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# The Vireya Venture

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Issue No. 58 September 2005

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## Editorial

The end of another quarter has come around and again we are two weeks late in preparing this issue of T V V. We apologize for the delay in its distribution and will try to do better for issue No. 59 in December.

This issue of T V V is the fourth since we assumed the editorship and this means that we have completed one full year – and are still going strong! We thank all of those who have contributed articles and letters and hope that more of you will pick up a pen or bash that keyboard and contribute something.

The number of subscribers to T V V is still small (less than 100) so the pool of correspondents is quite limited and we cannot expect too much. In fact, the number and quality of contributions thus far has been fantastic.

But, we haven't had enough articles for there to be leftovers from one issue to the next. Therefore, sometimes the cupboard has been a little empty and we have had to write filler articles ourselves. We don't want to do this too often as T V V could become boring.

So, until that hoped-for day when we are overwhelmed with contributions, we have decided that from time to time we will dip into our library of past newsletters and annual reports from rhododendron societies around the world. Our beloved vireyas haven't changed much over the past few decades, nor their cultivation and propagation. We will try to select articles that are still of interest today.

So, we definitely need more emails, letters, and notices for the next issue of T V V. Just throw down a few lines and tell us what you are doing. Even if you only have a few vireyas planted in your garden, or a small collection of potted plants, we would like to know how they are doing in your climate and what you most enjoy. Include a photo if you have one.



*The first flowering of one of our own hybrids (R. Buttermilk x R. Robert Bates). Large florets with a bright clear yellow colour.*

Thanks for the expressions of sympathy on the death of Minnie. It was a tremendous shock and we are still recovering. As expected, we couldn't be happy for long without a pug in our life. So, in July we got two – a boy named 'Buster' and a girl called 'YumYum'. They have the same father but different mothers and are now about 6 months old. They are charming and funny and boisterous, generally all at the same time.



*YumYum and Buster say Hello to all you Vireyaholics out there. We love vireyas too! They are very tasty and some smell nice.*

At present 'The Pug Team' is trying to tell us that they already know about gardening and are prepared to help. Each night they present us with a chewed up vireya branch, an orchid stem or a herb leaf. So, the balcony garden will have to be rearranged with everything moving upwards, out of pug-reach.

Please send items for this newsletter to:

Graham and Janet Price  
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Melbourne Victoria 3000 Australia  
Ph: +61 (0)3 9639 4493 Fax: +61 (0)3 9639 5480  
Email: [lithic01@bigpond.net.au](mailto:lithic01@bigpond.net.au)

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## **From Jack Goertzen, California via Neil Puddey, Woolgoolga, NSW, Aust.**

August 2005

Dear Vireya Venture,

I'm sending this request for a subscription to Vireya Venture to you (Neil) since I didn't know where else. I would like very much to get this publication, since reading those you gave me. If \$10.00 USA is more than enough then keep the change – if not enough I'll be happy to increase it.

It was a pleasure to meet Sherla at our Vireya meeting in L.A. (\*). I've ordered a number of the plants you are giving to Hawai'i. Our temperatures have been running at about 98°F–103°F (~37°C~40°C) with a resultant relative humidity of ~0, and August is hotter! My few Vireyas are under shade cloth and doing rather well – I hope. They need watering almost every day.

I'm thinking rather seriously of going to Hawai'i in September '06. I'm also thinking of going to Covent Gardens one day. Thinking costs little time and money. My daughter gave me a computer – now I have to learn how to use it. My correspondence may become more legible.

All the best, Jack G.

\* Sherla Bertelmann is President of the Hawai'i Chapter of the Amer. R. S. and was visiting California at the time.

Ed. Thanks for the letter Jack. Vireya growers in Australia regularly have to deal with high 30's and 40's temperatures throughout summer. My understanding is that many vireyas love it so long as their leaves don't burn and their roots can be kept cool and moist.

Neil Puddey included this note when he passed on the letter from Jack Goertzen.

Hi Graham,  
I am passing on Jack's contribution to the Venture. Jack is a very enthusiastic 80yr old who enjoys his vireyas and still jogs every day. I had the pleasure of a visit earlier this year and maybe over-extended his interest in Vireyas. It was non-stop vireya talk for 6hrs! Thanks for the Venture, enjoying the news.

Regards Neil

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## **Graham & Wendy Snell are Moving**

Graham and Wendy Snell wish to advise their Vireya friends that they are moving.

They have sold their home in Maleny and closed down their nursery. However, their Vireya collection moves with them to their new home in Highfields, just north of Toowoomba. Their new address will be:-  
2 Hannah Crt. Highfields  
Qld. 4352 Australia

As from 27<sup>th</sup> September their Phone Number will be: 07 46987537

Despite any news to the contrary, they have not given up growing Vireyas and plan to continue hybridising also. Friends will always be welcome to visit.

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## **From Allan Kerr Grant, South Australia**

3 August 2005

Dear Graham and Janet Price,

I write to thank you for sending Issue No 57 of the Vireya Venture which included a paragraph indicating the need to send notices etc for the next issue. My congratulations on your hard work. I find it very valuable to read.

You may remember that I wrote to you on 16 April 2005 regarding the interest that I, and my wife Mary, have in growing a significant number of vireyas in our garden in the Mt Lofty Ranges in South Australia. In that letter I indicated that I, Mary and two other members of the S.A. Branch of the Rhododendron Society, had planted vireyas in a shaded area of open garden in the Adelaide Zoo. This was done with the agreement of the head of the Adelaide Zoo – Ed McAlister.



The plants in this area were rather small and scarce in number. It is now five months since the planting was performed and I write to inform you about the progress of the vireyas.

I am sure that you will not be too surprised to learn that there have been a few upsets. This was largely due to the fact that the Zoo Gardens are invaded each week by a large number of children. They visit the zoo as part of their education about animals etc. It is therefore not all that surprising that the children do get excited at times and this can have an adverse effect on the vireyas plants!



*Notice about "Jewels of Asia" with a backdrop of Vireyas at the Adelaide Zoo Gardens*

These problems have been, I think and hope, largely fixed! In the past five months the original sixteen plants lost three of "the family", but these were replaced and others added. A recent visit shows that about twenty vireyas are surviving, and a number of the larger plants have even flowered.

Taking everything into account I believe that there is every chance that this area of the Adelaide Zoo Gardens may be a success. I believe that this will be important, since my experience in the S.A. Branch of the Australian



*R. Popcorn flowering at the Adelaide Zoo Garden*

Rhododendron Society indicates that members are not all that aware about the beauty of Vireyas.

It reminds me of a time, many years ago, when I had to tell those in some areas of the USA about the glory of Vireya Rhododendrons.



*R. Popcorn and R. Rosie Posie at the Adelaide Zoo Gardens*

I have included pictures (photos taken not in very good light) of the area for Vireyas with some in flower. For obvious reasons the plants are numbered since visitors have a habit of taking the names of the plants away with them.

If you wish I will keep you informed of the progress of the Zoo Gardens.

Best wishes, Yours sincerely  
Allan Kerr Grant

Ed. Yes Allan, please keep us informed of the progress with your 'project' at the Zoo Gardens. It could be of interest to compare notes and experiences with a similar project by the Hawai'i Branch of the American Rhodo. Society who have a garden bed of vireyas that they manage at their local zoo. I think it is near Hilo on the big island. Maybe we can get a report from someone there? I will ask.

Allan, I note from the photos you sent that the vireya plants at the Adelaide Zoo Gardens seem to very wide apart. Is there some reason for this or was the area large for the number of plants you had available? I personally prefer my vireyas to be much closer together, about 30-40cm apart, so the whole bed looks dense and more like a jungle. In a sunny position there should still be enough sunlight for the plants to grow many leaves and thicken up.

What do other people think? How closely should vireyas be planted in an open sunny garden?

## SPARE TUBESTOCK OF VIREYA SPECIES: SECOND OFFER

From Lyn Craven, Canberra

Following on from the offer of tubestock in the December 2004 T.V.V newsletter (# 55), I have a further offering for Australian readers. As with the first listing, the surplus is offered on the following basis:

1. First call is for the species collection at Olinda, and for Emu Valley if the people there are interested.
2. I will wait a month or so after distribution of this newsletter for people to get their requests in.
3. If I have insufficient plants to satisfy demand, I will move the unsuccessful requesters to the top of the list for the next surplus. Also, as far as cutting material and hotbed space are available, I will endeavour to take additional cuttings to fill "back orders". The plants mostly will be ex 50 mm tapered tubes, or for the smaller and less vigorous species, sent in the tubes to avoid damage to the roots.
4. For despatch, I propose using Australia Post 3 kg Express Post satchels, or the Post Pak cartons. I have found that the plants usually are rather too large for the Express Post bags, and expect that mostly I will be using the cartons. Despatch will not be in the worst of the summer, although these days I expect it is rare for mail bags to be left out in the sun for any length of time. Recipients will have to bear the cost of postage (incl. the carton cost). If people can arrange for plants to be collected, that is fine.

The species currently in surplus are:

<i>burtii</i>	<i>perakense</i>
<i>christi</i>	<i>phaeochitum</i>
<i>commonae</i>	<i>quadrasianum</i> var.
	<i>rosmarinifolium</i>
<i>crassifolium</i>	<i>radians</i> BCJR 114
<i>ericoides</i>	<i>rarilepidotum</i>
<i>gracilentum</i> (form from Aseki, reddish pink)	
<i>gracilentum</i> (pink form)	
<i>santapaui</i>	<i>suaveolens</i>
<i>himantodes</i>	<i>warianum</i>
<i>inconspicuum</i> (form from Mt Dayman, pink)	
<i>inconspicuum</i> (red form)	
<i>williamsii</i>	<i>zoelleri</i> (West NG form)
<i>kawakamii</i>	

A few notes are warranted, although I think all these species and their different forms should be in every collection of vireyas:

*burtii*, *christi*, *himantodes* are just lovely;  
*ericoides* is weird and only looks like a rhododendron when in flower;  
*gracilentum* from Aseki is really pretty, nearly always with at least a few flowers;  
*kawakamii* is probably relatively garden hardy but I have not been game to try it outside so far (Canberra's climate can be very unforgiving);  
*perakense*, a must on account of its tiny flowers;  
*phaeochitum* is one of my favourite species. Its flowers are good-sized and a lovely shell pink in colour;  
*radians* flowered for me just recently. This is one of the species we brought back from Sulawesi in 2002.  
*warianum* flowers really well and has quite different bark;  
*williamsii*. I put more cuttings in of this and was surprised that it was not more keenly sought after the last offer. It is a very good white and I have crossed it with *konori* in an effort to get some gene mixing going.  
*zoelleri* from Sleumer's West New Guinea collecting trip is such a beautiful plant. Its flowers have a poise lacking in many of the species and their hybrids.

There is an additional (non-cash) charge for this service: recipients are requested to share cuttings, plants, seed, etc with their fellow gardening enthusiasts – whether novice or expert. Many generous people have thus helped me develop my collection and it is appropriate that this debt be repaid by further spreading these delightful plants around the horticultural community.

Lyn Craven  
 26 Saville Close, Melba. ACT 2615  
 Email: lyn.craven@csiro.au

In a follow-up email Lyn wrote:

Dear all,

BCJR114, collected in Sulawesi in 2002, flowered for me a couple of weeks back and I was then able to identify it as *R. radians*. This clone grows better than another *radians* genotype that we collected, but (as usual) lacks the flower quality of the other. It is still well worth growing though. Attached are a couple of piccies of it.

Best wishes, Lyn





*R. radians* from Lyn Craven

Ed. It is very generous of Lyn to make these plants available and I applaud his 'condition' that recipients ["share cuttings, plants, seed, etc with their fellow gardening enthusiasts"](#).

For overseas vireya enthusiasts who cannot get these plants directly from Lyn, may I suggest that you make friends with a someone here in Australia and 'encourage' them to get plants from Lyn, to grow them and then pass rooted cuttings on to you – thereby satisfying Lyn's requirement. This will also help build a larger vireya community around the world.

## More from Lyn Craven

I am sending you a paper from Ben Hall's lab dealing with the phylogenetic relationships within *Rhododendron*. The data analysed is DNA sequence data.

Included in the paper are their proposals for tweaking the classification of the genus. Now you might think that the ponticum rhodos and the mollis azaleas make pretty strange bedfellows, but bear in mind that, as they point out, Sleumer recognised a relationship between these based on morphological evidence.

We are fortunate that Ben is planning a trip to the SW Pacific region later this year. I know that I am looking forward to meeting him as we have been emailing for several years now.

Best wishes, Lyn

Ed. The full reference to this paper is:  
The Molecular Systematics of *Rhododendron* (Ericaceae): A Phylogeny Based Upon RPB2 Gene Sequences, Loretta Goetsch, Andrew J Eckert and Benjamin D Hall; Systematic Botany (2005); 30(3): pp. 616-626.

I have a copy of this paper (as a pdf format file of 470KB size) and am happy to send it to anyone who is interested – by email only.

## From Lesley Eaton, Swanpool, Northeastern Victoria

Greetings to fellow vireya lovers.

Some four years ago my husband, Graeme, and I left the easy rhododendron growing climate at Mt Dandenong in Melbourne to come and live at Swanpool, a picturesque area some 25 km from the country town of Benalla in the North East region of Victoria. Swanpool is about 200km inland from Melbourne.

A full truckload of rhododendrons, including a substantial number of vireyas, accompanied us. But what a time to re-locate during what has been termed 'the worst drought in 100 years'! Many of our rhododendron society friends scoffed at our efforts and stated emphatically that we wouldn't be able to grow any type of rhododendron in 'that terrible climate'!

Well, that was like a red rag to a bull and I was more determined than ever to see just what would survive and flourish in this area of climatic extremes. Summer temperatures rise in excess of 40°C and winter minimums drop down to zero. Being situated high on the top of a hill, the frost is minimal, so the vireyas don't suffer too greatly. I have been inspired, too, by what I have heard and read of Lyn Craven's experiences in Canberra and this gave me the courage to continue.

I'll be honest and say at first many vireyas succumbed to the summer heat, but as many were in tubes I feel I may have killed them with kindness and probably over-watered or just plain boiled the roots. The larger plants were more forgiving and although they have stayed in pots for longer than I've wished due to a lack of a suitable micro-climate, many have put on good growth and are producing flowers.

Now, with some protected areas organized, more and more vireyas are being planted in the open ground. The lack of top soil has

meant the beds have been made of any soil raided when making paths, copious amounts of coarse pine bark, old potting mix, compost and anything thought to enrich the soil but leaving it well drained.

I've planted some of the vireyas under Callistemons (Bottlebrushes) and Melaleucas. These have been pruned to just give filtered shade and not remain shrubby. The vireyas seem to enjoy this situation. I've also sneaked room in a huge shade house which Graeme constructed for all the other most desirable rhododendrons – mainly my collection of dwarf species and cultivars and many of my rhododendrons in the Maddenia subsection.

Although I really prefer the species I thought it wise to first concentrate on growing the named varieties, hoping that hybrid vigour would prevail. Cultivars with *R. zoelleri*, *R. laetum*, *R. konori* and *R. lochiaie* blood are moving ahead in leaps and bounds and have rewarded me with many fine blooms. I still have much work to do to develop all the plants into nice, shrubby specimens as I still have far too many 'flowers on sticks, as Janet would say, but at this stage I just want them all to keep growing.

Over the first couple of hot, dry summers the dreaded azalea lace-bug feasted well on the leaves leaving no alternative but to spray with a systemic insecticide. A rotten job! Many leaves were scorched, too, with me not being careful enough when watering and allowing the sun to get on the wet leaves. What a learning curve I'm experiencing!

I must list some of the vireyas with which I'm having success. Ivory Coast, that lovely hybrid of Ron Cutten's, has probably been one of the best performers, flowering profusely each year. Tropic Tango always produces good flowers as do those ever reliable Just Peachy and Coral Flare. Star Shower, Arthur's Choice, Robert Bates, Our Waltzing Matilda, Penrice, Bonza, Sunny and some un-named crosses are starting to not only produce flowers but are becoming quite bushy. *R. zoelleri* 'Lufa' (Is this correct? I can't find reference to it anywhere.), and *R. laetum* are the only species to date which are of a good size and flowering. Particularly pleasing has been the *R. zoelleri* and it is now planted in the garden. Here's hoping it continues to flourish.

Just recently I was fortunate enough to receive a lovely collection of species and cultivars, courtesy of some members of the Vic. Branch Vireya Group. These are struck cuttings and are now residing in another little shade house. Then to round off my good fortune a dear friend arrived with 3 beautiful new vireyas to add to my collection.

So I'm hoping my 'bloody mindedness' will show that vireyas are tougher than you think, and that with perseverance they can grow over a much wider area than first thought.

Regards, Lesley Eaton.

Ed. Wonderful to hear about your experiences Lesley. There is another subscriber to T.V.V. who lives in 'inland Australia', at Griffiths in southern NSW. I'm sure that he, and others, will appreciate your comments and struggles as he has much the same climate. Maybe you can send some pictures one day?

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## From Jane Adams, Hawaii

Graham and Janet,

My husband Peter and I would like to subscribe to your Vireya Venture newsletter, and prefer to receive it via email (save on that postage). If there's a charge let me know and we'll ship some \$\$.

We are starting a Vireya nursery here on the Big Island of Hawaii, and are active in the local group. The more info out there about Vireyas the better! Take care and glad to hear the newsletter is getting up and running.

Jane and Peter Adams  
White Cloud Nursery, Pahoehoe, Hawai'i  
Email: [jane@peterandjane.net](mailto:jane@peterandjane.net)

Oops! – Meant to mention that we read about your newsletter in the Viva Vireya newsletter that the Hawaii Chapter produces.

Thanks again. Jane

Ed. There is no charge for email subscriptions to T.V.V. We included this brief message because we felt people might like to know that a new vireya nursery has started up.

A Question. Vireyas seem to do very well in Hawai'i and two species come from the high mountains around Cairns in Nth Queensland. Has anyone ever tried to grow vireyas on any of the islands off the Queensland coast? I know that many holiday resorts have lush tropical gardens but are there any vireyas?

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## An Experience in Hybridising

By Graham Price

As with most plants, there are several reasons for hybridising *Vireya* rhododendrons. One can seek different flowers (colour, size, shape, perfume), different foliage (smaller/larger leaves with different textures and colours), different plant habits (more compact, drooping or upright) or plants with 'hybrid vigour'. These differences have produced over 900 named cultivars (according to Chris Callard's website [www.vireya.net](http://www.vireya.net)) of which over 500 have been registered.

Flower colour is probably the most prominent objective of hybridising, with plant habit the second most common. Foliage characteristics are less common and there is little evidence for this among *Vireyas*.

Lately I have been hybridising with a partial eye to leaf colour and texture in combination with my desire for lovely scented flowers. For several years I tried to cross *R. orbiculatum* with *R. Charming Valentino* trying to get nice hanging red flowers with smaller shiny dark green leaves on a compact bush. But no luck.



*Tawny coloured furry new leaves (above) and plum-brown mature leaves (below) on phaeopeplum/zoelleri I.S. x superbum*



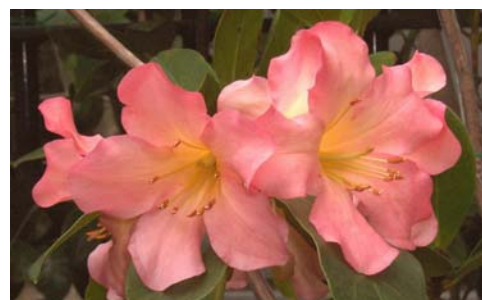
Then I got the idea of going for different coloured and textured leaves. A hybrid seedling that I bought several years ago has the most gorgeous new leaves of a soft, furry, tawny colour. Mature leaves are a deep plum-brown colour without the dense scaly fur covering and only when very mature do the leaves take on a deep green colour.

The flowers are large, white flushed pink and nicely scented and the plant is rather tall.

I crossed this plant with one of my own hybrids (X92-70) which is more compact, has broadly ovate leaves that are veined and which has alluring orange-salmon coloured flowers. A long-term objective is to produce a range of plants that have the tawny, plum & green leaves that I can self, or cross to a sibling, to try to increase these features.

Several of the seedlings from this cross show the tawny-furry new leaves and plum coloured mature leaves.

One even has the combination of fawn/plum leaves that are broadly ovate and veined – an interesting combination. The first of these seedlings has now flowered and the flower is wonderful, although this one's leaves do not have the fawn/plum colour.



*Wonderful pink flushed white and yellow flowers of X99-07, the first seedling from the cross to flower.*

I am about to plant all 200 seedlings from this cross into one garden bed so that variations can be easily compared. And, I hope to begin back-crossing later this summer. But it will be several years before I see the results. It's a patient game this hybridising.

**Ed. Does anyone out there have any other interesting experiences in hybridising *Vireyas*?**



*Green very mature leaves and the large white flushed pink flowers.*



*Orange-salmon flowers of X92-70  
This photo doesn't show the true colour*

## Follow-up from John Godfrey

Ed. In the June issue of T.V.V. John Godfrey told us about vireya seedlings given to him by Jack Wilson. Here he includes photos of one of these crosses. In that earlier letter John also wrote about *R. rugosa*, seed of which he collected on Mt Kinabalu in 1992. He sent a photo of its first flowering and noted that the plant was struggling. This is a follow-up message and a call for help.

Dear Graham and Janet,

Thanks for T.V.V. #57 with all the interesting info. Attached are two pictures of the first flowering of one of Jack Wilson's *leucogigas x konori* crosses. It is a rugged looking plant

with fissured bark and large tough leaves, but the flowers are 11cm across and fragrantly perfumed.



John Godfrey's plant and flower of *leucogigas x konori*



The *rugosa* in TVV 57 still looks healthy but Spring will determine whether it survives or not. I tried micropropagating it using shoots

that had developed in the current season but without success. Contamination is a problem with such sticky and scaly growths and my cultures were overwhelmed despite a rigorous surface sterilization protocol.

New Spring shoots may provide better material and might stand a better chance. With such a wide distribution of T.V.V. there may be somebody out there with more experience at tissue culture in rhododendrons, particularly vireyas. If there is, I would appreciate hearing from them.

Kindest regards from John Godfrey.  
Email address: [jwhaoma@alphalink.com.au](mailto:jwhaoma@alphalink.com.au)

Ed. If there is anyone out there who can help John with tissue culture of his plant *R. rugosa* please contact him directly. Alternately, we are happy to pass on a message.

## Apology

We received a request to publicise the 25<sup>th</sup> Western Regional Rhododendron Conference, which was held on September 9-11 in Newport Oregon, USA.

Unfortunately this issue of T.V.V. is being distributed well after the conference date. We are sorry and apologize if anyone wanted to go but didn't hear about it in time.

Graham and Janet Price

Well, that's the end of another issue of The Vireya Venture. We hope you liked it.

To repeat the request (hopefully without becoming boring) we need letters and articles for the next newsletter issue. Anything will do and photos are particularly welcome.

The next Issue of T.V.V., Issue # 59, is scheduled for production and distribution in December 2005. And we will do it this time !!



So, its goodnight from Buster and YumYum.