

June 2021

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Newsletter of the ARSV



Presidents Report June 2021

John O'Hara, President

In this edition of the newsletter, I would like to briefly outline for the members of ARSV, discussions that the committee have had recently as well as mention some of the commendable efforts carried out by our members.

Firstly, the entire committee are so very pleased that Richard Florey has volunteered to take over the vitally important roles of membership manager and newsletter editor. Richard replaces Francis Crome who had filled both these roles, with distinction, for many years. Both I and the committee would like to express our gratitude for the great effort Francis has exerted on the Societies behalf.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find an article by Prue Crome on work recently done in the garden at Olinda to improve the Australian Hybrid and the deciduous azalea species collections. What she fails to mention is that the study, identification of plants, planning, propagation and documentation, over the last four years, for these two projects was entirely the work of her. This herculean effort by Prue has made a significant contribution to the DRBG and we are all so very pleased that she finds the time and energy to donate this effort to our benefit.

At the last committee meeting it was decided that the ARSV would fund a refurbishment and relocation (in anticipation of expanding the carpark) of the plant nursery at Olinda. This will involve rebuilding the existing large shade house, erecting a second large shade house, building a potting shed and glass propagation house and leveling an open growing on area. This is needed to maintain our current rhododendron propagation program (the current shade structures are falling down) and allow us to propagate a wider range of plants. The committee also decided to organise more garden visits (see this newsletter) and discussed the ongoing development of the North Queensland garden (the plans of which will be ready for the next newsletter).

ARSV Annual Membership Renewals 2021-2022

Richard Florey, Membership Manager



For paid memberships, it is that time of year again for annual membership renewals. The ARSV membership form is included with this newsletter edition. The ARSV communicate to members via the website, social media and hard copy publications. Please let us know your preferred method of receiving information whether via post or email.

The ARSV Newsletter is published bi-monthly with news and activities, items of local interest and the calendar of forthcoming activities. Event dates are on the website as well as in the newsletter.

The ARS national journal, *The Rhododendron*, is published yearly as a high-quality colour publication featuring articles on the genus from contributors throughout Australia and overseas. It is sent to members and released at a later date on the website.

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ARSV Plant Sale 10am-4pm Saturday 2nd October 2021 at the DRBG



With continued interest in our rhododendrons and vireyas at past bi-annual plant sales at the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden (DRBG), ARSV are again excited to hold its next sale. The sale will comprise a vast range of hard to get rhododendron species hybrids and vireyas. ARSV staff will be on hand to provide specialist plant knowledge and advice. If

you are searching for a particular rhododendron or vireya contact Michael Hare on 0405 403 607 or vichrondo@gmail.com to discuss your needs. The DRBG is located at The Georgian Road in Olinda.

Succession planting works at the DRBG

By Prue Crome, Treasurer

The National Rhododendron Gardens (NRG) in Olinda (now DRBG) was established by ARSV in the 1960's with the majority of the Asiatics Rhododendron plantings occurring between 1960-1980's. Many of the rhododendrons have survived with little recent horticultural attention, a devastating 10-year drought and are now senescent. The active ARSV members have been seeing the decline of many of these plants in the gardens and are concerned that this very comprehensive collection will be lost to ARSV members and future generations.

As the NRG are now a Botanic Gardens, the rhododendron collection is an important component of the many other exotic plants eg. Camellia, Magnolia, Acer and numerous other genera, that form the backbone of a quality Cool Climate Botanic Garden, not suitable for Melbourne or Cranbourne Botanic Gardens.

There is little chance for replacement of these rhododendron species or hybrids, given collection restrictions and quarantine protocols world-wide. This has prompted a propagation program by the ARSV to ensure there is a succession plan for the vast rhododendron collection in Olinda.

Initial focus was propagation and then planting, 10 each of the 16 species of *Pentanthera* and *Rhodora* – commonly known as deciduous azaleas, which were planted in December 2020. This is not yet complete but hopefully a top up on propagation this spring, will complete the collection. The original plants are scattered through the gardens and are hard to locate. In the future, there will be a full display with the mass planting located beside the road below the deciduous horseshoe. These species flowers might not match the spectacular colour and size of their hybridised progeny but the perfume and floral coverage more than compensates and delights.

The next focus was on the Australian Asiatic Hybrid collection, predominantly done in the 1970's with a focus on early flowering to beat the summer heat, which has looked stressed and diseased for quite some time. Over the last couple of years Parks Victoria have assisted by removing trees that have overshadowed much of the collection and have installed impact sprinklers ready for the plantings. Location, identification and propagation started in 2017 with continued effort throughout 2018-2019 to ensure the best plants would be represented in this display of the Australian hybrids by Boulter, Van de Ven, Dosser, Bramley and O'Shannassy, to name a few of the 20 plus hybridisers covered in this collection.

The works are proceeding well with a Parks Victoria team weeding, clearing and mulching and then collectively with ARSV, planting 4 of each hybrid, tagging, GPS and labelling. We have underplanted between existing plants that will then be removed as the replacement plants mature. The Van de Ven hybrids were planted on the 18th of May having completed about half of the collection so far. Weather dependant, all plantings should be completed before this winter's end.

Another collection of evergreen and deciduous azaleas species that has languished at the bottom of the gardens out of sight are the *Brachycalyx*, *Sciadorhodion* and *Tsutsui* sections. Seed imported in the 1970's through to 2000's by Bob Withers and other ARSV members included some rare species from Taiwan, Korea, China and Japan. This diminished collection has been propagated and we intend to do a mass planting to enhance the Japanese Tea House and Cherry Tree Grove area.

These succession programs hardly scratch the surface of the rhododendron collection at DRBG but we will endeavour, over the coming years, to work through the other important collections, for plantings either in the existing beds or creating new beds. Our invaluable data base, maintained for many years by Tom Noonan, has been the go-to resource that has helped us sleuth specific plants. Many more hands are needed for both locating and recording the original plants as the tagging and labelling is also failing and weed infestation make the job even harder. Parks Victoria do the best job they can, given limited funding and staff numbers.

Now the seasons have been more favourable over the last few years we can hopefully, with a concerted effort from ARSV members and everyone interested in this vast collection, safeguard it for future generations.



Member's garden – Ian Chalk from Sulphur Creek, Tasmania

Richard Florey, Newsletter Editor

Ian Chalk, a relatively new member of ARSV and previous contributor to the newsletter, lives on the northwest coast of Tasmania off Bass Strait. Ian started his garden around three years ago and has since planted 80 vireyas. Ian's method of planting to establish his vireyas is interesting by making the use of dead Man Fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*) from his owned neighbouring forested properties. This is a little different to growing vireyas as epiphytes on live ferns above ground. Either way, it is a great growth medium.



Using Ian's method, he places two Man Ferns slightly apart in a hole and placing a hole between them in which to seat a vireya after reducing its size. He then backfills the hole with a mix of soil and purchased compost. "The vireyas seem to be liking this method", says Ian, and it certainly shows that this method works.

Below are Ian's *Rhododendron tuba*, R. 'Concerto for Brass', R. *zoelleri* and R 'Pretty Cotton Candy'.



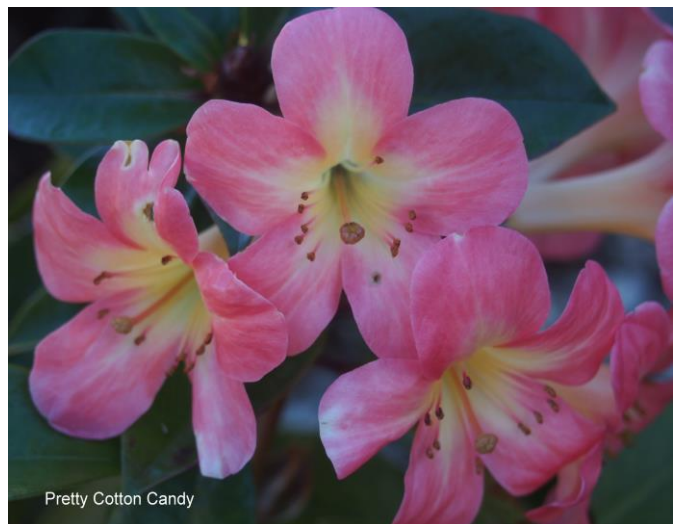
R tuba



R Concerto



R zoelleri



Pretty Cotton Candy