

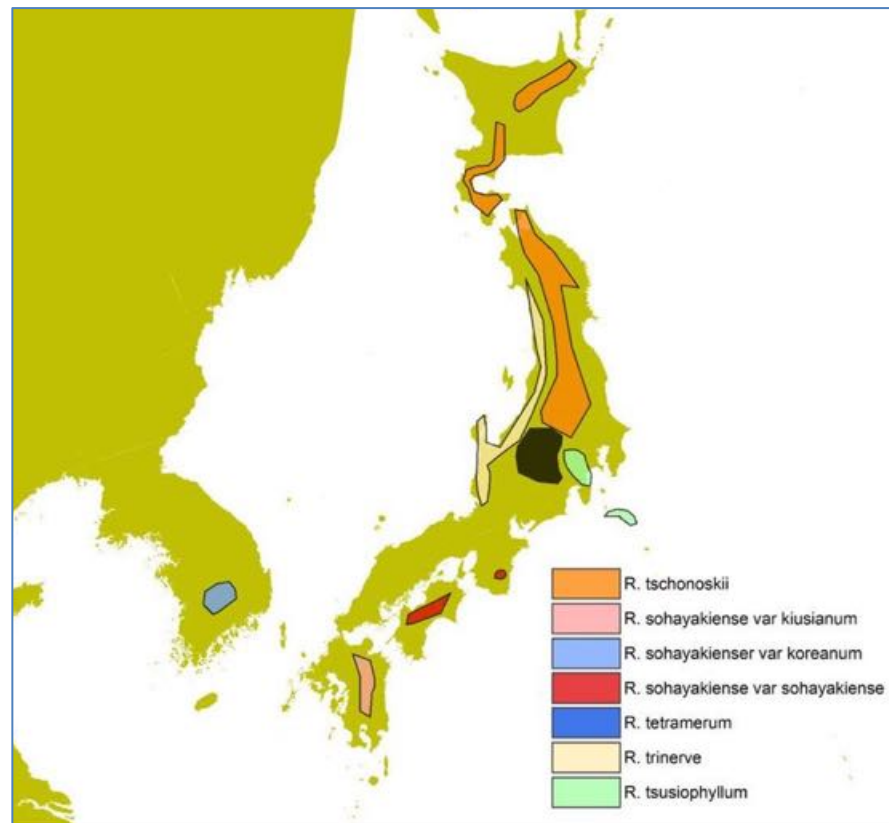
Newsletter of the ARSV



The “*tschonoskii*” rhododendrons

Our attraction to rhododendrons and allied plants is surely their spectacular flowers but there are many species that are not magnificent flowerers nor spectacular plants. They may thus be of limited horticultural interest but are, nonetheless, fascinating in their own right. One such group is the “*tschonoskii* alliance” a group of Tsutsui azaleas from Japan, Korea and neighboring Russia which includes *R. tschonoskii*, *R. tsusiophyllum*, *R. trinerve* and *R. tetramerum*.

These are all small shrubs that grow on wooded mountain sides as well as on exposed rocky sites and cliffs. They bear very small white flowers and have small leaves.



As usual, the naming and taxonomy is open to argument. Davidian treats *R. trinerve* as a subspecies of *tschonoskii*, and makes no mention of *R. tetramerum* while Cox’s Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species only mentions *R. tschonoskii* and *R. tsusiophyllum*. The Plant List includes all as species with unresolved names.

A group of Japanese and Korean botanists have been researching this group and have not only more definitely sorted this group out but have also discovered a new species *R. sohayakiense* and two new varieties - *R. s. kiusianum* from Kyushu and *R. s. koreanum* from South Korea. The nominate *R. s. sohayakiense* is from Shikoku and southern Honshu.

These findings were based on detailed analysis of the morphology of the plants and analysis of DNA.

As the photographs show they are small shrubby plants and it may be hard to distinguish between the species. Yoichi *et al.* (2019) provide a key to identify

them but it could still be difficult.

Cox notes that *R. tschonoskii*, and presumably the other species, is almost deciduous and produces orange red to reddish brown foliage in autumn. He also says that *R. tsusiophyllum* forms a “dainty little creeping or mound-forming shrub”. These are hardy species and can take the cold as well as the hot Australian summers.

R. tsusiophyllum is a bit different to the others. It has anthers that open by a longitudinal slit rather than by a pore at the top that all other Rhododendrons have. It was originally described in its own genus *Tsusiophyllum tanakae*.

DRBG has a *R. tschonoskii* which has been in the gardens for probably 40 years. We have checked its identity using the keys in Yoichi *et al.* and it appears to be *R. tschonoskii* rather than one of the other species. It has survived decades of neglect and we have propagated from it as it appears to be the only one in the gardens.

Reference: Yoichi, W., Minamitani, T., Oh, SH., Nagano, A. J., Abe, H. and Yukawa, T. 2019. New taxa of *Rhododendron tschonoskii* alliance (Ericaceae) from East Asia. *PhytoKeys* 134: 97–114 (2019).doi: 10.3897/phytokeys.134.38216.



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Photographs and credits

No. 1 - *R. sohayakiense. sohayakiense* variety (photo from Yoichi *et al.* 2019)

No.2 - *R. trinerve* photographed by Qwert1234 on Mt Mikuni-dake, Fukushima pref., Japan (https://species.wikimedia.org/wiki/Rhododendron_tschonoskii_subsp._trinerve#/media/File:Rhododendron_tschonoskii_subsp._trinerve.JPG0)

No 3 - *R. tsusiophyllum* photographed by Knud Petersen of the Danish chapter of the ARS. (<http://www.rhododendron.dk/tsusiophyllum.html>)

No 4 - *R. tschonoskii* photographed on Mt Adatara by "user Σ64" (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rhododendron_tschonoskii_05)

No. 5 *R.tschonoskii* in the DRBG.

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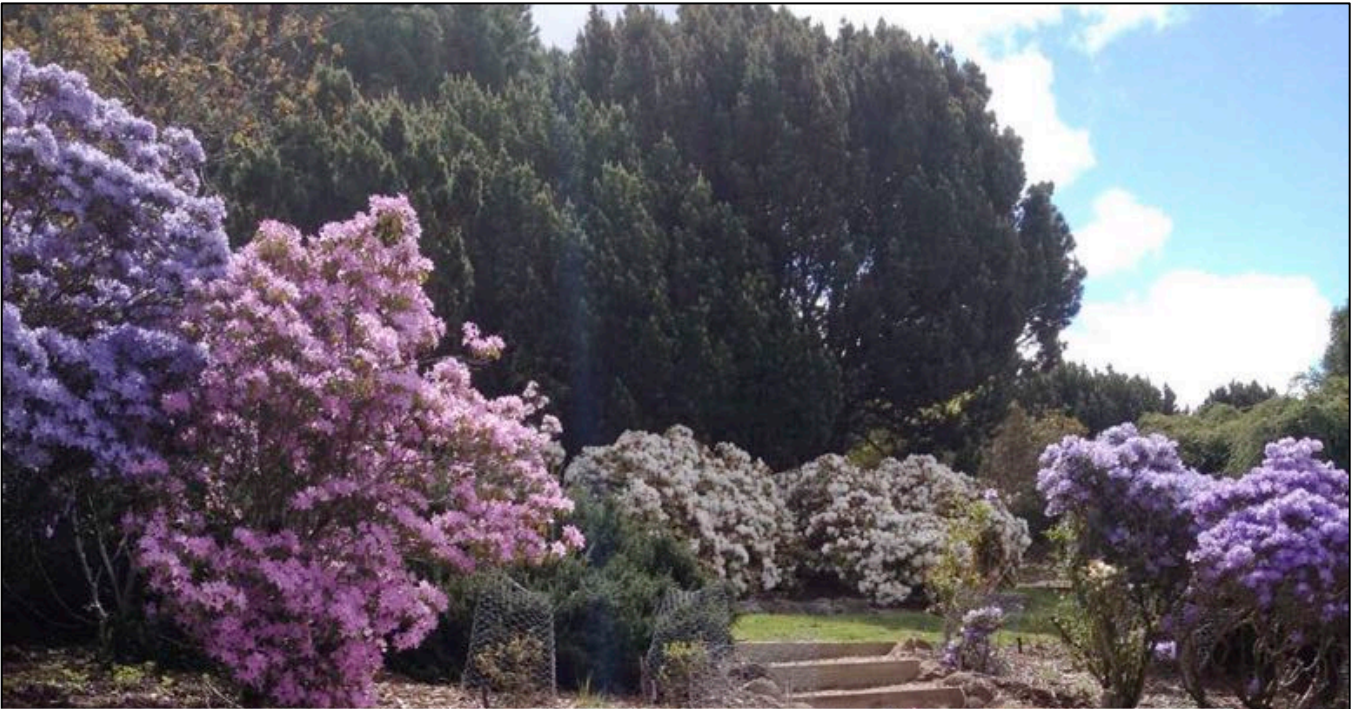
Rhododendron in focus: Rhododendron augustinii

Section Triflora

This species is regarded as the best blue in the *Rhododendron* genus. It comes from Sichuan and Hubei in Northern China at 1200 to 3400 metres, generally in open rocky locations. A check of our database shows about 150 *R. augustinii* have been planted in the garden, many of these in the largely inaccessible area along the Mathias Road boundary. However, a review of the plants in the Triflora bed revealed that there are 12 plants of various forms of this species. At present this area looks untidy with long grass and weeds proliferating, but the plants, which are around 50 years old, look surprisingly healthy and are two to three metres high. They are an important part of our species collection.

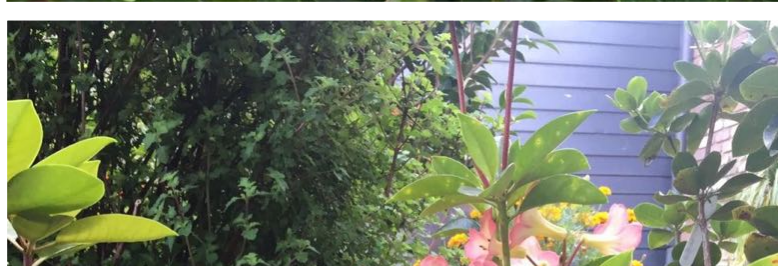
The most impressive plant of *augustinii* I have seen was in the garden of Norm and Jill Brown of Ferny Creek, which we visited in October last year. This plant was growing on a steep slope and is around three metres high, covered in violet-blue flowers. (bottom photo). The top photo shows *R. augustinii* at DRBG with *R. yunnanense* alongside.

Alan Kepert



Vireyas in the garden right now and some garden jobs

If you have the right spot vireyas make great garden plants. These are some flowering in Prue Crome's garden in Kallista right now. She keeps them tight and flowering well by constant judicious pruning. They like living under tree ferns. Autumn is on us and now is a good time to clean up our Rhododendrons in the garden and prepare for spring. It is a good idea to clear away mulch and debris from the stems so as to reduce the chance of rot in winter and clean up any dead branches or flower heads if you have not done so already.



Clockwise from top: *Carringtonia* hybrid, *Saxifragoides* hybrid, Great Scent-sation, Kisses.