



Emu Valley revisited for collection of species rhododendron cutting material

By John O'Hara, ARSV President

On Monday 22nd and Tuesday 23rd of January a small group of three ARSV members, James Pethybridge, Prue Crome and I, flew to Burnie in Tasmania for a couple of days collecting cuttings of species Rhododendron from the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden (EVRG). This was a repeat of a visit undertaken by another small group last year and is part of an ongoing project to try and duplicate those species Rhododendron that are rare in Australian gardens.

Attempts by the ARSV to import species Rhododendron seed in recent years has highlighted that although most Rhododendron species are a permitted import, it is pretty much not financially viable given the cost of certification and paperwork required for each different species. Armed with this knowledge, it became obvious that there was a need to ensure that those species that are in Australia need to be protected against loss. The aim is to have collections of species at EVRG, DRBG at Olinda, Mt Lofty, Mt Tomar and other gardens so that the wide distribution insures against loss by fire, drought, accident or neglect in one or a few gardens.

The collecting trips have been very generously supported by EVRG, in particular Mary McConnell and Maurie Kupsch, who have been unstinting in their hospitality and have worked very hard to prepare the groundwork of locating all the required species so that the collecting could take place efficiently. Indeed, Mary's hospitality for this trip stretched to having us stay at her house, which made for a very comfortable and enjoyable few days of travel.

This trip resulted in an exchange of cuttings, with some 53 species of Rhododendron going to EVRG, thanks to Andrew Raper at Rhodoglen Nursery, and about 50 different species of Rhododendron coming back to DRBG Olinda. Included in the species collected at EVRG were some relatively recent introductions into cultivation by Steve Hootman at the American Species Foundation a couple being *R. huianum* and *R. valentinioides*.



R. huianum

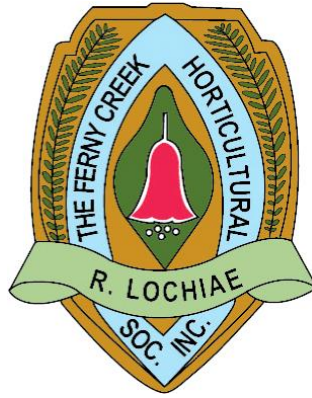


R. valentinioides, SW Yunnan

R. valentinioides

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Plant Collectors Expo – 9th and 10th of March 2024



The Ferny Creek Horticultural Society will be holding its 18th annual Plant Collectors Expo on Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th of March from 10am to 4pm at 100 Hilton Road in Sassafras. They will have rare and unusual perennials, bulbs, trees, succulents and more by specialist growers, Australian made quality garden tools and equipment not available in hardware stores and book sales. Set in 10 acres of beautiful gardens and with guided walks. Light refreshments and free parking available.

Entry fee is \$10 (free for 14 years and under).

Australian Rhododendron Society Victoria



At the Plant Collectors Expo, the Australian Rhododendron Society Victoria is providing a range of hybrid rhododendrons at a very reasonable cost. Some hybrids include Bibiani, Carmen, Donvale Ruffles, Edeltraud, Hachman's Banana Flip and Brasilia, Katherine Louise (low grower, good yellow) Markeeta's Prize, Tiffany, Virgo and a few others. There will also be a range of species rhododendrons. We have a wide collection of Vireyas which will be offered for sale at very reasonable cost.



R. Bibiani



R. John Dossier

Royal Horticultural Society United Kingdom plans to move rhododendrons north

By Richard Florey, ARSV Newsletter Editor

In January 2023, the climate crisis prompted the Royal Horticultural Society United Kingdom to plan for sending its important collection of rhododendrons north. It was thought that they were more likely to thrive at Harlow Carr in Yorkshire than at their current home at Wisley in Surrey. It follows similar decisions to move Wisley's national collections of rhubarb and gooseberries to the Bridgewater garden in Salford. On one level the move is pragmatic in that all the plants are expected to do better in the north of England because of a changing climate. Dry springs and warmer temperatures generally have meant rhododendrons have been struggling in some parts of southern England. "They're surviving but they're not really thriving," said Paul Cook, Harlow Carr's curator. "We've got cooler soil and a generally cooler climate," he said, so Harlow Carr's rhododendrons had been doing extremely well.



Battleston Hill at Wisley has long been famed for its rhododendrons, with the original plantings made in 1937. "It is quite an amazing collection really of rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias," said Cook. "It was devastated in the Great Storm [of 1987] and replanted shortly after and the collection there is pretty much one of the best in the country, certainly the best of the RHS gardens." There are hundreds of varieties of rhododendron at Wisley and the first stage will be to work out precisely what the garden has and give priority to endangered ones. "It is a long-term project and won't happen in the next couple of years, but it is something which will be worth doing," said Cook.

Harlow Carr was acquired by the RHS in 2001. Before that it was the display garden of the Northern Horticultural Society, with the driving force being the gardener, writer and broadcaster Geoffrey Smith, a regular on Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time. A lot of the planting Smith did in the 1950s and 1960s needs replacing which, said Cook, meant "we've got plenty of room in the 30-odd acres of woodland and that's one of the long-term plans, to have a collection that will in the next 50 years be maturing and become really important regardless of which garden it's at". Some rhododendrons may also go to Salford where they might well do even better, said Cook. The plan does not mean Wisley will be without rhododendrons and it may instead have American hybrids, which prefer warmer summers. "It's not about one garden having one collection, it is about spreading the collections around the country as well."

Global heating means gardeners such as Cook are constantly experimenting with what does do well and what doesn't. One of the big recent successes at Harlow Carr is a garden area that probably could not have been achieved even a decade ago: the Sub-Tropicana garden, which in the summer brings a jungle vibe to North Yorkshire. Plants are currently covered to protect them from frost. In comparison, December is obviously not at its best, the tree ferns and banana plants are carefully wrapped with straw in a white fleece. But next summer it should be a joyous riot of plants including salvias, dahlias, gingers and cannas.

Team leader Russ Watkins, the mastermind of the Sub-Tropicana garden, said: "When I go to visit other gardens the things that excite me are the things I don't see all the time – so the more exotic ... bananas and things like that. It's about giving visitors things they wouldn't expect to see in North Yorkshire. "We have never grown this sort of stuff here before and it has been a great way to experiment and discover new things. For example, we are more and more finding that salvias are much tougher than people think."

Article written by Lenore Taylor, Editor, Guardian Australia.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/04/climate-crisis-prompts-rhs-to-plan-for-sending-rhododendrons-north>

Mount Lofty Botanic Garden, Adelaide Hills – Winter bloomers on?

By Neil Shirley, ARSV Member

Whilst walking around the Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens in the Adelaide Hills throughout the year, the whole of the Rhododendron season can be seen. The rhododendron gully here, houses a collection of mainly species growing in warm, dryish conditions at about 500m above sea level. Some plants have been growing here for thirty years or more and are as you might imagine, the hardier species for heat and drought tolerance. The season can come to an end as late as February and this year, it started in late June.



R. scabrifolium var *scabrifolium*

This season, the shrubby species (~2m), *R. scabrifolium* var *scabrifolium* got the show on the road. It lightened the mood in dark wintery gullies with foamy white flowers from top to tail. At the same time, the firecracker species, *R. spinuliferum* showed off its upward pointing insistent red flowers, begging for pollinators. Later, at the end of winter, *R. mollicomum* brought forth a show of delicate pink blooms. These three species belong to the section Scabrifolia and they embody the reputation of the section for drought and heat tolerance as well as a propensity to flower in winter. When it comes to hardiness, there can be few species that can rival those in the well-known Arborea section and many species flower in winter. *R. arboreum* ssp. *delavayi* var *delavayi* (what a pedigree!) is a case in point, flowering at the end of July with tight trusses of indomitable, glowing red. These sturdy tree-like shrubs can be seen on a dry north facing hillside ready to stare down another Adelaide summer. Tough!



R. delavayi



R. spinuliferum

In July, a few less well-known species started to bloom, namely *R. moulmeinense* and *R. lukiangense*. The first plant is a skinny tall shrub with spectacular long bronzy new growth and large attenuated delicate pink blooms, few in a truss but overall, they make an impact. The flower shape is reminiscent of a mollis azalea but the plant is from a different group, Chionastrum, whose members have a tolerance for warmth.

R. lukiangense is a relatively rare member of the Irrorata section, whose members generally have done well in the Adelaide hills. This plant had deep cherry red trusses on a large shrub (~4m) which seems to have grander ambitions. Usually sporting rosier blooms, it can reach up to 6m in its homeland of western China.



R. mouleimensis

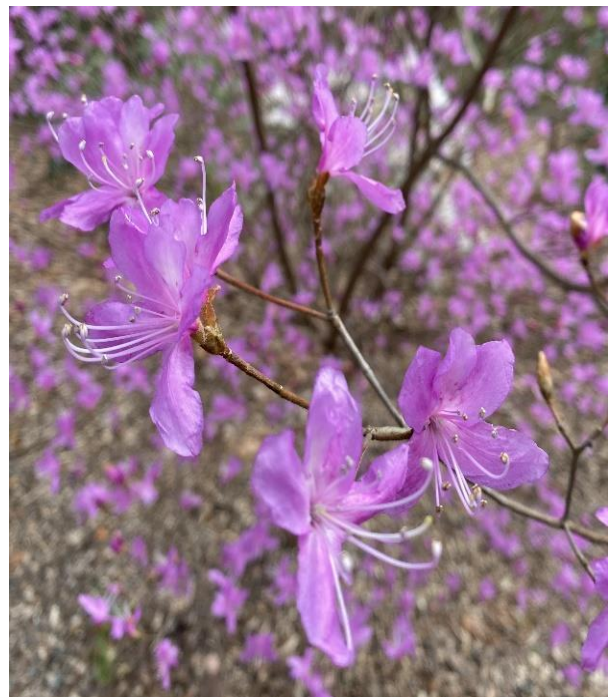


R. lukiangense

If all these red blooms are too much then, in late August, *R. moupinense* and *R. dilatatum* brought some subtle elegance to the garden. *R. moupinense* is a small shrub with apple-blossom style flowers on a small shrub with sparse architecture. It is one of the parents of the hybrid, *R. X cilpinense* but this species has a charm all its own. If architecture in shrubs is important then *R. dilatatum* bears a light, breathy branch structure which, at the end of winter, was adorned with swarms of soft pink open-faced flowers. A great farewell to the season and a teaser for spring.



R. moupinense



R. dilatatum

These are only some of the earlybirds seen at the Gardens. Soon enough, the spring bonanza starts. As we know, hybrids are likely to bloom in the main, sometime between their parents, or at least, at similar times. Hybrids, one might argue are probably not going to flower before the early species parents or after the late ones. Therefore, some species offer the best chance to extend to about six months rhododendron blooming in the garden. Move over, roses!

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

By Richard Florey, ARSV Newsletter Editor

Ian Chalk, a member of the ARSV since 2021, has again contributed photos from his collection. You may recall Ian's various contributions since becoming a member. Ian lives on the northwest coast of Tasmania off Bass Strait where he started his garden around six years ago and had since planted 80 vireyas.

Back in the ARSV June 2021 newsletter, we wrote an article on Ian's method of planting to establish his vireyas is interesting by making the use of dead Man Fern (*Dicksonia Antarctica*) from his neighbouring forested properties. This is certainly a great planting method to refer back to.



R. Candle Power



R. Choc Orange



R. Cinnamon Pink



R. Glen Sunrise



R. King Solomon



R. konori