



**Vireya of the Year
'Great Scent-sation'**

VIVA VIREYA!

HAWAII CHAPTER AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Volume 13

Issue 1

Jan/Feb 2008

Notes from the President's Desk:

Having Bob Peck of the Water Garden Society as our guest speaker at our January meeting was premonitory to say the least. Since then, our Island has been treated to such a deluge few of us will forget: flooding everywhere, nearly four feet of rain falling in a 24-hour period in some areas, and day after day after day still more rain -- so much in fact that local koi were seen abandoning lily ponds in search of drier grounds! Alas, there were no drier grounds. All of you who wisely took home some of the water plants Bob so generously distributed at the meeting last time were well advised.

After weeks of wetness, the weather gasped for air and for a brief moment gave way to damp, gray, dripping, draining afternoon allowing me to navigate to the zoo and inspect the condition of our beloved vireya gardens. Although there were some minor washouts here and there throughout the zoo, the Pana'ewan Zoo and its gardens were amazingly intact. A few branches bent over from the month long onslaught of torrential rains gave mute reminder of the passing storms. Otherwise all appeared well.

I was expecting, of course, a plethora of weeds choking out everything inasmuch as quite some time had passed since our club's last weeding party. Oh, there were weeds all right. But their growth and spread nowhere equaled that of our very own vireyas. Talk about "Viva Vireya". Better to explain "Viva Viagra"! The "Bill's Bank", the species garden bed, and everywhere else our Vireya Rhododendron were leaping for the sky. We don't just need a weeding party, we need a pruning, fertilizing party -- and soon (weather permitting). Remember, fertilizer is needed after 10" of rain.

There were no dampened spirits at our antediluvian January meeting (for the few of you who were unable to

attend) everyone seemed still to be in Christmas party mode. A potluck buffet table accompanied revelry, mindful of the debauchorous holidays the month before. Spirits were high, vireyas were in bloom and so was the club's bank account. According to Marijean Horton, our treasurer, we netted \$399 at the Christmas party, thanks to auctions and raffle ticket sales! "Is there any good soul out there with a dollar to put us over the top?", I asked our Members. Hands shot up; Christa, my wife took count and we logged an additional \$15 for the kitty. Way to go, everyone! Mahalo nui. Many of us were still talking about how festive the hall had been just a month before, with all the poinsettias from Roy Shigenaga. Aware that Roy was soon destined for major surgery, I gave him a call recently. No surgery yet, he reported. End of the month, but he is doing fine. Our best wishes go out to him.

We have a new man on board -- the Board of Directors, that is. Spike Werner has agreed to take over for Henry Horton. Hopefully, Henry's conflict of schedule and interests will not prevent his attendance at our regular monthly gatherings. Thanks, Spike, for stepping up to the plate!

So what's on the table for our February meeting? Hmm ... plate, table, must be still thinking about those potlucks. Jane Adams has agreed to speak about selecting the right vireyas for specific garden requirements. Soo ... see you there! No, not in the garden -- at the Kea'au Community Center, 12 noon on Sunday the 17th. Bring food! Bring trusses! Bring a friend!

Viva Vireya,
John Barbour

Officers of the Hawaii Chapter ARS

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Past President: Sherla Bertelmann **Director Emeritus:** Mitch Mitchell

Mitch's Corner

By Mitch Mitchell

New attire for Big Island Feet



Judging by remarks that have gotten back to me it seems that last month's column should have been labeled: "With Tongue-in-Cheek". Just so you won't misunderstand, the photo to the left is offered in that same vein.

Recently our member, Bruce Winter, sent me an email from a friend who sent this photo. I remembered it as I sit here enjoying a beautiful sunny day and wondering if this is the first day of the drought. While looking back on many very wet days there are many stories going around that make it clear the last 6 weeks have

had an unusually large amount of rain. You might ask how have the Vireyas responded, and I'll quickly say "Beautifully". Most Vireya growers I know say the same thing....."We have never seen so many flowers."

For those of you who haven't visited us I should add that we are blessed with a very porous volcanic soil. So the rain goes right through on its way to sea level 4000' below. As it goes by the Vireya roots, they say "thankyou", and are pleased that it doesn't stay and create the soggy condition they hate. One might think as I do that with so much rain and so little sun the flowering would decrease. However, even if I cant explain it I continue to enjoy them. Here are a couple examples:



'Dr.Sleumer' X 'Pink Delight'
on the left and
'Cephas'
on the right



Secretary's Notes

I hope that all this crazy weather hasn't been driving you up the wall. Chinese water torture! I'm sure that it was banned by the Geneva Convention. On the bright side, if our plants don't all wash away, we'll have a glorious display from our Vireya this coming spring.

But enough of Noah's Ark and co. Let's hear about the last meeting! For those of you who attended you know that we were joined by the President of the Water Garden Society, Bob Peck. He gave excellent information on how to maintain a water garden with optimal success. And, if you were one of the lucky ones who got a pamphlet with enclosed membership card you should join. Just being a part of any society will enhance your garden in ways you wouldn't have thought possible. Not to mention all the good food. J

We wrapped the meeting up with the usual raffle and auction. A very nice cutting of Taylori came in with

eight plus trusses on the top of it. Boy, what a sight that was to behold! Maybe we will be lucky enough to have a picture of it in the newsletter??? And of course the auction was a big hit with a good selection of plants.

Hope to see you all at the next meeting on the Feb. 17th. Bring the vireyas along, too and keep the Western Regional conference in mind!

Jurahame Leyva
Secretary, Hawaii Chapter A.R.S.
Avid Vireya enthusiast



Here is Sherla with the Taylori cutting with multi trusses..

2008 ARS Western Regional & Board Meeting & Vireya Seminar Up-date

Sept. 24 to Sept. 27 w/ post-convention tour on Sept. 28

To help with your plans here is a brief description of what is being planned for the Sept. Convention followed by the Hilo Hawaiian Hotel's registration form. A website is currently being constructed and more information, as well as, registration information will be up shortly. [www:HawaiiVireyaARS.org](http://www.HawaiiVireyaARS.org)

Wednesday - Sept. 24th – Puna Tour..

You will visit an organic farm far off the beaten path, a palm garden with 5 acres planted with 5000 palms (yes, I did say 5000), a vireya and native plant nursery as you travel along the old road that ends at the famous Black Sands beach. You won't see these places on any other tour.

Thursday - Sept. 25, - Volcano Tour & Board Meeting Day

The Volcano tour was also on the agenda for the 2004 Western Regional held here, so many of you are already familiar with it. For those that are not, the day is spent in the Volcano National Park where you will visit the Jaguar Museum, a lava tube, an art center and more. Their lunch room overlooks the crater rim.

Friday - Sept. 26, - HI Chapter Members Gardens & Fellowship Dinner

This tour covers 5 gardens that range in elevation from 400' to 2000'. You are in for a real treat as Hi Chapter ARS members welcome you into their homes & gardens. You will experience 'local style' hospitality and 'local' gardens sure to be unforgettable.

In the evening there will be a **Fellowship Dinner** in the park. This event was the 'hit' of the 2004 Western Regiona and this year's one should prove to be just as much fun with food, friends, and entertainment 'local style'.

Saturday – Sept. 27, Vireya Seminar & Aloha Banquet

Among our speakers are Kaye Hagen from Tasmania, AU and the Australian Rhododendron Society – Fred Renick from CA and a member of the S. Cal Chapter-ARS, and Erik Nilsen from Virginia Tech. This is the 4th vireya seminar hosted by the HI Chapter – ARS and promises to be entertaining and educational . A must for rhododendron lovers.

The **Aloha Banquet** will consists of dinner, a raffle and a silent auction. Some of the items planned for the raffle and auction will be one of a kind... like the wonderful items made by our members/wood turners.

Sunday – Sept 28th Post Convention Tour

There was no other time to schedule 3 more must sees for our visitors so, a post-convention garden tour. First, there is the Vireya Garden at our local Panaewa Rainforest Zoo & Gardens. Second, there is Mitch Mitchell's one acre Vireya Garden, 'Kimalia', located in Volcano Village at 4000'. Third, there is the Trommer's 3 acre garden located on the Hamakua Coast right on the ocean. This will be a more leisured tour with lots of time allotted to enjoy and absorb each garden thoroughly.

Big Island Woodturners

2008 Tenth Annual Woodturning Show

Wailoa Center, 200 Pi'opi'o St. Hilo, Hawaii

Show Dates: Feb. 22 thru March 28th.... 8:30 am to 4:30 pm... Monday – Saturday

Artists Reception 5 – 7 pm (pupus) Friday Feb. 22

For more information contct Larry Grodin at 934-7535 or Wailoa Center at 933-0416

Be sure to get down there and support our own chapter's woodturners..



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AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

September 23-28, 2008

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* * * * *

Name(s): _____

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City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

Arrival date: _____ Time: _____ Departure date: _____

Please indicate number of people in room: _____

STANDARD GARDEN VIEW: _____
Special Rate: \$90.00 plus tax, per night
Regular Rate: \$190.00 plus tax, per night
Bedding: 1 King or 2 Doubles
Maximum persons: 4 with existing bedding

DELUXE OCEAN VIEW: _____
Special Rate: \$115.00 plus tax, per night
Regular Rate: \$240.00 plus tax, per night
Bedding: 1 King or 2 Queens
Maximum persons: 4 with existing bedding

ON REQUEST BASIS: SMOKING: _____ NON-SMOKING: _____

- ** All rooms include: Refrigerator & Coffee Maker.
- ** Rates are net, non-commissionable.
- ** Roll away: Please add \$30.00 plus tax, per day. Roll-away(s) needed: _____
- ** All rates subject to 11.4166% GE and Transient tax. Taxes subject to change without notice.
- ** Cancellation Policy: 72 hours cancel notice is required for a refund or no charge to your credit card.

To confirm your reservation, please enclose a 1 nights' deposit. To guarantee with credit card, please complete below:

Type of credit card: _____ Number: _____

Full name on credit card: _____ Exp. Date: _____

Signature on credit card: _____

**Requests for room must be received by August 23, 2008 or subject to rate and space availability.

Eating and Cooking Vireyas – A Warning and a Tale of Woe

By Graham Price

I can just hear you all thinking – “*Now that’s an unusual title.*”; “*I didn’t think you could cook and eat Vireyas.*”; “*What parts does one eat?*”; “*I thought Vireyas were poisonous just like other Rhododendrons.*” Well, the replies to those thoughts, in order, are: Yes; You could - but don’t; None; and Yes.

To be more expansive; Yes, its an unusual title for an article and its aimed at getting your attention and making you smile. You could eat Vireyas, if you really wanted to, but don’t even try. None of the parts of Vireyas are worth eating, they are too tough and stringy. And Yes, vireyas are poisonous so don’t try to eat them and don’t even let any sap get into your mouth or in your eyes. Let me explain.

Its something of a folklore that rhododendrons are poisonous, or at least some rhododendrons, some of the time and to some people/animals. But this folklore appears to be true. If one searches the Web there are many references to and warnings about poisonous rhododendrons. So, I’ll start with the most important thing first.

Warning: Little children and grazing animals should be kept clear of all azaleas and rhododendrons, including Vireyas. Don’t ingest nectar from rhododendrons, including vireyas.

Type of poison: Andromedotoxins (grayantoxins) - water soluble volatile resins chemically related to turpentine which burn the mouth and so discourage potential victims from consuming large quantities of the leaves. Also occurs in flowers and nectar and honey made from flower nectar.

Toxicity: As little as 3ml nectar /kg body weight or 0.2% of the body weight as leaves may be toxic or lethal. ar
History: The effect was known by the Greeks and Romans since 401BC. Apparently around 30BC something bad happened to Pompey’s army crossing the Caucasus after they feasted on local honey made from rhododendrons. Acute cases of honey poisoning have been reported from Nepal and Turkey producing severe cardiovascular problems with very low blood pressure and slow pulse rate (1). A Scottish case records how a man licked *R. ponticum* nectar from his hands and rapidly experienced loss of coordination and an inability to stand (2). J Clyde Smith in Wollongong, Australia, reported strange effects after nectar from a vireya accidentally fell onto his tongue.

However, rhododendron honey remains toxic for only a very short period. Honey that is stored in the comb will probably have lost its toxicity before the first extraction. Also, the bees themselves will consume most if not all of this honey for brood rearing during the spring and early summer build up. Whilst the bees may build up well on the nectar and pollen of *R. ponticum* and most other rhododendron species, and appear to come to no harm themselves from the toxins, there are one or two species on which they do not fare so well.

A study of the species that produce nectar toxic to bees was carried out on the Isle of Colonsay in the Hebrides in the late 1950’s (3). Nectar from different rhododendron species was collected, their toxins analysed and also fed to bees and injected into mice and cats. Species found to be especially poisonous to all victims were *R. thomsonii*, *R. arboreum* and *R. pratti*

Now you have been told! So don’t do eat rhododendrons. So what’s this about “Cooking Vireyas”. I’m actually talking about your vireya plants ‘cooking’ when they are kept in black plastic pots and left directly in the hot sun. Here is my tale of woe.

For several years I had a problem with vireya plants occasionally slowly losing vigour, wilting and dying - sometimes many at the same time, like an epidemic. It was pretty obviously a problem with the roots. When the pot was watered there might be some recovery, but at other times there was no recovery. When examined I couldn’t find any new young roots – they were all brown and rather sparse. If an affected plant was put in the shade and kept damp, but not overly wet, it might show some weak recovery over a long time, but generally speaking it was doomed.

I thought it might be phytophthora, which is a soil/water born fungi that kills roots and stops plants from taking up water, so that the leaves lose turgidity, wilt and turn dry and crisp. At one time I had my pot soil tested by the local agricultural department but it came back as indeterminate. I tried drenching the pots in a soil fungicide and also tried spraying systemic fungicides. Neither produced any improvement.

Honey made from rhododendrons has been reported to cause cardiac arrhythmias, emesis, mild paralysis and convulsions in humans and is known as “mad honey”.

I abandoned the idea of root fungus and next thought the problem might be nematodes – microscopic worm-like critters that live in soil and eat plant roots (they also infest animals, including humans). Some nematodes are considered as beneficial and soil-friendly but many can severely damage plants.

I studied up on nematodes and tried to buy the latest nematicide. However, it comes only in huge quantities, is expensive and is very dangerous to humans. I read that preparations from Neem seeds would effectively fumigate the soil, kill nematodes and fertilize the plants so I bought a bag of Fumefert (crushed neem seeds and shells). It only came in 40kg bags but since it is also a fertilizer I thought I could use it elsewhere, maybe! Well, I scattered some on top of the soil in my vireya pots and watered them. All I got was a horrible fungus growth across each pot which people in adjacent shadehouses complained about so I had to scrape it all off. The plants didn’t improve.

I decided to think rather than act. I realized that the problem never occurred with vireyas planted in the

(cont. on page 6)

Viva Vireya!

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“Eating and Cooking Vireyas” cont.

ground – it was only with those in black plastic pots. I decided to measure the temperatures of these pots on a hot summer’s day when they were fully exposed to the sun. I was astonished. Even when the air temperature was around 38oC the temperature of the plastic pot was near, at or over 50oC, depending on pot size and location. The soil and plant roots must be around these same temperatures. On really hot days of over 40oC (and we get these in Melbourne) I think the soil and roots could even get to around 60oC, maybe even more. And these temperatures are likely to remain high for quite a few hours – as long as the sun is striking the pots. Well, I’ve slow-cooked a leg of lamb at not much higher temperatures (70-80o) so its not surprising that what I was really doing was cooking the roots of my Vireyas. It wouldn’t even matter if the soil around the roots was damp – all this means is that the roots would be steamed rather than baked! Once cooked the roots have problems taking up water (wouldn’t we all) and its only to be expected that the plant doesn’t recover. While some plants might be able to take this sort of treatment its clear that Vireyas cannot.

So the lesson is, if you keep your Vireyas in black plastic pots (or maybe any colour of pot and made of any

material) then make every effort to keep the sun from shining directly on the pots. Use shade cloth (reasonably dense), shade from trees or whatever you can get. The conclusion of this tale – don’t try to ingest any parts of Vireyas and if you want to keep them growing nice and strong don’t cook them by leaving their pots in direct sunlight on hot days.

References.

1. Newsletter of the WHO Surveillance Programme for Control of Foodborne Infections & Intoxications in Europe 1996 49/50 6
2. Cooper, Johnson; Poisonous Plants & Fungi: an illustrated guide. HMSO 1991
3. McLeod-Carey, Lewis, MacGregor and Marin-Smith, 1959 Pharmacological and Chemical Observations on some Toxic Nectars. J. of Pharmacy and Pharmacology 11, Suppl. 269T-274T

*Eds. It is fascinating how things come around again and again. We wrote this article back in June this year. Then in September Lyn Craven sent out a message to the web chat rooms: vireya@yahoogroups.com and rhodo@vireyagroups.com about an article that had just appeared on the same topic. The reference is:
Title: Poisoning by mad honey: A brief review Authors: Koca, I; Koca, AF Source: FOOD AND CHEMICAL TOXICOLOGY, 45 (8): 1315-1318 AUG 2007*

Next Meeting: 3rd Sunday – Feb. 17, 2008
Place: Kea’au Community Center (aka Senior Center)
Time: 12 noon – potluck lunch
2 pm - meeting

Jane Adams has agreed to speak about selecting the right vireyas for specific garden requirements. Come join us for fun, food, and fellowship

