

**Bringing a conclusion to confusion:  
Rhododendron 'Gardenia Odyssey'**

by Lyn Craven

from "The Rhododendron"

Journal of the Australian Rhododendron Society

Volume 33, 1993

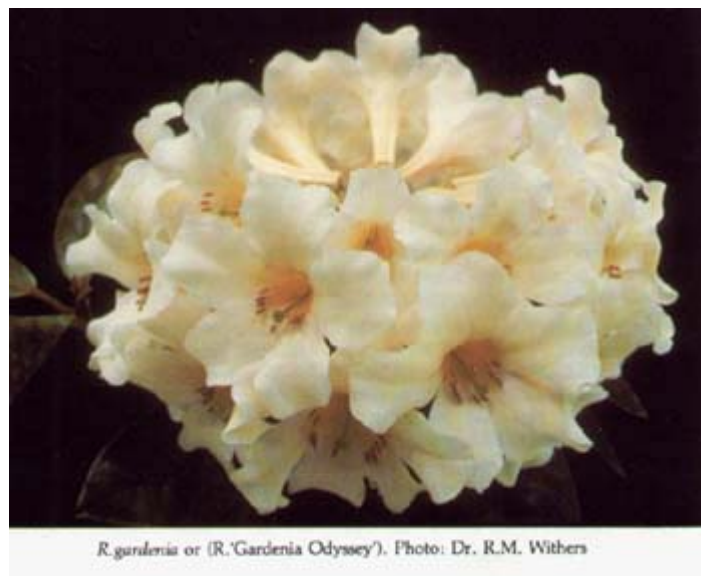
There is a particularly beautiful vireya *Rhododendron* now becoming more widely available to Australian gardeners as nurserymen develop stocks for sale. The inflorescence of this plant is especially well-illustrated by Bob Withers in Graham Price's book on Rhododendrons in Australia (opp.p.28, Price 1988) where the caption states "Rhododendron gardenia. A spectacular vireya species from New Guinea". However the plant is neither *R.gardenia* nor a species.

Apparently the plant was introduced to Australia from the Netherlands by Bill Mearns of Wollongong, New South Wales. Bill (personal communication, pre-1988) stated that the original Dutch grower derived the name, 'Gardenia', from a perceived similarity in its flower colour to that of *Gardenia globosa*. The inference was that the plant was of garden origin. Subsequently, in Australia the view developed that the plant represented the species, *R.gardenia* Schlechter. For example, it was treated as a species in Price (1988) and in Withers (1991). In the latter reference, Withers states "*R.gardenia* was received by Bill Mearns from Welensky, a forester in West Irian in 1973. It is considered to be a true species by Bill Mearns, although some growers of vireyas consider that it is a natural hybrid."

The plant certainly is not *R.gardenia* Schlechter; in Sleumer (1966) it keys to *R.konori* Beccari from which it differs, *inter alia*. in the shape and colour of the corolla. Seedlings from selfed seed of the plant are variable and different to the parent according to Graham Snell of Maleny, Queensland (Snell, personal

communication, 1992), suggesting that segregation is occurring. My view is that the plant is of hybrid origin and is either at the F1 or F2 level or is an example of incomplete introgression. It seems very likely that *R.konori* was one of the original species involved.

As regards a name for this plant, which should be in the garden of every serious vireya grower (even those who prefer species to hybrids!), the available evidence indicates that a cultivar name needs to be provided instead of a botanical name. The epithet 'Gardenia' is not valid under Articles 27(a) and 31(a) of the current "International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants". As the plant has already been introduced commercially (Snell, personal communication, 1992) use of the word 'Gardenia' in the registered name would be advantageous. The name 'Gardenia Odyssey' has been selected therefore and has been registered with the Royal Horticultural Society, the registration authority for *Rhododendron*. The word 'Odyssey' reflects the nomenclatural journey upon which the plant has been.



## References

- Price, G.P. 1988. "Rhododendrons and azaleas in Australia". (Australian Rhododendron Society Victorian Branch: Melbourne).
- Sleumer, H. 1966. Rhododendron. In 'Flora Malesiana' ser.I, 6: 474-668.

(Noordhoff; Groningen).

Withers, R.M. 1991. A history of the introduction of vireya Rhododendron species into cultivation in Australia. The Rhododendron 31: 3-15.

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