



Marshall Pierce Madison  
Vireya of the Year

# VIVA VIREYA!

HAWAII CHAPTER AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Volume 11

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## Notes from the President's Desk:

Got a lot for you this month that should carry us through the year. Starting with:

We've been contacted regarding the selecting the Vireya of the Year for 2009. Results must be submitted by Dec. of this year. Take a look at your vireya. Is there any particular one that performs well for you? I'm accepting nominations now through Nov. and we will vote on a final at our Dec. Holiday party.

Many of our members know Babachic, a former member of our chapter. He was in the hospital recently for a serious illness. Last word received is that he is leaving for Pennsylvania this week with his 2 sisters. We wish him well.

The "Toyama" plaque of appreciation is now in place at the zoo thanks to John Barbour, Ron Phillips and John's personal friends who all helped in the different stages to complete this project.

Can you believe it's already October and the Vireya workshop we've been planning for is right around the corner scheduled for Sunday, Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>. We will need everyone to join us. We will have a tent put up along side the pavilion at the zoo. Under it will be several

tables and chairs for you and interested persons to sit at and talk vireya story. A couple of the tables will be set up for propagation of cuttings and repotting demos, too. There will be lots of handouts and plants to give away.

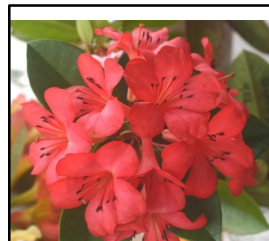
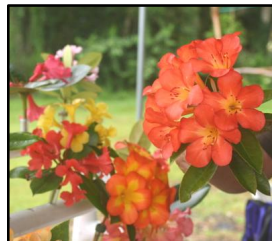
If you have blooming plants to display, bring them. Trusses? Bring them, too. Subway sandwiches and drinks will be provided by the chapter. Desserts and finger foods are welcomed. No plant auction

Much thanks go to John and his helpers, Nancy Bruckner, Joyce Larkin, Carol Werner, Mary Hinck, and Kim Martin for their help with the publicity for this event.

The zoo garden looks great! Much thanks to all our wonderful, energetic volunteers for a job well done. The feedback of the vireya garden continues to increase with only very positive comments!

A big mahalo to Peter and Jane for hosting our last meeting and for agreeing to take over the responsibility of our paper goods for our meetings. The photos on this page are from them of the trusses at that meeting.

Till next time, Happy Gardening & Viva Vireya,  
Sherla D. Bertelmann



### Dates to remember:

1. We have a firm date of Saturday, Oct. 21<sup>st</sup> for a garden work party for Dale Dinsmore. I will have directions and time at our next meeting.
2. Our Nov. meeting will be on Nov. 19<sup>th</sup> at the Kea'au Community Center. (Finally, back home). Fran & Jean are scheduled to do a presentation of their travels for us.
3. Our Holiday party is scheduled for Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>... the second Sunday of the month... at the Kea'au Com. Center. Planning will be at our Nov. meeting. Be ready with your ideas, it's your party. Think fun!

# JOHN'S NOTES

By John Barbour

The weather was as indecisive as an independent voter on election eve. Gray skies hung over "White Cloud Nursery" as a rather dubious membership rolled in, doubtful that the weather would hold and even more doubtful if they were on the right road! A large tent greeted our arrival and did its best to protect the food tables and seated guests as the first large raindrops began to fall. Water splashes on my notebook explained how I was able to get a seat up front near the speakers.

Our hosts, Jane and Peter Adams, began the meeting with a discussion of important landscape considerations when selecting native trees and shrubs to adorn our yards: climate, elevation, salt-tolerance, soil (clay? Lava?), rainfall, invasiveness, caustic properties of the leaves and fruit, adult size, intrusive roots, etc... enough to frighten any novice gardener!

After Jane's presentation Sherla made a few brief announcements and called for an all-hands-on-deck attendance for our next meeting, Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>, at the Panaewa Rainforest Zoo and Gardens where and when we will be giving away vireya starts and trusses to the general public. Demonstrations of

cultivation, pruning and care will also be held.

Sherla also announced a projected work party at Dale Dinsmore's.

Since Stan's passing their gardens have fallen a bit into disarray. Dale would



certainly appreciate any and all kokua extended. Once a firm date is established I'm sure many of our members will demonstrate their aloha and sign up for the event.

The meeting drew to a close with a burst of sunshine that permitted us to put our umbrellas aside and enjoy a tour of Pete and Jane's new house and nursery – a project but a scant two years in the making and quite an impressive accomplishment. Way to go P. & J.!

Speaking of accomplishments, I finally got to conduct that promised interview with Dorothy Walker, our club's treasurer. What a kick! Dorothy is a bundle of surprises, wit and fascination. She was quick to dispel the rumor that she and Bill, her husband, were



once globe-trotting ministers. Anyone talking with Dorothy more than a few minutes would have difficulty giving any credence to that story. Dorothy is, however, a bit of a world traveler. She hails from Australia - Sydney, to be exact. She met Bill in 1957 while he was serving the U.S. of A. as a communications officer in Sydney. It was Bill's line of work that swept Dorothy, like a twister in Kansas, around the world with extended stays in Manila, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Port au Prince (Haiti), Washington D.C., Bamako (Mali, W. Africa), Stuttgart (Germany), Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania, E. Africa), and lastly, 4 years back in Sydney before Bill finally retired. It wasn't until 1978 that Dorothy finally arrived in the 'Land of Oz' – the Big Island of Hawaii.

Dorothy's world travels allowed her little time to put down roots, let alone doing much gardening, till she and Bill settled into Puna. In 1998, however, Bill discovered a flower farm for sale on the Internet. Their daughter Rachel's interest in gardening sparked the investment and suddenly the family was in the nursery business with vireyas and daylilies.

When asked to name her favorite vireya, "you know

that's difficult," Dorothy replied with her always-charming accent. "I love them all. Harry Wu comes immediately to mind, but I have this one gorgeous vireya in bloom at the moment. It's huge and has bright yellow and orange trusses. I can't think of its name, but it's simply beautiful. No, not Zoelleri (my guess), not Narnia." V-30? Anyone out there ready to make a guess?

Speaking of *R. zoelleri*, Richard and Sherla have a magnificent specimen in bloom. What makes it particularly stunning is that at its base are growing blue ginger (neither blue – it's

purple; not ginger – try commelinaceae). Call it what you will, the deep purple of its blossoms contrasts with the brilliant



*zoelleri* to make for an unforgettable experience.

Another unforgettable experience was the fun my wife, Christa, and I had last

year at our club's convention when we hosted one of its speakers, Fred Renich, and his partner, Alex Garcia, and Alex's family from Mexico. Just got a call from them the other day. We shared all the good memories and they send their aloha to their fellow vireya growers here in Hawaii.

Well, that's all folks. See you at the Zoo - and Gardens.

Viva Vireya!

## Mitch's Corner

By Mitch Mitchell

In case you haven't received the news, the Friends of the Zoo have brought in another batch of their great Garden T-shirts. In addition to the beautifully designed Vireya lei with a King Kamehameha butterfly resting on it, is this legend: "Pana'ewa Rainforest Zoo Vireyas Botanical Garden". This wording is not very readable in the accompanying photo where my lovely wife is modeling the lavender design. A number of other colors are also available.



They are on sale at the Zoo Gift shop for \$16 and members of our chapter receive a 20% discount. It's a marvelous buy for our members to wear and should be a lovely

Christmas gift. Furthermore, it is very timely, because at the last County Council meeting it was decided to rename this outstanding attraction the Pana'ewa Rainforest Zoo and Botanical Garden. Hopefully the tasteless sign along Highway 11 that now simply says "Zoo" will be replaced with an attractive display that emphasizes the beautiful Garden in which the Zoo lives.

You may not be aware that in addition to our Vireya garden there are extensive plantings of a large collection of palms and bamboos as well as Victoria lilies provided by the Palm Society, the Bamboo Society and the Water Garden Society. It is truly a magnificent Hilo show piece and admission is Free.

P.S The numerous benches and tables provide an ideal setting for family picnics.

(conclusion)

# The Discovery of the Malaysian Rhododendrons

## by David G. Leach

Royal Horticultural Society  
Rhododendrons with Magnolias and Camellias 1977

The fifth and final zone, above 9,000 feet, is open alpine meadow on the slopes and ridge tops to the mountain summits. Only pygmy rhododendrons are found on grassy glades in the rarefied atmosphere. These low cushions of densely matted leaves, such as *R. saxifragoides*, send up long stems above the foliage, each with a single inch-long, down-curved blood red flower. At a little more than 13,000 feet, these are the ultimate alpine rhododendrons to be found. They are also the most difficult to grow in cultivation. A rule of thumb among connoisseurs is that the higher the elevation of origin and the smaller the leaves the more cranky is the species in the greenhouse.

The zones of vegetation occur in the same sequence throughout New Guinea but with wide differences in the elevations. On some parts of the island the mossy forest may begin at 3,000 feet; elsewhere it may first appear at 8,000 feet.

About 60 different species and hybrids of the Malaysian rhododendrons have grown well outdoors in the United States, primarily in the San Francisco Bay area, in central Florida and in Hawaii. Although so many come from 10,000 to 12,000 feet where there are occasional frosts, the cold is of short duration. At the Strybing Arboretum in San Francisco, the collection survived 28 degrees F, with

only minor damage, but it was later all but decimated by 23 degrees F, except for the high altitude sorts. The heaviest blooming there is in September and October, continuing on to March.

For most gardeners, the splendours of the *Vireya* rhododendrons must be enjoyed in the greenhouse. Whether outdoors or under glass, their growing medium must recognize the epiphytic tendency. There are almost as many methods as there are cultivators. Australians like to use tree fern logs, slitted to receive young plants with bare roots. In England, the Malaysians are often grown on hanging platforms with a bit of moss, exactly as are orchids. A retired explorer of Borneo uses a third each of oakleaf mould, peat-moss and chopped bracken fern. The Germplasm Resources Laboratory of the Agricultural Research Center in Beltsville, Maryland, prefers pure sphagnum moss. Hobbyists in Oregon like coarse fir bark. I use a modification of Cornell University's epiphytic mix: a third each of coarse vermiculite, coarse peat and fine grind fir bark, with five ounces of dolomitic limestone, three grams of fritted trace elements and three-quarters of a gram of iron sulphate to the bushel. So many different mixtures succeed that it would probably be simpler and just as

feasible to buy one of the bark and perlite mixtures pre-packaged for orchids. The principle to be observed is that the growing medium must be loose, well aerated and with very quick drainage. The plants flower best in containers which restrict their roots; they should not be overpotted.

In nature the Malaysian rhododendrons grow on soils of extraordinarily low fertility and high acidity. The epiphytes receive traces of nitrogen dissolved in rain during lightning storms. Although they do respond to fertilizing, in cultivation their tot should be doled out with a delicate hand. A fallacy persists from the days of the Veitchian hybrids that these rhododendrons require hothouse treatment. They do not. A minimum night temperature of 45 degrees F suits them very well. In summer, a vacation outdoors with the pots plunged in a shady bed invigorates them as much as a holiday does for humans.

The *Vireya* rhododendrons have a great deal to recommend them for indoor cultivation. Many of them are so fragrant that they scent an entire hobby greenhouse. The flowers are renowned for their durability. It is common for them to remain in good condition for a month. Expert growers are careful not to self-pollinate the plants in bloom by jostling them, because the corollas then drop

off much more quickly. They often cut off the stigmas of those that spontaneously self-pollinate because of the arrangement of the flower parts. By pinching and cutting back, even the strongest growing of the Vireyas can be kept to about 30 inches. The largest in my greenhouse are in six-inch pots.

Under glass in the United States the Malaysians flower most profusely as short-day plants, from late fall to early spring, when their colour is most appreciated. They have no definite resting period; instead, they grow, bloom and grow once more to bloom again, more or less at random. The manipulation of the blooming period makes a fascinating project for the amateur. In nature near the equator the days and nights are of about equal length. The difference between day and night temperature varies hardly at all the year round. The only fluctuation throughout the seasons which appears to affect flowering is the amount of moisture and sunlight they receive. Most growers recommend keeping these

tropical rhododendrons on the dry side, which of course promotes aeration of the roots.

Vireya rhododendrons root easily from cuttings. The simplest method for hobbyists is to cut off a three-inch length of firm green terminal growth, nip out the terminal bud and make a one-inch slice wound on each side of the bottom of the stem. Dip the wounded stem in hormone powder, wrap it in a handful of damp sphagnum moss from which all free water has been squeezed, and hold it in place with a rubber band. Place the whole in a plastic bag, securing it with another rubber band. After two months in a warm but not sunny spot the cutting will be luxuriantly rooted. Thereafter the terminal buds should be pinched after each flush of growth to insure the development of a many branched, well formed specimen.

Finally, from these multitudes of exotic and unfamiliar rhododendrons which should be chosen? My own selection for ease of cultivation and freedom of flowering, for the beginner:

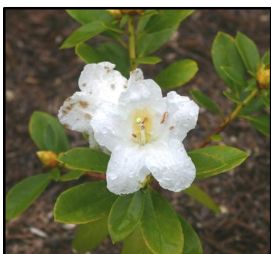
macgregoriae (light orange, salmon pink or pale yellow); lochiaie (rich red); christianae (brilliant orange); laetum (brassy yellow, big flowers); aurigeranum (orange-yellow, big flowers); 'Pink Delight' (pink).

A selection for the most spectacular flowers: zoelleri (yellow, orange, salmon or red); leucogigas (white); hellwigii (blood red); lowii (yellow, orange, salmon or cerise); rhodoleucum (tubes deep pink, corollas white); brookeanum (orange-pink, cream centre); orbiculatum (white or pale pink); laetum (brassy yellow); aurigeranum (orange-yellow); 'George Budgen' (orange-yellow).

The newly discovered species of rhododendrons are in great demand and difficult to obtain. The American Rhododendron Society does operate a referral service at the following address: Mr. Theodore Van Veen, Secretary-Treasurer, American Rhododendron Society, 4201 Southeast Franklin St., Portland, Oregon 97206.

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(Received from Jane Adams)



-- R. dendricola, that is blooming for the first time. I hope this bodes well for us being able to grow (and bloom) maddenias here. This was one of the group of plants that came in spring of 2005.... They languished in pots and finally got put into a bed this winter. I didn't expect these to really bloom, but this one came out last week, and another maddenian from the same batch, R. excellens, has HUGE buds on it, one of which is swelling ominously!



# Viva Vireya!

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**Past President:** Richard Marques

**Director Emeritus:** Mitch Mitchell



Here’s Mitch, on his wonderful “Rock & Roll” vehicle, coming through one of his many garden paths to greet Jay and Carol Trayer from Brooksville, Florida. Carol is a long time member of our chapter and the sister to member, Richard Marques.



## **Next Meeting:**

**Date:** Oct. 15, 2006 (Sunday)

**Time:** 10am to 2pm

**Place:** Pana’ewa Rainforest Zoo & Gardens

We are having our talk-story vireya workshop at the zoo. Set-up at 9am...

The club will provide drinks and subway sandwiches.

Please feel free to bring finger foods, such as chips-carrot sticks etc. Desserts also welcomed.

For those growing out vireya cuttings...don’t forget to bring them for our vireya plant give-away.

For those with vireya trusses...do bring them, too

Everyone is needed and welcomed. Any questions please call Sherla at 966-9225.