

THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2005



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Happy New Year to all and may the year be a good one for you. Hope you all had a very good Christmas.

AThe year 2004 was not one of our best, but then there were some positives.
We lost several members, who will be sadly missed: Ken Watkins, Ken Cathie and David Howard.

Now on a positive note, we tried a new venture with a display at the A.B.C. Gardening Show at Caulfield Racecourse. That put the Society's name before the public which created a very good interest and earned us several new members, not forgetting our Silver Award, as a bonus. So with this success, we intend to do this again in 2005.

Also we, the Victorian Branch hosted the 2004 A.G.M. and conference of National Council which was a very successful weekend with several interstate and overseas visitors, who thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Thanks to Carole Quinn and her assistants for all the great organising, as things went very smoothly.

Several things have been happening at the Olinda Gardens – a new shade cloth has been installed on the long shade house, which is a great improvement, the old black shade cloth had deteriorated and split, this was replaced with white to allow better light penetration to improve plant growth.

The Retail Nursery this year was down on sales, due to the weather on weekends, but we still made quite a good profit, a lot was due to the efforts of the Volunteer Group with restocking of new stock on a regular basis.

The shows were again well supported by members, but we still need more assistance and support to take the load of the usual few, so this year get involved and enjoy the camaraderie. It's not all work, we do have some fun also.

We have put together an Agenda for this year, but if you have any ideas or subjects you would like, please contact one of your Committee Members so that we can consider your suggestion.

To make things easier for our Newsletter Editor, put pen to paper and forward them to Simon Begg. If we don't send articles in, we can't produce a Newsletter, **so please help.**

We are considering a Xmas in July again but only if we get enough response so let us know and as we haven't decided a venue, so if you have any ideas where, let us know, also we want to know about our December Christmas function, if you are at all interested, let us know. These functions are to try and bring members together socially, as this is our Society, **and that means you.**

Don't forget our Australian Day B.B.Q. – B.Y.O. everything, on the 30th January, 2005.

**Bill Taylor
President.**

THE SPECIES COLUMN.

calendulaceum,section

pentanthera,subsection

pentanthera.

calendulaceum:

Rhododendron calendulaceum is regarded as one of the most brilliant of the American deciduous azaleas. It grows readily in the open at Olinda but probably needs light shade in Melbourne. Like most deciduous azaleas it is not particular about soil conditions but should not be allowed to become dry in the Summer. It can be propagated from soft cuttings taken in late November.

Name:

calendulaceum means "like a calendula", in reference to its orange flowers.

Distribution:

From the mountains of South-Eastern U.S.A., Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas, at an altitude of 800 to 6000 feet.

History.

This species was known to the Cherokee Indians, who called it "The sky-paint flower", after the brilliant colours of a Summer sunrise.

(ref. "Azaleas" by Fredrick Street-1959.)

In 1797 a Frenchman, Andre Micheux, raised a collection of American native azaleas and sailed to France with potted plants. Unfortunately the ship was wrecked off the coast of Holland but most of the plants were rescued, and washed with fresh water. These plants first flowered in Ghent, Belgium, in 1804 and were used in hybridising the Ghent Azaleas. "Coccinea Speciosa" is believed to be a form of *calendulaceum*, and "Nancy Waterer" is listed as *molle* X *calendulaceum*.

Characteristics:

R. calendulaceum is a tall-growing shrub with pink, yellow, orange, or red flowers. This species can be distinguished from the other late reds (*cumberlandense* and *prunifolium*) by the sticky glands on the calyx and corolla. The stamens and stigma are unusually long ; three times longer than the corolla tube.

Where to See These Plants:

Most plants of *calendulaceum* at NRG have been planted in the "Horseshoe Bed", which is the long semi-circular bed of azaleas just past the "Lyrebird Lookout"

At the top end of the bed a spectacular group of this species can be seen in late November, with colours varying from pale pink, to orange, orange-red, and deep red. At the bottom of the bed there are two plants with orange flowers blotched a deep Cadmium-yellow.

Hybrids.

R. calendulaceum is a tetraploid species which can be difficult to hybridise, however, American enthusiasts have successfully crossed this with other U.S. native species. The influence of *calendulaceum* can be seen in the deep orange-red colours of the Knaphill and Exbury azaleas.

Alan Kepert

VIREYA SPECIES

R viriosum [was *R lochiae*] and *R lochiae* [was *R notiale*]

Vireya Subsection Vireya [The Rhododendron Handbook RHS 1998].

At the time Dr H Sleumer published *Flora Malesiana* in 1966 these two Australian vireyas were identified as one only; - *R lochiae*. Presumably because Australia is not part of Malesia, Dr Sleumer referred to them only in a note to *R comparabile* [number 244 in his classification] that *R comparabile* is 'much related to *R lochae* [sic] F. v. M. [Ferdinand Mueller] from N.E. Queensland (the only *Rhododendron* in Australia), which, however, has red corollas laxly hairy ovary (the scales thus clearly visible) and 2-5 (rarely up to 7) flowers per umbel.

The RHS Handbook describes a tree or shrub to 3m, epiphytic or terrestrial. It notes that the original plant described as *R lochiae* was identified as a separate species and called *R notiale* [and has now, again, been called *R lochiae*] following the work of L.A. Craven & R.M. Withers [“ *A second species of Rhododendron (Ericaceae) from Australia*, Edinb.J.Bot. 53(1): 27-37, 1996]. I hope to access a copy of this paper and persuade Lyn Craven to write something for a later Newsletter.

I have both species in my garden at Olinda, one *R viriosum* being from *Thornton Peak*. I have other accessions also but these are of unknown provenance. Both species flower mainly in the summer from around Xmas time. I find that both species need protection from the sun and do not tolerate drying out as well as many other vireyas. I have killed one of each in recent years by assuming they would tolerate harsh conditions as well as their hybrids. *R lochiae*, when protected, grows particularly vigorously.

These species are a parent in many successful hybrids. I have many in my garden.

- 'Bob's Crowning Glory' [*lochiae x leucogigas* 'Hunstein's Secret']
- 'Donvale Pink' [*lochiae x leucogigas* 'Hunstein's']
- 'Christmas Past' [*lochiae x pseudonitens*; remarkably sun tolerant..]
- *lochiae x herzogii*
- *lochiae x macgregoriae* [there are many of these. For example 'Celebration'.]
- 'Christmas Present' [*lochiae x brookeanum* subsp. *Gracile* Sun tolerant, yes; but rust prone too.]
- 'Red Tubular', not registered, is, I assume, a *lochiae* hybrid.
- 'Irian Jaya' [*lochiae x* 'Pink Delight']
- 'Great Scent-sation' [*konori x lochiae*]
- 'Coral Flare' [*lochiae x laetum*]
- 'Arthur's Choice' [*christianae x lochiae*]
- 'Littlest Angel' [*lochiae x pauciflorum*]
- 'Saint Valentine' [*lochiae x gracilentum*]
- *lochiae x jasminiflorum x multinervium* [a great, scented, sun tolerant plant for a hanging basket or in the ground; not registered so far as I know]

Number in NRG

Surely there must be some in NRG? But I am not sure where to find them in the ground.

Distribution

R lochiae is to be found in the Bellenden Ker Range and Bell Peak in the Malbon Thompson Range, at from 1200-1500m. *R viriosum* is to be found at Mt. Finnigan, Thornton Peak, Mt. Windsor Tableland and main Coast Range at from 900-1330m

These locations range from the Atherton Tableland, near Cairns, to the Daintree, north of Cairns. I have visited the general locality but soon discovered that seeking out vireyas *in situ* would require some planning and, I think gear, for venturing into road free rainforest. I have put this on my list of things to do.

Where in the Garden to plant *R viriosum* and *R lochiaie*

Plants are readily obtainable. I think the species need good protection and should not be allowed to dry out. Like all vireyas they need good drainage. They are not as hardy as their hybrids! But worth it.

S.W.B.

REPORT OF ALAN RAPER'S TALK ON GRAFTING RHODODENDRONS

Reprinted from March 1992 Newsletter Ed.

Prior to advances in propagation by cuttings, (e.g. mist, plant hormones), layering and grafting were the only vegetative means of producing rhododendrons. Layering has severe volume limitations so grafting was the only commercially acceptable technique available in early days for the production of rhododendrons true to name. In Australia the great majority of grafted plants were imported from Holland, using *R. ponticum* as the understock. The shock of movement from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere often caused a setback to the scion, resulting in excessive production of suckers from the stock.

Apart from this problem, costs inevitably rose as labour increased, even if the grafts were produced locally. So, today, if a Rhododendron variety cannot readily be produced from cuttings and grow well on its own roots, it disappears from the commercial scene.

Grafting is still used however for a few especially desirable varieties which do not readily strike or grow well from cuttings and is, of course, available to the enthusiastic amateur for use in special circumstances.

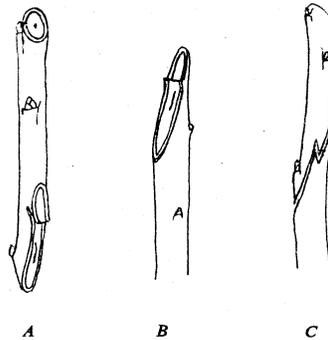
Once mastered it is a comparatively easy procedure which has many advantages for the amateur.

Alan recommended the "whip and tongue" method for most cases and demonstrated by making several grafts. A list of the main features of this method follows;

1. The whip and tongue method has a good chance of success because there is a large area of cambial contact and the chances of making cambial contact are high. It heals quickly and makes a strong union.
2. The diameter of the stock and scion should match if possible. If a mismatched pair must be used, match cambium layers on one side.
3. The stock plant should not be too wet. It should be placed under cover a month or so before grafting.
4. The scion should preferably be dormant so the time of grafting is determined by the time of flowering of the scion, e.g., early variety should be grafted in early winter.
5. The stock should be encouraged into active root growth by the time of grafting. Thus an early stock, (e.g., 'Sir Robert Peel', 'Christmas Cheer', 'Cornubia') should be selected for early scions.
6. Stock and scion should be compatible for a long life of the grafted plant, e.g. *arboreum* hybrid on *arboreum* hybrid, *maddenii* on *maddenii*. If the rate of growth or ultimate trunk diameter is not similar, the plant may fail at the graft later in life.
7. The grafting knife must be very sharp so that all the cuts are clean and not bruised as in cuts by secateurs. Frequent sharpening is recommended.
8. The stock should preferably be cut at a point where the wood is young (green). Older wood can be used but union will take longer and success is less likely.

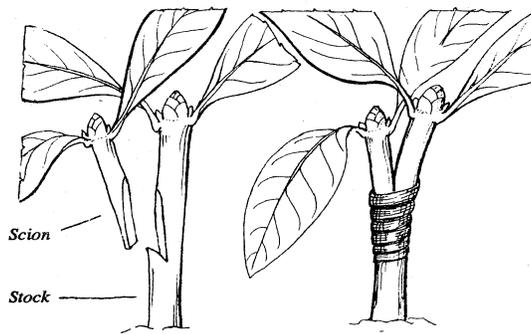
9. The graft point on the stock should be above a few leaves, to help keep the stock growing until the graft takes.
10. The scion should be green (current growth) wood.
11. The number of leaves on the scion should be reduced to about 5 or 6 maximum at the top. There is no need to shorten leaves, even though they may touch the walls of the covering medium later. If leaves need to be removed cut them off cleanly with the grafting knife to avoid bruising or tearing of the bark.
12. Conventional plastic grafting tape may be used to bind the union but Alan demonstrated a new, very thin tape like Gladwrap which adheres to the graft union with a final tie. He has found the new tape to be an improvement. It does not need to be removed later.
13. After completing the graft, spray the foliage lightly with fungicide then cover with glass (bell jar or wine flagon with bottom removed).
14. If a glass of a suitable size is not available, a plastic bag and supporting wire loops may be used. The plastic usually sweats excessively, so a small hole should be made in the bag, e.g., by a lighted cigarette.
15. After-care is important. Preferably keep the graft in a glass house with reasonable shade until new growth of the scion starts. The aim is to retard movement of the scion until the union has callused. Do not water the stock unless essential until active growth has occurred.
16. Buds on the stock will start to grow when the scion starts to move. Rub these buds off to prevent stock growth below the graft. This helps to force the scion into growth.
17. When the scion has made new leaves, uncover carefully and water if any drooping occurs. Replace the cover in whole or in part until the cover can be removed completely without the leaves drooping. Wait until the new growth has hardened before regarding the graft as complete.

Another method of grafting is the "side graft". This is particularly useful if there is a large disparity in stem diameters of stock and scion and also at times other than the dormant (winter) time. It needs more after-care and does not give as strong a union as the whip and tongue method but is nevertheless a useful technique. The chances of "take" are good, and if it should fail, the stock is still available for another attempt.



Whip and tongue graft

- A. *Scion (top leaves and terminal bud not shown).*
- B. *Stock in container (not shown).*
- C. *Stock and scion fitted together ready for binding.*



Side graft

Again, Alan demonstrated by making several grafts using this technique.

The top of the stock is not removed at grafting time but is left until the graft has taken. As the top buds of the stock elongate, they should be removed. This will force the buds lower down (on both stock and scion) into growth. Buds on the stock should be removed as they elongate. After the graft has taken and the new scion growth has hardened, the stock above the graft union is removed.

A good time to make this graft is January. Experience has shown that fungus disease is at a minimum at this time and there is ample growing time ahead for union to take place and the scion to make growth and harden as autumn comes.

As a final method, Alan mentioned cutting-grafts, where a whip and tongue graft is made between a scion and another (vigorous) cutting as a stock, using a sharp knife for all cuts. The graft union is completely covered with tape to make it waterproof, hormone is applied to the base of the stock cutting and it is then placed under mist. The stock cutting should be of a variety which strikes quickly, grows vigorously and is compatible with the scion.

Grafting is particularly useful for those varieties and species which:

- (a) do not grow well their own roots, e.g., 'Arnold Teese', 'Hawk Crest', 'Alice Street', 'Marion', 'Glen Glow', 'Elizabeth', 'Sir Charles Lemon', the Loderis, 'Pink Pearl', *yakushmanum*, *delavayi*, *niveum*.

- (b) are difficult to strike, e.g., 'Marion' and its hybrids, *arboreum* and some of its hybrids, yellows such as 'Arnold Teese', 'Hawk Crest', 'Alice Street'.
- (c) where the root system is easily detached from the stem, either on removal from the propagating medium or in later repotting or planting out, e.g., 'President Roosevelt'.

Varieties which are easy to strike and which have been found useful as stocks are:

- (a) 'Admiral Piet Hein', 'Christmas Cheer', 'Sir Robert Peel', 'Columbia', *arboreum* seedlings – particularly useful for early flowering varieties but also good for later varieties.
- (b) 'Fragrantissimum' – for *maddenii* and similar varieties.
- (c) 'Robert Withers' – for Vireyas

Jack Wilson's EDITOR'S NOTE

This report was initially based on the lecture and demonstration given by Alan Raper at the General Meeting in July 1991. Jack O'Shannassy has collaborated with Alan in amplifying the original presentation, and Margaret Barnes prepared the drawings. Our many members who are interested in grafting will find this excellent article of great assistance.

GARDEN VISIT TO
Hilda Crouch

SUNDAY 20th MARCH, 2005, arriving at 10.30 a.m.

The Address: “Ashlea”
 2113 Geelong Road.
 MT. HELEN

On left hand side, leaving Ballarat, several K's down the road where a sign directs you to Geelong Rd.

We will lunch at the Ballarat Botanical Gardens – **B.Y.O. everything.**

AGENDA FOR YEAR 2005

January 30th	Australia Day B.B.Q. – B.Y.O. everything	5. 00 p.m.
February 18th	Propagation	8. 00 p.m.
March 18th	Panel Problem Solving	8. 00 p.m.
March 20th	Garden Visit to Hilda Crouch	10. 30 a.m.
April 15th	Vireyas - Murray McAlister	8. 00 p.m.
April 16th & 17th	VIREYA SHOW	
May 20th	G.P. System – A. Kepert and T. Noonan	8. 00 p.m.
June 17th	To Be Advised.	
July 15th	Rhodos for the Suburbs – L. Begg	8. 00 p.m.
July	Xmas in July ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?	
August 19th	John Faull’s – Olinda Gardens – The early days	8. 00 p.m.
September 16th	Maddenii – A. Kepert	8. 00 p.m.
October 21st	To Be Advised	8. 00 p.m.
October 1st & 2nd	Azalea Show	
October 29th, 20th, 31st & 1st Nov.	Rhododendron Show	
November 18th	Satsukis – Azaleas – Len Sloggett	8. 00 p.m.
December 4th	Christmas Luncheon	

General Meetings are usually at Nunawading, but the venue is not available for some in midyear so watch *Newsletters* for locations.

Please Note the date and time for the Australia Day BBQ! *Newsletter* got it wrong in November!

VIREYA GROUP MEETINGS

February 12th	Olinda		1. 30 p.m.
April 9th	Venue	T.B.A.	1. 30 p.m.
June 11th	“	“	1. 30 p.m.
August 13th	“	“	1. 30 p.m.
October 8th	“	“	1. 30 p.m.
December 10th	“	“	1. 30 p.m.

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