



Merry Christmas

Newsletter of the ARSV



Update from the ARSV Committee

COVID restrictions have prevented the society from organising events in 2020, and we were only able to restart our activities at Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden in mid-November.

Our AGM on 14 November was a 'virtual' meeting and attendance was actually higher than for physical AGMs, so this may be a format we use for future meetings. I'm pleased to report that the society is in a healthy financial position, and we have two new committee members: Emma Moysey and Ray Weeks. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank them for nominating and we look forward to working with them over the coming year. Also a warm welcome to members who have joined since July 2019: Ian Chalk, Andrew Duncan, Julian Hill, Geoff Lomas, Richard Rigby and Kevin Flintoff, Susan Thompson, Damien Ward, Andrew Watson, Craig Wilson and Anthony Frost.

The lockdowns forced us to postpone our planned winter replacement of the main shade house at DRBG until autumn 2021. However, at the start of 2020 DRBG was successful in winning a state government grant for the North Queensland conservation garden which matched and added to funding provided by a very generous bequest from Simon Begg's family and the Ian Potter Foundation. This gives an initial \$240,000 to advance the project. The conservation garden, along with the maintenance of a potted collection of provenanced wild collected *R. lochiaie* and *R. viriosum*, will be the major contributions by ARSV and Parks Victoria towards a large Australian Tropical Herbarium project on tropical mountain flora conservation. Three of our members have joined a Parks Victoria working group established to oversee this new development. Andrea Proctor Landscapes has been appointed to develop the designs for the garden. Andrea has had a long collaboration with Andrew Laidlaw and together they have provided most of the landscape design to RBG Melbourne over the last decade or more.

We already have in our collection the rhododendrons for the conservation garden and will shortly receive from Cranbourne Botanic Gardens the other montane species collected by the Australian Tropical Herbarium and the other project partners. We will need to keep all these as a potted collection until the bed is ready for planting-out, hopefully towards the end of 2021. Andrew Rouse will give a rundown of how the native rhododendron collection held at DRBG is going in the next newsletter.

On behalf of the Committee, very best wishes for Xmas and the New Year. I hope to see you at Society events in 2021.

John O'Hara, President

Rhododendron in focus: *Rhododendron yunnanense*

Subsection Triflora

This species covers a large area in Yunnan province in Western China and covers a wide range of climatic conditions. The relatively small flowers are freely produced and range from white, to rose-pink to lavender, but the best forms have a pink to crimson blotch. (see photo) Most of our plants in the DRBG are in the Maddenia Walk area which is not well-known to the public so we should plant more of these near the entrance. A closely related species, *R. davidsonianum*, is also quite beautiful and covers itself in pink flowers every year. I have had limited experience with these species in Ringwood but they should do well in the suburbs.

Alan Kepert



Committee							
John O'Hara	President	johnohara@optusnet.com.au	0444 552 212	Peter Grose		pgrose@bigpond.com	04 8877 3577
Andrew Rouse	Vice-President	awrouse@bigpond.com	0424 750 406	Emma Moysey		emmamoysey@bigpond.com	0422 231 924
Michael Hare	Secretary	vicrhodo@gmail.com	0405 403 607	Ray Weeks		rayweeks@optusnet.com.au	0408 351 934
Prue Crome	Treasurer	prue@crome.net.au	0419 659 741	Alex Pottage		niceplants53@gmail.com	03 5786 1595
Graham Price		lithic01@bigpond.net.au	0409 639 448	Walter Lobbezoo	Librarian	wlobbezoo@parks.vic.gov.au	03 9751 1704

Update on ARS activities at the DRBG

ARSV members resumed activities at DRBG on the week of the 17th November. In order to meet the COVID requirements we spread our numbers over the week so that we could manage social distancing. The shade houses are looking good with many of the plants putting on lots of growth. The Australian hybrid collection has many plants ready for planting out in the new sites currently being prepared in the gardens. This will provide much needed bench space for the next lot of plants following.

We are currently working to organise rhododendron hybrid plants for sale at the DRBG shop and to plant out as they had put on good growth during the lock down. We've been working hard with weeding and potting up. Unfortunately, the cuttings in the propagating glass house suffered the most during the lock down period. Many cuttings didn't survive and a few were set back so we have been selecting the few that could be saved. The priority here is also cleaning up the propagator which is a big job so we can get more cuttings going in a clean setting to start again.

Over the next few months we will be busy with potting up, planting out and weeding. One of our members works in the rockery and that is huge job with the amount of weed growth that has occurred with her absence over the lock down. With planting out, we are rejuvenating the Australian hybrid bed where the collection of notable Australian Asiatic hybrids is displayed. We're also planting out the collection of deciduous azaleas in a new bed beside the horseshoe.

We'd welcome more ARS members to support our work at DRBG. Pre-COVID we worked on Tuesday (rather than spread out over the week) and hope to return to our regular pattern in the New Year. Please give me a call on 5786 1595 if you'd like to join our regular group at DRBG.

Alex Pottage, Propagation Coordinator

Vireya House Blues

The vireya house is looking a bit sad after being neglected during the lockdown so we are organising a working bee in March 2021. More details later. Were unable to put up the internal shade cloth, nor to test the watering and fogging. On the one hot day we had in October, the fogger failed and without the blinds up, many plants were extensively burnt. Most of the hanging baskets are either dead or so damaged they need to be discarded. The plants in the beds have top growth badly burnt but should survive. On the bright side there is very little mealy bug thanks to a neem oil-based spray that Parks uses and Andrew Rouse reports that *R. sojolense* is in flower – the first time he has seen that.

Updates from members

ARSV has members across Australia and overseas and it would be good to receive news from you that we can put in the newsletter from time to time. Has anything of interest flowered? Gardening triumphs or disasters? A question for other members? Please send your snippets and photos to Andrew Rouse (awrouse@bigpond.com). If including photos, please send as separate jpeg files. This edition we have news from Ian Chalk, Geoff Lomas and Neil Puddey.

Geoff Lomas – Maleny Queensland

"I fell in love with Rhododendrons in my 20's when I first visited England and saw magnificent displays in various parks and gardens. Living in Brisbane made the dream of growing them impossible. But four years ago, my family and I began to create a garden on two acres of land near Maleny, which has a more temperate climate.

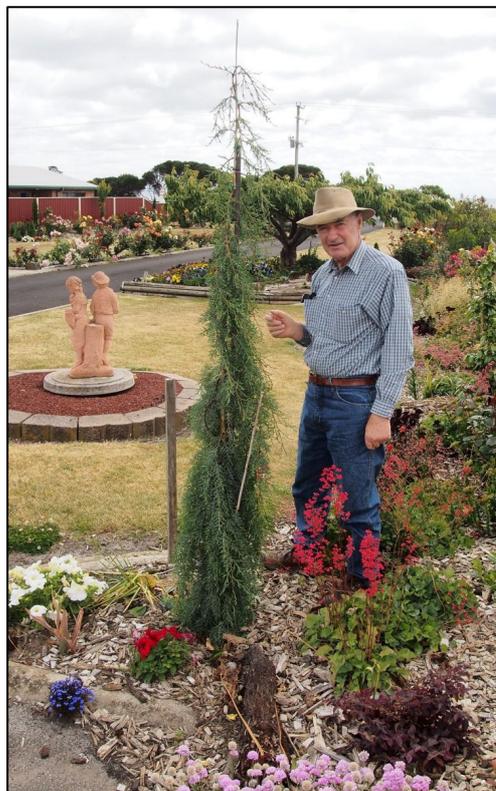
The garden has several themes – a North American woodland with Canadian Maples and other Autumn colouring trees and shrubs; large variety of Japanese Maples; a Pinetum with a range of Conifers including Californian Redwoods; a Silver Birch alley; Cottage garden; and a Rhododendron woodland. A lot of this planting is very experimental. Would these plants grow in this climate? Would they thrive? I'm pleased to say that mostly we have had success so far, including the Rhododendrons. Some losses but many are growing and flowering



Initially I found it hard to source Rhododendrons, even by mail order, but it has got easier as I've learnt more. I particularly wanted to get *R. arboreum* but couldn't source it anywhere. That's why I joined the Society – to see if anyone could help in this regard. Well, they could. I purchased a range of plants from the ARSV and Prue Crome kindly gave me a specimen of ssp. *albotomentosum* (pictured flowering in the garden) that she had grown from seed. My son, Jon, who is my right hand in this project, visited the Dandenongs last December and collected this precious Rhododendron and some others, which are all going well, in the ground. It is early days, but we have reason to believe that all the different visions for the garden will be realized.

Ian Chalk – Sulphur Creek, Tasmania

We shifted a little over 2 years ago and I have spent a lot of that time redeveloping a garden right on the coast and this is a photo taken in October this year; Jenny's 80 roses were not quite out then. We are virtually frost free and now have 80 vireyas all outside and 30 deciduous azaleas plus a number of very classy and unique conifers including *Cupressus arizonica* Raywoods weeper and *Sequoia giganteum pendulum* which are now showing considerable growth and already becoming standouts. As per the penguin on the gate post, we have them nesting opposite on the beach. I am replacing some initial name tags with aluminium ones siliconed onto small stone turned upside down under the plants. Saves the garden looking like a cemetery. I have also just tried them as reminder of plants photographed. But I really need to do a little better next time. All of my vireyas are doing remarkably well and I have a dead buried treefern under the ground for them to grow in – it will help to hold the moisture in the summer.



Neil Puddey – Woolgoolga, NSW

Neil has been producing hybrids using 'Saxon Glow' in the parentage, in an attempt to produce compact Vireya hybrids with similar growth habit but different coloured flowers. The compactness comes from *R. saxifragoides*, a cushion bush alpine vireya that is a parent in 'Saxon Glow'. At right is one of his hybrids.

Neil also provided images of other un-named and unregistered hybrids of his that flowered in 2020. These were created using larger flowered hybrids including 'Superfleur', 'Pashabell', 'Pink Jazz', 'White Rajah' and 'Lord of the Rings'. Some stunning flowers on taller upright bushes. (left column on next page)



Neil said, "Spring 2020 produced one of the best displays of older vireya (right column) that I have seen in our Woolgoolga garden 'Jagera'. The stimulus may have been a prolonged dry followed by some good rainfall, some cosmic event or the plants improving with age unlike the gardener. No matter the cause it was a great display to be enjoyed."

