

Rhododendron 'Chayya'

A Highly Rated Vireya Hybrid

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R.'Pink Delight' x *R.intranervatum* F2 (second generation) was my prize winning truss at the Annual Rhododendron Show held at the Rhododendron Garden, Olinda, in November, 1990. This exhibit was awarded the Society's Certificate of Merit for an entry of exceptional merit, the Pritchard Trophy for the Best Rhododendron raised by an exhibitor, The A.R.S. Trophy for the Best Truss in the Open Section and the Louise Anderson Trophy for the Best Vireya Hybrid in the Show. Application has been made for the registration of this hybrid to be officially named as R.'Chayya'.

The second generation seedling first flowered in February, 1988, when the plant was only 25.4 centimetres high. Remarkable as it may seem, the initial flowering on this small plant was attractive, a perfectly symmetrical truss of thirteen flowers measuring 20.3 centimetres across. The individual flowers measured 8.3 centimetres across in an exquisite shade of pink (Royal Horticultural Society, London, Colour Chart 52D shading to 19D yellow buff throat with pink stamens). The truss was reminiscent of the hardy hybrid R.'Alice'. Because the plant was so small only one cutting could be taken, and to identify this, the plant and cutting were nicknamed 'Alice'. In 1989, the same small seedling, which had been repotted from a 12.5cm to a 15cm pot, had a fourteen flower truss on a side stem. Such a large truss on such a small plant was an exception to the general rule of "Never judge a seedling by its first efforts at flowering" because the flower buds are not properly or fully developed at the juvenile stage. I liken this to a Pullet's egg: large eggs are only obtained when the bird is fully developed.



Rhododendron 'Chayya'

R.'Pink Delight' is a classic hybrid which has stood the test of time. It is one of the many hybrids produced by the great English nursery of Veitch and Sons over one hundred years ago. It has a symmetrical truss of fifteen flowers, very good foliage (from *R.javanicum* and *R.brookeanum*), and is easy to grow and flower. The plants of R.'Pink Delight' growing in Australia originated from plants growing in Kew Gardens, England. R.'Pink Delight' still ranks highly amongst the Veitch hybrids in cultivation in Australia.

R.intranervatum, from Borneo, is closely related to the magnificent and outstanding *R.lowii* which probably has the largest individual flowers of any Bornean rhododendron, and one of the largest trusses in the whole genus. Both species are classified by Dr. Sleumer in the Series *Javanica* and the key to their separation is the number of flowers in the truss: *R.lowii* has eight to fifteen waxy golden yellow or orange flowers, erect and spreading up to 35 centimetres in diameter, whilst *R.intranervatum* has waxy light yellow flowers in two's and three's.

R.intranervatum was first flowered in Australia by Dr. John Rouse, in November, 1973, from seed obtained in England in 1969. The seedling plant had three light yellow waxy flowers. However, the most significant fact from the point of view of Vireya growers and hybridizers is that the plant flowered

when it was just 30 centimetres tall. The pollen of *R.intranervatum* was used by Dr. Rouse to make crosses with *R.laetum* and *R.aurigeranum* (two of the best yellow flowered species), and with the hybrid R.'Pink Delight'.

Small seedlings, about 2.5cm high of R.'Pink Delight' x *R.intranervatum*, which had been germinated by Dr. Rouse, were distributed to Victorian Branch members at a General Meeting of the Society at Camberwell. This distribution was arranged through Dr. Bob Withers, Chairman of the then Technical Sub-committee. I grew one of these seedlings to flowering. At first flowering, this seedling had a truss of eight flowers similar to R.'Pink Delight' but lighter in colour. From experience, I knew that R.'Pink Delight' had up to fifteen flowers in the truss and that the larger flowers of *R.intranervatum* had not appeared in the first generation seedling.



Rhododendron 'Pink Delight'

In "*Rhododendrons of the World*", which is the acknowledged reference work on Rhododendrons, David Leach wrote: "The classic method of securing the combination in a single plant of the very best characteristics existing separately in the two original parents is to cross two, or self-pollinate one, of the best of the first generation seedlings of intermediate character and indifferent quality which result from the initial cross. Then in the next generation will often be found the ideal result"; thus the simplest and most direct way to combine the large number of flowers in the truss of R.'Pink

Delight' with the large flowers of *R.intranervatum* to obtain these best characteristics in the one plant was to self-pollinate the first generation flowers. The first generation flowers were self-pollinated in October, 1984, and the resultant seed were sown in March, 1985. As indicated above, the first flower on the second generation seedling appeared in February, 1988.

Every day in my garden I wonder at the magnificence of creation. When I consider that the tiniest seed of the first generation hybrid had programmed within itself the size, shape and number of leaves, stems, roots, flowers, colour and much more, I can only fervently say "How Great Thou Art".

Rhododendron 'Chayya' is well furnished with good leaves which last for three years. It is easy to grow and easy to flower. Like its grand-parent R.'Pink Delight', Rhododendron 'Chayya' has the potential to become a classic hybrid.

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