

R. scabridibracteum is a large shrub with rigid upstanding leaves and big scarlet corollas, a very fine sight in bloom. It gets its name from the cone like involucre of silvery brown bracts from which the opening buds protrude, but which drop away as the flowers develop.

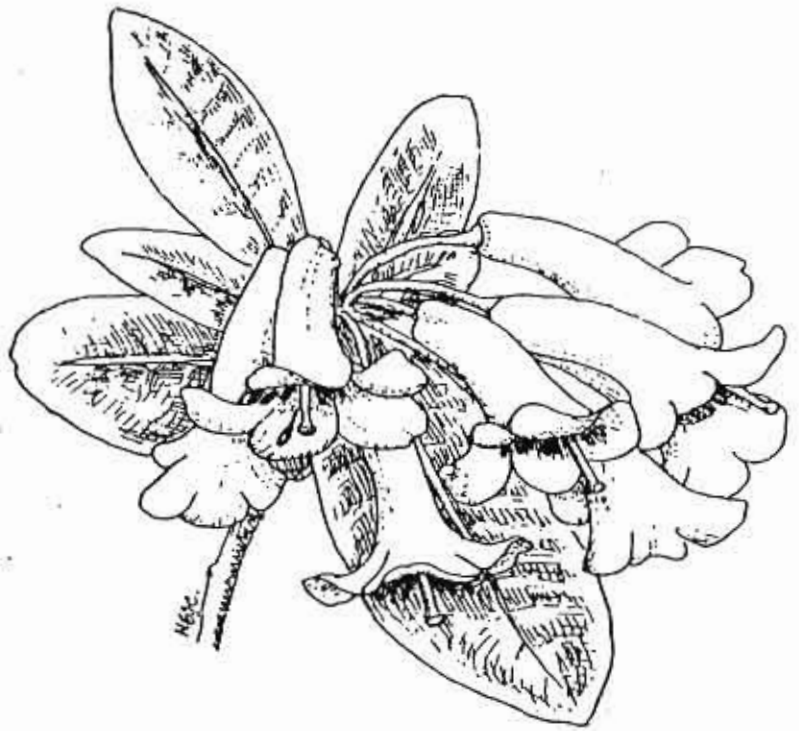


Figure 2. *Rhododendron scabridibracteum*, approximately 1/2 size.

THE VIREYA VENTURE July 1999 No.36

Weather is always relevant to to the state of the garden and the normal apparent extremes of temperature and rainfall have occurred here. The real extreme was two days of violent winds from the snowfields. The autumn leaves fell in a hurry and so did many branches and twigs, leaving an incredible amount of litter to be cleaned up. Fortunately our only loss was a small shrub blown right out of the ground, and many pots had to be tied down after being blown around. In this area a few houses had some damage from large branches falling on roofs. Westerlies are usually at their worst in August but may occur from June to September.

There have been some good shows from the Vireyas with the small leaved basket plants doing well and two of these in the ground namely 'Littlest Angel' and 'Pendance' have been covered in bloom. The largest and brightest one was a pink R. leucogigas x R. zoelleri.

A copy of the Aust. Rhodo. Scty. Year 2000 Conference programme is included - it should be a very interesting meeting and the Dandenong Ranges have many magnificent gardens to visit, not the least of which is Olinda where there are some large plantings of Vireyas.

The Hawaii Chapter of the American Rhodo. Scty. have commenced an interesting trial at four elevations being planted with identical groups of Vireya for a comparison with performance from 50 to 3500 feet above sea level, in both high and low rainfall areas. Climate zones there go from sea level to 13,000 feet.

Your contributions are essential to the continuance of this newsletter, please let us have some comments on your experiences. Send them to The Editor, P.O. Box 8, Keiraville, N.S.W. 2500.

J. Clyde Smith.

From Mrs Sylvia Saperstein, Main Arm, Mullumbimby N.S.W.2482.

"Last year I sold a couple of thousand Vireyas to the Mae Fah Luang Foundation (meaning Big-Mother-in-The-Sky) in Northern Thailand. It was funded by the now deceased mother of the King ten years ago. It comprises 20,000 acres of mountain terrain with a population of 10,000 hill tribesmen. Her pity for these impoverished, opium dependant people prompted her to establish clinics and schools, to provide clean water and power to each of the 27 villages.

The Villagers are employed in a number of enterprises such as orchards, weaving factories etc. and the denuded mountains have been largely re-afforested. Huge public gardens have been established to attract tourists (mainly Thais) and create further employment. The latest garden is devoted to azaleas and Vireyas. The site is reminiscent of Wollongong's garden, with magnificent vistas, but severely depleted by slash and burn agriculture. This was a real challenge to the Thai landscaper (and incidentally to me).

This year in February I went to see how the Vireya project was going and spent ten days trying to rectify mistakes that had been made owing to the language barrier - I speak no Thai and the Thai Garden Managers do not speak the Hill Tribe languages! Some of the Vireyas were struggling in full sun, heavy soil and no mulch - others were thriving in full bloom. I showed them how to prune and shade the weaker plants with fresh bamboo cut from a nearby hillside and the path sweepers turned up with full baskets to make a wonderful deep mulch. My strongest recommendation was to appoint one Garden Manager to be responsible for all aspects of the Vireya gardens, with whom I could communicate directly.

So in May two managers came out to Australia for a month's training with me.

They brought very encouraging photos - small trees had been planted to shade the areas which were too hot. The Vireyas that had been shaded, pruned and mulched were shooting vigorously from the base. My visitors were Northern Thais who had never been on a plane before and had only little English learned at school (mainly forgotten).

It has been an intense month. The Prince who runs the whole project had warned them that they were not here for a holiday - they were here to work and learn; and work they did! As so did I! In the time they were here it rained constantly, except for three days. So we worked in the rain. when it got too heavy we would shelter for a while and do a bit of 'school' which consisted of compiling a little dictionary of words relating to our work. I now know the Thai words for sawdust, soil, sand etc. and they (hopefully) know them in English. This was exhausting, but by the end of their visit we were communicating quite well and they claimed they could understand 75% of what was going on. I was astounded at how quickly they learned to use a Venturi Syphon for instance.

The soil here at Main Arm is very similar to the clay of their garden site, so I was able to demonstrate practically how to overcome this disadvantage in my own garden. We started an extension to my garden but gave up in frustration when the ground turned into a mud bath. But I did show them how to make agricultural drains, the use of which was demonstrated immediately during the next down pour.

Khunchai, the project manager, claims that in six years from now Mae Fah Luang will have the biggest Vireya garden in the world and he might well be right. In the meantime I have the satisfaction of having made a contribution to this aim. This love very big bright flowers so I have undertaken to make some new hybrids to cater to this. Three 'Hunstein's Secret' (form of *R. leucogigas*) seedlings flowered this year and the size of the flowers and the intensity of the perfume makes them perfect parents for what I plan to call the Doi Tung series. I have some good seed pods, but as we all know the early stages of seedlings are quite a gamble, so I am perhaps counting the chickens too soon. The King's mother's favourite colour was red, so the Prince is anxious to find a large red Vireya to name after her. Andrew Raper sent me a plant that might fit the bill and I am anxiously waiting for the first bud to open.

xxxxx

The Australian involvement internationally through a garden plant is rare indeed but Mrs Saperstein has established our good reputation without any doubt in this regard in Thailand. Those who have seen her Nursery and home will have appreciated her innovative approach to Vireyas - eg. standard plants and large leaved basket plants - will be assured of the broad education of her 'students' and she and her family are to be congratulated on their work. It would certainly have been intensive and exhausting but it must also have been very interesting and satisfying at times.

xxxxx

SILICON and POWDERY MILDEW

In the last issue (No.35) there was a comment on the effect of silicon salts on the prevention of powdery mildew. There is much more detailed information on this in Alec Bulford's recent book 'Caring For Soil', a Kangaroo Press publication.

He lists as references five scientific papers on the use of silicates - sodium or potassium meta-silicate - as foliar sprays on commercial crops to protect against powdery mildew. These chemicals are poisonous and require care in their use on food crops.

Bulford also recommends the use of 'Agrichar' a form of high carbon ash from rice hulls with a high silicon content. 10% of Agrichar by volume in water has a soluble silicon content 30 to 35 ppm and may be used as a drench or a spray. However his detailed notes on Agrichar should be read for a full understanding of the use of this substance. Other information on soils, composting, and the use of additives are very interesting and the book is well worth reading.

LABELS

Having had unreliable results with various pens and pencils on plastic labels the end result has been simply to use an HB pencil, as they do in the Wollongong Botanic Garden, a quick and easy way but not easy to read and not very permanent. Plastic labels can become very brittle and tender with age.

So a slow change over to a much better system in all respects is in progress; the new labels are made from adhesive black Dymo Embossing Tape, on a strip of white colorbond about 2½-3cm wide and 15-20cm long, drilled to be tied on or pointed to go into the ground. If a Dymo tape embosser does not appeal then a very fine brush can be used to print a name with black Dulux which will also be long lasting but not so easy for those unnamed hybrids with four or more parents.

xxxxx

FOR CONSIDERATION

The listing of Vireya hybrids by Mr C.Callard is a very comprehensive and interesting summary and it is surprising perhaps to find that parents of those hybrids have come from only 49 species. Since there are about 300 species of Vireyas there are obvious possibilities in the future for some new hybrids. However while we do not have so many species in Australia we do have 107 here from the list prepared by the late John Womersley with the addition of some new arrivals.

While we may not still have some of the species on the list - and possibly not some of the hybrids although there are probably some new hybrids still unregistered - it is worth while looking through these lists if new hybrids are to be planned for the future.

In the following lists the species that have been used for hybridising have been underlined and the new 'arrivals' have been added.

xxxxx

VIREYA RHODODENDRONS IN AUSTRALIASPECIES

<u>acuminatum</u> ?	B	<u>herzogii</u>	N
<u>aequabile</u>	S	<u>hooglandii</u>	N
<u>alticolum</u>	N	<u>hyacinthosmum</u>	N
<u>anagalliflorum</u>	N		
<u>arfakianum</u>	N	<u>inconspicuum</u>	N
<u>atropuppureum</u>	N	<u>intramervatum</u>	B
<u>aurigeranum</u>	N	<u>invasorium</u>	N
<u>bagobeanum</u>	B	<u>jasminiflorum</u>	
<u>beyerinckianum</u>	N	var. <u>jasminiflorum</u>	M
<u>blackii</u>	N	var. <u>punctatum</u>	M
<u>brookeanum</u>		<u>javanicum</u>	
var. <u>brookeanum</u>	B	var. <u>javanicum</u>	J
var. <u>Bako Island</u>	B	var. <u>teysmannii</u>	S
var. <u>gracile</u> ?	B		
<u>bryophyllum</u>	N	<u>kawakamii</u>	
<u>burtii</u>	B	var. <u>flaviflorum</u>	F
<u>buxifolium</u>		<u>konori</u>	
var. <u>robustum</u>	B	var. <u>New Guinea</u>	N
		var. <u>West Irian</u>	N
<u>carrii</u>	N		
<u>carringtoniae</u>	N	<u>laetum</u>	N
<u>christi</u>		<u>lanceolatum</u>	B
var. <u>Kores, red-pink</u>	N	<u>leptanthum</u>	N
var. <u>Searle, bi-colour</u>	N	<u>leucogigas</u>	N
<u>christianae</u>	N	<u>lochae</u>	A
var. <u>grandiflora</u>	N	<u>longiflorum</u> ?	MBS
var. <u>sunset</u>	N	<u>loranthiflorum</u>	SO
<u>commonae</u>	N	<u>lowii</u>	B
<u>comptum</u>		<u>luraluense</u>	SO
var. <u>comptum</u>	N	<u>luteosquamatum</u>	N
<u>crassifolium</u>	B		
<u>cruttwellii</u>	N	<u>macgregoriae</u>	N
<u>culminicolum</u>		<u>maius</u>	N
var. <u>angiense</u>	N	<u>malayanum</u>	MBS
var. <u>culminocolum</u>	N	<u>maxwellii</u> ?	B
		<u>micromalayanum</u>	B
<u>dianthosmum</u>	N	<u>multicolor</u>	S
<u>dielsianum</u>	N	<u>multinervium</u>	N
<u>ericoides</u>	B	<u>nummatum</u>	N
		<u>nervulosum</u>	B
<u>fallacinum</u>	B		
		<u>pauciflorum</u>	M
<u>gardenia</u>	N	<u>perakense</u>	M
<u>goodenoughii</u>	N	<u>phaeochitum</u>	N
<u>gracilentum</u>	N	<u>phaeoeplum</u>	N
		<u>pleianthum</u>	N

quadrasianum		spondyllophyllum	N
var. rosmarinifolium	P	<u>stenophyllum</u>	B
var. cuneifolium	B	stevensianum	B
		sumatranum	S
<u>rarum</u>	N	<u>superbum</u>	N
retinevium	B		
<u>retusum</u>		tuba	N
var. retusum	SJ		
<u>rhodoleucum</u>	N	vandeursenii	N
<u>robinsonii</u>	M	versteegii	N
<u>rubineiflorum</u>	N	vitis-idaea ?	N
rugosum			
var. rugosum	B	williamsii ?	P
		<u>womersleyi</u>	N
santapauui	I	<u>wrightianum</u>	
<u>saxifragoides</u>	N	var. wrightianum	N
sayeri ?	N	var. cyclopense	N
scabridibracteum	N		
schoddei	N	yelliotii	N
searleanum	N	yongii	B
<u>sessifolium</u>	S		
sheilae	N	<u>zoelleri</u>	N
<u>solitarium</u>	N		

N = New Guinea
M = Malaya
B = Borneo
J = Java
BO = Bougaineville

S = Sumatra
P = Phillipines
F = Formosa
SO = Solomon Is.
I = N.E. Frontier Agency

Current additions to the list are:-

bainitzeanum	N	
calignis	N	hooglandii ?
hellwigii	N	
notiale	A	
<u>orbiculatum</u>	M	
<u>praetervisum</u>	M	
<u>pseudonitens</u>	N	
rarilepidotum	M	
wrayii	M	
searleanum	N	
suavolens	M	

Preview: Rhododendrons Down Under -
Australia 2000 Conference
Melbourne, 13-16 October 2000

We promised to provide members with advance information on plans for the October 2000 Conference, so they can plan ahead for their participation.

Venue selection is expected to be finalised soon. It will be close to Mount Dandenong, and a number of visits will be offered to gardens in the ranges. Basics of the programme are settled, and key speakers have been engaged, including

- Peter & Patricia Cox - from Glendoick Nursery, Scotland
- Graham Smith - Director of Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust, NZ
- George Argent - Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
- Dr. Ross Macdonald - (Vic Branch member) Rosemont Nursery, Montrose
- Sue Wells - (Southern Tasmania Branch ARS) formerly of RBG Hobart

The Conference will include varied content, but with several main themes:

- Vireyas - from Rainforest to Garden. Vireyas are clearly still under-appreciated by gardeners. Let's do something about that!
- Collecting news.
- What's state-of-the-art in management of botanical collections?; and are we interested in where developments might lead?
- Australian-raised hybrids - a celebration of achievements past and a talk about the future.
- Rhododendrons and the media - do they get a "fair go"?

"Indoor proceedings" will be on the Friday afternoon and all-day Saturday (with the official Conference dinner to follow). The Conference will begin on Friday morning in the National Rhododendron Garden, Olinda, and conclude on Monday afternoon, with the Sunday and Monday devoted to garden visits and associated touring. Pre and post-Conference excursions will also be offered.

To provide attendees with flexibility of personal choice, it's intended that separate components of the programme will be bookable separately:

- Each of the pre and post-Conference excursions
- Friday daytime
- Saturday daytime
- Saturday dinner
- Sunday daytime excursion
- Monday daytime excursion

Fees for each component won't be set until later. We expect to issue the official Conference brochure and invitations to attend in September 1999, and would expect to close "early-bird" registrations around end-July 2000.

It's hoped that members around Australia will find the Conference an event not to be missed. We'd like to think that it will attract a large number of Australian rhododendron enthusiasts, both ARS members and others, in addition to significant numbers of visitors from elsewhere (it will be widely publicised, including overseas).

PLAN TO BE THERE!