

VIREYA VINE

ISSUE #70, September 2003

PUBLISHED BY THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE RHODODENDRON SPECIES
FOUNDATION

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E. White Smith, Editor

From Mitch Mitchell

August 2, 2002

Dear VV,

Volcano, Hawaii

Hey, E. White, you probably don't remember this but back in the 1980s when you first got me interested in Vireyas, I did whatever research was possible at the time, re media, fertilizer, watering etc. etc. etc. At some point, and I have forgotten what button was pressed, a light came on for me. Everyone who had written so knowledgeably in the Vireya Vine was talking growing Vireyas in containers for the obvious reason that they had no other choice. So from that point on, I selected just the bits of information that I might try along with my technique of growing the plants in the ground.

Before going any farther I must hasten to add that I have great admiration for the successes so many container gardeners have growing Vireyas, but this letter is not for them. I quickly admit to a lousy record in growing Vireyas in pots. I get them out of the pots as quickly as I think they have a good root system and get them planted in to an outdoor bed. I used to put them on top of our wonderful volcanic, humusy soil and build it up around the roots of the plant. Now I create a bed with tree fern logs and fill it with a mix of 1/2 and 1/2, medium fine black cinder and mulch of ground up tree fern fronds. That mixture provides the drainage so important when dealing with large amounts of rain which can amount to 24 inches in 24 hours. When asked how much our annual rainfall is I usually say between 170 and 240 inches (20 feet or 6.6 meters), and quickly I must add that the later doesn't happen too often.

That much rain can drop the nutrients in the soil down to lower levels in short order, so fertilizing is done when necessary to replace what the soil has lost. What kind of fertilizer? For some time I have been happy with one that comes from Oregon that we call "Blue Chip". Not only does it have the trace elements that our soils need, but it is "moisture released". In our rain forest we don't get enough warmth to suggest the use of one of the heat release products.

Mitch Mitchell Jr.

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Volcano, Hi 96785

For any of you who do not know Mitch; probably 20 years ago he wrote to me and wondered if I could send him some large leaf Vireya cuttings. So I sent him a box and he was off and running from then on. Then in 1996 Mitch, Dick Chaikin and I spent a month in the UK looking for Vireyas. Really we were visiting the UK for a month and visiting Rhododendron gardens and looking for Vireyas. We didn't find many Vireyas but got to be good friends. One question Mitch had for me is "why should a person living in Hawaii belong to the American Rhododendron Society". I did not have a good answer but told him the any information about Rhodies was useful and the ARS Journal was very good. I also encouraged Mitch to start a Chapter of the ARS on the Big Island (Hawaii). Well, Mitch did and the Hawaii Chapter has been the fastest growing of all Chapters of the American Rhododendron Society. Needless to say "Vireya Rhododendrons are alive and well in Hawaii". The people in Hawaii have developed their own special way of growing the plants. EWS

E-mail from Chip Lima in Scotland. Chip was a Vireya grower in San Francisco, but has now moved to the UK.

From Chip Lima
Dear Vireya Vine,

July 8, 2003
Stirlingshire, Scotland

Well here I am living in Scotland. I am doing well and enjoying all that is new. I did send some of my Vireyas over from SF, I washed the roots and dipped the plants into a 20% solution of bleach. Once here I repotted them and kept them in a too hot house for three months. Despite the bleach treatment I had a terrible infestation of thrips. I lost about 50% of the plants. My survivors are now in the greenhouse at Brechin Castle, home of the Dalhousie family. I am manager of the Brechin Castle Garden Center. There are some great old, as in 100+ year old Rhodies and ericaceous plants in the gardens. Wild collected from the old days. Plus the garden is very beautiful. I don't work there though I am across the street and down the road at the new Garden Centre. I didn't know the difference between garden centres and nurseries until I came here to this job. A nursery is just plants, a garden centre is entertainment for families with issues around horticulture, eating, country life, and in our case the Pic's culture of NE Scotland. Different.

Back to Vireyas. I've got several crops of seedlings coming along. Almost all of them are hybrids with *R. commonae* and *saxifragoides*. They are doing better here for me than in California, at least in the juvenile stages. We'll see how it goes as the seedlings are so slow.

One of the great things about being here is I can pop into the Vireya peat house at the RBGE (Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh) when ever I like and I've had some enjoyable visits with George Argent. Otherwise, there is nothing happening with Vireyas here. The Scottish Rhododendron Society is very friendly and knowledgeable and between them and the Scottish Rock Garden Society I could be constantly busy. Wish I had more time.

Chip Lima
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Many of you don't know it but Chip was a Landscape Architect in San Francisco and he also helped care for the Vireya garden that Pete Sullivan started at Pete's church. A great garden with what must be the biggest and oldest Vireyas in America. Now Danny Prichard watches after the garden. Thanks to both Chip and Danny and to Pete Sullivan.

From Bill Moyles
Dear Vireya Vine,

July 16, 2003
Oakland, California

I felt it was about time to bring folks up-to-date with respect to the Vireya Garden at Lakeside Park. So here goes. Early this year the Lakeside Garden Center funded the construction of a new 10 by 12 foot free-standing raised (3 feet) bed in the Vireya garden. Much work filling it with ballast and bringing it up to level and then larger rock to construct "mountains", etc. It is still a work in progress but so far *R. suaveolens*, *sessilifolium*, *herzogii*, *vitis idaea* and an unnamed *phaeochitum* hybrid are growing happily. Of course this new bed meant a complicated overhead extension of our watering system. So with financial help (\$1,250) from the Center and California Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society overhead access was established and a much needed overhaul of the whole system was undertaken. We now have an elegant 3-valve automated watering system that now gives the whole garden (summer schedule) 15 minutes 3 times a week. The potential is there for installing irrigated hanging baskets. Of course this means finding someone(s) to take on the task ... I need help!

I should back up. I began developing the garden in 1995 under a \$1,000 grant from Cal Chapter and a lot of moral support ... especially from Barbara Campbell! The garden now consists of a series of raised beds, perimeter beds and various free standing beds. All this within a larger covered lath area. The full area is enclosed by a 5 foot cement block wall that is extended up to 12 feet by extruded metal lath. It is covered with similar (50% shade) metal lath. Very secure, lockable and "heavy duty". Sort of I admit "prison like" but what the heck it's there for free and they let me run the show. Oakland gets a Vireya garden and we get a secure place to show off! Over the last 6 years we have spent less than \$3,000 and have installed almost 80 Vireyas. I estimate we will top out at around 100 plants. I think we got the best of the bargain.

The (micro) climate at Lakeside (Lake Merritt, Oakland, California) is wonderful. Mild and soft with summer fog. But Oakland does experience frost ... years ago we were decimated by low 20's F, but in general Lakeside experiences less frost and the mid 30's to mid 40's is considered "cold". There has been foliage damage but one can live with that. The fact is the Vireyas have experienced no really extended cold winters yet. Perhaps a fool's paradise. Realistically I need around 6 to 8 thousand \$\$ (estimate?) to buy and install large thermostatically-controlled overhead fans. Tough to pass the hat for those dollars. One cannot look to the City of Oakland for much more than moral support. It has other priorities: drugs, murder, mayhem, potholes, schools, all that stuff. If we can beat the frost problem I would not trade our climate for any other and so far the

Vireyas seem to agree. If the Arctic Express descends before some sort of frost control is installed (I do use Cloud Cover) ... well, it's been a fun trip! Jim Gerdemann is trying to beat the odds with his new hardy commonae hybrids, but any fund raising ideas are welcome. Seriously welcome.

The plants (mostly) look wonderful and I think I have to admit to success. I attribute this to climate, consistent watering, and bed construction. Most plants grow on a two foot base of 1 inch (plus/minus) lava rock and gravel with humus (pine/fir/redwood bark) added. Some peat and pumice and extra care around individual plants. Many (hellwigii hyb, zoelleri, laetum x zoelleri, praetervisum, "Lawrence", etc.) are reaching upward of 6 and 7 feet. Goodenoughii, hellwigii x konori, hybrid leucogigas monsters are getting up there as well. It's getting crowded. Several plants that I think really look good: a 4 foot Alexandr ... an outstanding hybrid in foliage and flower; Cephas ... the monster Sullivanian leucogigas hybrid; a 6 foot rhodoleucum that hates to bloom but is marvelous in foliage; Moonstone ... Bill Moynier's best; and an outstanding foliated polyanthemum from Pukeiti seed. Also I must mention a plant that Dick Cavender gave me years ago and continues to grow and mature at Lakeside: jasminiflorum var punctatum. Outstanding. The epitome of a (potential) basket plant. Floriferous, fragrant, dense, spreading and easy. And Dick's pleione orchids are a great "companion" to Vireyas. I can't use them at Lakeside as they would immediately walk away.

My pride: three years ago I had a 5 by 8 foot raised bed built that went up 4 feet. Most beds that I inherited are only a foot off the "ground" but go down a foot or two below ground level. I then took this bed up another foot or two with moss rocks thus creating a small rocky mountain spine. The dwarfs love the rocky hillside. *R. ericoides* thrives along with saxifragoides hybrids, and "Silver Thimbles". *R. acrophilum* wanders about and a small 1 foot alborugosum will eventually need to be moved. One corner is taken over by (my favorite) a hunky phaeopeplum, and above it in the middle is *R. maius*. *R. orbiculatum* (ex Peter Schick) spills over the side and is now 20 inches or so across and a foot tall.

All plants were donated by friends or grown by myself. So many contributions: The R Species Foundation, E. White & Lucie at Bovees, Dick Cavender, Don Selcer, Jim Gerdemann, Paul Molinari, Alex Koomanoff, George Argent (RBGE), Chris Callard (www.vireya.net), Peter Schick and Peter Sullivan, Fred Renick, and the late Bill Moynier. The list goes on: Graham Smith, Richard Currie, Os Blumhardt (all New Zealand), Brian Clancy, Jack Wilson, the late John Rouse (Australian). And of course the "Hawaiian Connection": Mitch, Sherla and Richard. There are many new things coming along and hard choices to make. The purpose has been to exhibit a balance between species and hybrids ... perhaps tipping toward species.

With respect to hybrids I try to display locals ... Sullivan, Moynier, etc. Am getting a bit overloaded with hybrids ... they grow too well. There are a couple of 4 or 5 foot hybrids that need a new home if anyone is interested. They would have to be dug by the recipient and I might expect a few bags of lava, etc. in exchange! I hope by this years' end to have a plant list and bed map available. So many unfinished tasks and I periodically run

out of gas. Old age. I have finally settled on a permanent labeling system and have a new revised descriptive brochure available. This is probably the first year that I feel secure in “advertising” the garden. It’s beginning to look like something and most things are big enough so they do not “walk away”. Sadly lost was one small *R. madulidii* to some “collector”.

This letter is much too long. But I must mention how well things do grow “in the ground”. The difference between something growing in a container and growing in a raised bed is quite profound. And I find it is not just a matter of plant size although that does make a difference. I can put a sickly looking plant in my rocky raised bed and behold: “The Lazarus Effect”. There is a thicket of *rushforthii*’s (now in bloom) that could never be achieved in containers. It is sometimes hard to find those things that are appropriate to containers in terms of scale and habit. Lucie and White recommend ‘Lawrence’ as a basket plant; my ‘Lawrence’ here (and Pete’s at St. Johns Church) is a 6 or 7 foot tree. Just depends. Pinch, pinch. And yes, visit Peter Sullivan’s garden (now well tended by Danny Pritchard) at St. Johns (St. Marys Ave) in San Francisco. If it were not for Pete there would be few *Vireyas* growing in California.

For containers at home I am using a mix that is more pumicey/gravelly and in containers that are deeper than wide. The ability to provide CONSISTENT drainage and moisture is, I think, most important. My humus in containers is coconut husk (1/4 to 1/2”) and fibrous peat. But you just have to find the balance that works for you ... the Sullivan adage applies: begin by “Thinking like a plant”. This has gone on long enough! If you are nearby or passing though come see the garden.

Bill Moyles
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OK, maybe I should blow Bill’s horn a bit. For years Bill operated the Vireya seed exchange for the ARS and the world. Much of the seed he received he tested and then passed the seedlings on to other people like me. Quite a few Vireya species we now grow would not be in cultivation if Bill Moyles had not distributed seed and plants.

From John Bodenham
Dear Vireya Vine,

Plymouth, England
June 19, 2003

I recall quite a bit of interchange over the internet about split corollas. I do not recall whether there was a firm, definitive conclusion. Perhaps the readers might care to contribute their further experiences? My splitting seems to happen mostly in the summer, but not exclusively.

Currently (mid-June) the affected plants are jasminiflorum and christiana. Is it heat? Is it long hours of daylight? Is it fertilizer? Is it lack of fertilizer? Watering? Drying out? Any newer ideas?

Also, in the cooler, shorter days of winter, the buds begin to open (on some sorts, only) and then the individual florets themselves refuse to grow any more and eventually fall off. Do any of you out there suffer in a similar manner? I am not sure whether this has been discussed before, but the latest experiences of others would be interesting to hear. Of course, if there are cure-alls for both of the above problems I would love to know what they might be. Perhaps I need to keep a record of the dates and particular species/hybrid affected. Has anybody already done that? (I have kept records in recent years of what is flowering when, but have not necessarily noted current problems...)

John Bodenham
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Wembury, Plymouth, Devon
England, UK PL9 0DL

From Heinz Kratz

August 2003

Dear Vireya Vine,

Wuerzburg, Germany

I live in Wuerzburg, that's in Lower Franconia in Bavaria, Germany. This area is known for its good wine. The climate is very dry (45 -49% humidity) there is often Africa pure temperatures. Outside at the moment (local time 18:30 p.a.) it is +39.4° C (102°F), always sun, and the temperature on the roof tiles is +54.2° C (129°F), with no rain in sight. When BBC, German Wave TV – Foreign Service, CCN Europa or CBS (over satellite) report that there is 24° C (75°F) and 85% humidity in Los Angeles, I know why my first attempts with Vireyas went wrong. Our weather forecast – with rain – always goes for other parts of the country, but not for Franconia. When snow is announced for other parts of the country, we will only get some snowflakes and they will be on the ground for only three days at the most. On the other hand there can be days of 28° C (82.4°F) for 8 to 10 days). Our winters are too dry. On frost free days in the winter I have to water my rhodos, otherwise they dry up.

I am a beginner in the field of Vireyas and don't do anything with them at work. I saw an image of a Vireya (*R. zoelleri*) while visiting the hothouses at the Botanical Garden in Bremen and that started me off to more closely deal with Vireyas. Contacts with Martin Monthofer from the Botanical Garden in Bremen and to Bill Moyles in Oakland California were my shoulders to lean on in this field.

I was unlucky with my first Vireyas despite help (telephone advice is difficult) from Bill Moyles, Erhard Moser from Chemnitz, Germany, and Mr. Monthofer Sr. and Jr. It is difficult reading about a thing and then doing it. You have to have the plants in front of you to be able to judge. But when plants are dying bit by bit it is very depressing. There is no local help with cultivating Vireyas.

I do not have a greenhouse and I can't get permission right now to build a greenhouse on a slope like ours. But I won't give up. For the first time I succeeded in getting my Vireyas through the winter of 2002 (in the house). Among them was also St. Valentine. It is impossible to keep the plants outside in the winter. Even in the north of Germany with more of rain, and lower temperatures, it is not suitable for Vireyas. So, with out a greenhouse, no Vireyas.

I can assure you that each Vireya Vine letter is very informative. Even when it is only a single sentence. An example of this information in the Vireya Vine was brilliant, as in Issue #69. The thing about "liver wort and pearl wort". I tried it and it does work with normal vinegar not with biological vinegar. The problems other people have seem to exist with us also. By the way: When you have a certain problem that doesn't exist in Europa yet, you can be sure we will get the same problem in three weeks at the earliest or in ten years at the latest. We some times worry about this.

People should be glad with simple things and clues. In life not everything is distributed regularly. C'est la vie, say the French people. "While eating you get your appetite" (Spanish) and so I will make more attempts with Vireya hybrids. I have learned the hard way. I could have chosen another kind of plant or hobby, couldn't I? But no, it must be Vireyas. They give me a lot of pleasure and that is important.

That's it for now. Hope you have a nice day with plenty of sunshine in your heart.

Heinz Kratz
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Germany Phone 49 (0)931 25563

I think we all struggled with these plants to start with. Growing Vireyas in the house really takes a special bit of ingenuity. Yes I had a nice 8 foot x 18 foot lean-to greenhouse (really just a protected growing chamber) at my house in Tacoma, Washington. Now in Portland, Oregon we have a nice big glass greenhouse. But we still have some Vireyas in our house and a couple of orchids. South facing window, heat vents taped closed, and a small water fountain going all the time. The fountain uses a big glass of water every day. There are lots of other way of providing humidity in the home. But you must do something because houses are just too hot and dry in the winter.

And then there is the problem; Vireyas are not that easy to find. Very few places sell them. I would bet that there is no retail stores or nurseries in all of Europe that sell Vireyas, except maybe for the ones that the Dutch have sent around. It's not just Europe either. There are probably two nurseries in the UK and maybe three or four in the US including Hawaii. None that I know of at all in Asia. But in Australia and New Zealand you can buy Vireyas even though you will have to search a bit. EWS

OK this is important: Ken Cox is getting ready to write another book. He thinks there will be room for about 50 Vireyas with pictures. He says that maybe the Viners could help. Sure we can but make sure the plants you suggest are easy to grow. Ken has given me a list of species and they are great species, but one is R. himantodes which is a great looking plant but hard to grow. He also includes R. rousiae and taxifolium which are both first class species but are very rare in cultivation. He wants both species and hybrids. Send you comments and list to Ken at e-mail ken@glendoick.com

See Chris Callards wonderful Web site at www.vireya.net

Get into this group and lets talk about Vireyas www.groups.yahoo.com/group/vireya

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