons would become entwined with his curiosity. He kept meticulous records of the numerous experiments that he conducted into seed germination, potting media, hybridisation, grafting compatibility, and so on. His imaginative propagation units, perhaps best described as high-tech versions of Wardian Cases, have been adopted by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, where they are known as “Rouse Houses”. John’s *Order of Australia* award was made in recognition of his contribution to horticulture.

John’s personal academic world of physical science in the School of Physics underwent a metamorphosis as a result of his exposure to the intricate and often microscopic, structures found in plants and emerged as the Botanical Physics unit. In particular, he investigated phyllotaxis, the spatial arrangement of leaves and floral organs, and their initiation and growth on the primordium. Such studies have relevance to crystallography and the development of new materials for use in semiconductors, etc.

The research collaborations that John developed with biologists in the university’s Botany School were particularly productive. The team’s investigations into pollen tube growth and fertilisation were conducted upon John’s extensive collection of potted *Vireyas* and resulted in an impressive stream of published papers. While I have not enquired about John’s publications in physics and mathematics, I am sure he would have been similarly responsible in publishing the results of his work. It is his extraordinarily prolific writing in the fields of horticulture and biology that is of concern to us rhododendrophiles. John was the sole or co-author of over 70 articles involving rhododendrons, over 30 of which are meritorious for their impact in their respective disciplines, mainly in the field of reproductive biology but ranging from grafting and seed raising studies to phyllotaxis. When editing and checking has been completed, a list of his *Rhododendron* publications will be accessible on the *Vireya* web site maintained by Chris Callard (<http://www.vireya.net/>).

John was a philanthropist in his own right, contributing funds to provide study facilities for Physics students at the University of Melbourne and to support a research project on *Vireya* rhododendrons.

While this brief sketch of the life of John has mentioned his professional and horticultural activities, there was even more to the man than this. John was a great family man; his wife Clare and their four children, and their grandchildren, were very dear to him. Family skiing and camping trips, Royal Tennis and Lawn Tennis, music, and reading were some of the other important aspects of his private life.

John's generosity in sharing the results of his *Vireya* hybridising freely around the world, in giving cuttings from his plants to fellow enthusiasts, in suffering frequent visitors who came to learn about rhododendrons are evidence of the person within. His respect for others, friendliness, sense of humour, and honesty in discussions are qualities he demonstrated consistently. Visits to Melbourne were never complete without a visit to John Rouse; one came away with more than just scions of interesting plants.

Towards the end of his life, John was suffering from two serious conditions, Parkinson's Disease and Myelodysplasia, both of which he managed with courage and good humour. He never showed any bitterness at his grim situation and continued as long as he was physically capable in making observations and measurements of phyllotaxis, using the equipment he had constructed in his own well-equipped workshop. He died on 13 March 2002 after being in hospital for about a week.

His infectious smile, his incredibly twinkling eyes, and the goodwill that manifestly emanated from him, will be fondly remembered by his friends whenever they are out among *Vireya* rhododendrons.

Lyn Craven
Canberra, ACT
Australia

Reg Pohlmann, of Devon England passed away in early July. Reg had a letter in VV 65 and was the personal Vireya propagator for John Bodenham in southern England (now John will have to root his own cuttings). They had been friends for years. When Reg became quite sick, John picked up all of Reg's Vireyas and took them to his home to care for them. As the plants bloomed John would take cut trusses to show Reg. A good Vireya grower and a great gardener gone to the big potting shed in the sky. RIP Reg.

In May, my wife Lucie Sorensen-Smith and I went to the Rhododendron Conference in Edinburgh Scotland. It was held at the Royal Botanic Garden. Dr. George Argent and Dr. David Chamberlain did a great job putting on a very educational program. About 200 people from around the world attended. There were special identification training sessions both before and after the formal sessions. During the Conference we spent many hours in the Vireya collection, both the collection growing greenhouse and the Tropical display house. WOW. What a great collection of species Vireyas. The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, is the world authority for the Rhododendron genus, which includes the Section Vireya. We were allowed free access to the collection-growing house and many of us got a lot of good photos of plants in bloom. We saw many species that we had only known the names of before and probably never expected to see.

The real highlight for us was the Tropical Display House where the public is welcome. There were many of tropical plants in is display house but the emphasis is on Vireya Rhododendrons. They were planted in the landscape in Subsection groups, all labeled and looking very healthy. There were colorful graphics explaining each subsection. No hybrids, all species. Well not all. As you entered through the door, growing on a moss-covered branch overhead was a blooming plant of R. Lucie Sorensen. John Rouse made the cross in Australia. Fran Rutherford grew the seed on and gave me a plant. I named it (R. Lucie Sorensen) for my soon to be wife. We gave George Argent a rooted cutting when he was in Portland, Oregon a few years ago. I bet George is still chuckling.

The RBGE is a wonderful garden. The hardy rhododendron species are laid out in landscaped groups (big landscaped groups) and every plant has a label. Even though we have a large collection of hardy species at the Rhododendron Species Foundation we saw species at Edinburgh that we were not familiar with. Great stuff for us species nuts.

The famous rock garden must surely be one of the best in the world. It includes many dwarf species from around the world. And the level of maintenance is first class

After the Edinburgh Conference we went on to the Chelsea Flower Show in London accompanied by Fran Rutherford. No Vireyas there but a great show. Met Dick and Karen Cavender at Chelsea. 80,000 people there and we meet 3 people we know. Small world. The next morning our good friend Chris Callard picked us up in his car and drove us to Chris Fairweathers Nursery south of London and very near Exbury Gardens. Fairweather is the holder of the Vireya Hybrid collection for the UK. He had a lot of plants and they look quite good. John Bodenham joined us at Fairweathers and went with us on to Exbury. Fairweather rents a very large new greenhouse from Exberry to grow his other nursery crops. In this greenhouse he also has a large group of Vireyas that he is hoping to sell wholesale. Nice looking plants and a very good selection. After Exbury John and his wife Margaret took us to their home near Plymouth for a few days rest. John also has a good collection of Vireyas and other Rhododendrons. Lucie, who loves greenhouses, spent a day playing and working in Johns greenhouse. They live in a very old house that at one time was a hunters cottage for a big estate. They have completely refinished the inside of the house and have a great piece of property looking out over the countryside and 60 acres of forest.

The Vireya Vine is financed by its subscribers. The only things you pay for are printing and postage. Fran Rutherford and I and my wife Lucie, do the work for the love of it. We do not have an annual subscription fee. Your mailing label will have a year date on it, which is the last time you contributed to the Vine. We welcome your contributions. You can use your credit card to make payments to the RSF for the Vine.

We print this list because we think people are interested in who is getting the VV and growing the plants. We say Washington State so that you do not confuse it with the US capital. **Remember that a letter to the Vine gets you a free subscription upgrade.**

New subscribers or recent contributors since issue #64 are:

Allan Anderson	New Jersey	Howard Oliver	California
Paul Anderson	California	Don Paden	Illinois
Gregory Andrews	California	Reg Pohlmann RIP	England
Robert Batts	Florida	Graham Price	Australia
Matthew Brimberry	Georgia	Danny Prichard	California
Margaret de Weese	Canada	Fred Renich	California
Daniel Dorsey	California	Fran Rutherford	Washington State
Don Dulac	California	Hans Sauter	Washington State
Alma Edwards	England	Hartwig Schepker	Germany
Chris Fairweather	England	Graham Snell	Australia
Hank Helm	Washington State	Joan Steele	Oregon
Mark Jury	New Zealand	Ray Steele	England
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Chip Lima	California	Peter Stevens	Missouri
James McKechnie	California	Peter Vaillancourt	California
Ruby Miyashiro	Hawaii	Julia Westhoff	Germany
Sonja Nelson	Washington State		
Brian & Jan Oldham	New Zealand		

Some interesting Internet sites

The Bovees Nursery (Lucie Sorensen-Smith)
1737 SW Coronado (E. White Smith)
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Catalogue is \$2.00 (Mail Order)

Glendoick Gardens (Kenneth & Peter Cox)
Glendoick, Perth Mail Order
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