

Newsletter of the ARSV



President's Report

By John O'Hara, President

Dear fellow Rhodo Society members. Just a brief note outlining some of our recent activities and reiterating a call for members to consider being more involved if they can. Elsewhere in this newsletter, Alex and Prue have written of recent work on sales and the Australian Hybrid collection. These activities are very valuable to both the general gardening community of Victoria and to the ongoing relevance of the Society. Alex and Prue are both very hard workers and their contributions to the ARS are both commendable and extraordinary. We will over the winter months begin refurbishment of the nursery. This will continue the process of improving the quality of the plants the ARS produces and further enhance our role in the Garden at Olinda with new projects now starting on Japanese deciduous azaleas, Satsuki azaleas and a consolidation of the large leaf Rhododendron collection. The Society and its committee do need help though with the injection of new blood, so if you know of a plant lover that would benefit from being shown how interesting Rhodos are and how time spent with fellow members of the Society can rapidly advance their development in horticulture, let them know how keen we would be for them to join us or let us know and we will work on them. As previously mentioned, there are several executive committee positions which will become vacant this year. This is a committee which is not particularly hard work but it does control some considerable funds and makes important decisions regarding the development of the Garden at Olinda and the ongoing availability and interest in a wide range of plant genera and species, so if you think this could fit in to your timetable please let me know. In this edition, we have received a member's garden article from John Gray of Brindabella Country Gardens (garden and nursery). John offers fully guided tours during Autumn and Spring. For more information, visit <https://brindabella-gardens.com.au/GRAND%20TOURS.htm>

The FCHS Plant Collectors Expo recently held 5th and 6th of March 2022

By Alex Pottage, Propagation Coordinator



Photo courtesy of Michael Hammer

The plant sale went well over the weekend. The weather was wet and foggy for the start and after lunch time we had sunshine for a short while before the clouds came over. Sunday's weather was a bit better except for the wind gusts in the afternoon and the marquee took flight!

Our stall looked good and we set up on Friday with Parks kindly driving the plants to Ferny Creek. After Covid, the benches were bursting so we had lots of lovely rhododendrons and Vireyas for sale. Most of the sales were on Saturday and we sold quite a few plants. Each year the sale always throws up surprises with what

people are interested in with rhododendrons. This year the interest lay with the apricot coloured rhododendrons and we sold most of the stock. This was then followed by the ever popular reds. Over the weekend we sold over half the plants and felt we did well. There were fewer people coming through the gate so it was noticeably quieter than previous years. We have been attending this plant sale for a number of years and people now look forward to buying the plants from the society.

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Blackheath Rhododendron Festival, Blackheath NSW from 5th November 2022

Blackheath is a village located in the renowned tourist destination of the Blue Mountains west of Sydney New South Wales. Blackheath will hold its Rhododendron Festival, or simply the Rhodo Festival as the locals refer to it. It is a week-long event starting from the 5th of November 2022. It has taken many forms over the years, usually capped off by a parade and a revue, but also involving other events spaced out during the year. A further reminder will be published in our October newsletter. For more information, visit <https://rhodofestival.org/>

Autumn Flowering in the Vireya Bed

By Andrew Rouse, Vice President

With covid lockdowns, it's been over two years since I've seen the vireya species bed at Dandenong Ranges Botanic Gardens, so it was great to see the bed in good condition on a quick visit on 15 March. A number of species are in flower and of particular interest is *R. villosulum*, a tall erect species with flowers akin to *R. christi*. Also flowering this Autumn is *R. kochii*, a lovely white flowering vireya from the Philippines, *R. quadrasianum* ssp. *rosmarinifolium* (also from the Philippines) and *R. impositum* from Sulawesi. We plan to bulk up the species that grow well in the bed so we can have mass displays, so please let me know if you'd like to be involved in the planting out of this bed and its ongoing maintenance.



R. villosulum



R. kochii



R. impositum



R. hellwigii



R. laetum

Update on the Succession Planting of the Australian Asiatic Hybrid Bed at DRBG

By Prue Crome, Treasurer

Following on from the Succession Planting article in the June 2021 newsletter, ARSV active members continued plantings for the Australian Asiatic hybrid bed at DRBG. In 2021, we planted the Boulter, van de Ven, Begg and Teese hybrids along with plants from less prolific hybridisers. Tuesday 15th March 2022 saw the Dosser hybrids planted by our cheery gang, interplanted between older specimens, which will afford tender plants some protection but later be removed once the new plants have established. Next cab off the rank will be the Waghorn and O'Shannassy hybrids in April which will fill the existing bed. Parks Victoria's assistance will be needed for the preparation of an extension to the collection. This is planned below the road of the existing collection and will require removal of large rhododendrons and then herbicide and mulch. This will house the Sullivan and O'Rourke hybrids and worthy ARS hybrids. To help orient our members, the map of the DRBG shows the Australian Asiatic Hybrid Bed outlined in orange with the proposed extension below the road.



Member's Garden – John Gray, Brindabella Country Gardens, Toowoomba QLD



John with his daughter and grandson among their rhodos

I have been a member of the ARS Vic branch since before 1990 (I can't actually remember when I first joined but I think it was 1986). I have been a rhodophile for that long at least. When I moved to Toowoomba from Goondiwindi in 1985, I thought I would have a go at growing these truly majestic plants. I remember attending one meeting of the local Garden Club when I first moved here and at the end of the meeting I waltzed up to the President and told him of my plan. He laughed loudly in my face and said "you can't grow rhododendrons here. Everyone has tried!". I didn't go back to another meeting.

I am a retired District Agronomist with the Queensland Agriculture Department and more recently a Plant Pathologist, so I've learnt a thing or two about plants over the years.

After 30 years, I have a collection of over 700 rhododendrons, including 3 Vireyas only, in my 4 acre English style garden just on the north side of Toowoomba. Some are now over 8m tall! But they are not the rhododendrons that you would see in the Dandenong Ranges by and large. They have

genes for early flowering, phytophthora resistance, heat/humidity tolerance and drought tolerance. I have hunted them down over the years. They have survived and thrived through the City's worst drought in 100 years during the last 3 years and the record floods of 2011.

Up until the last 6 years, I regularly travelled to the Monbulk area on business and around the turn of the millennium, met Laurie Begg. I was in awe of his work with Elepidotes. I asked if he would raise some seedlings from a cross I had in mind that I believed would do well here and he agreed. I have registered a number of these in recent years.

If I had one suggestion about how to get the public thinking again big time about Elepidote rhododendrons, it would be to promote them as pot plants. Let's face it, most of the country has very poor soil for

rhododendrons - not like the red krasnozems we are blessed with here in Toowoomba and down around the Dandenong Ranges. But grown in a small pot with good potting mix and good drainage holes, placed in a south or east facing patio at front or back of any suburban house, they can thrive. I have a rhododendron in a 30x30x30cm pot with a trunk as thick as my arm and 1.5m tall which flowers every September. It has been in that pot since 1994. It lives in a shade house with regular water and Osmocote applied once a year and some treatment for lace bugs – nothing else done to it! The key is keep them tight in pots. This is not a hard sell to the public as they are by and large aware of this for growing their Cymbidiums, so we could just latch onto this line. I often say to locals, if you think of where rhododendrons grow in the wild, it's often in the mountains in pockets of decomposing litter - i.e., a pot!



Rhododendron 'Larnook Sappho'