

# TROPICAL RHODODENDRONS

By Stephanie Jackson

If you're hooked by the common misconception that rhododendrons will only grow and thrive in cool climates, then it's time to think

with moist, slightly acid soil that contains plenty of humus and that has good drainage is what these plants demand, and they're quite at

they'll thrive and provide you with pleasure for many years to come.

If you're averse to too much hard physical yakka, you'll be pleased to know that these plants require minimal maintenance. Removing any dead flowers and doing some light pruning after flowering to encourage the formation of a neat and compact shape are the most exerting tasks you'll need to attend to as far as tropical rhododendrons are concerned.

Watch out for caterpillars, grasshoppers, and aphids that occasionally attack the foliage, and take the appropriate action to control these unwelcome pests whenever they appear. And don't forget that petal blight and root fungi, which may cause plants to wilt and ultimately die, can also cause more severe problems in humid areas if the soil is not well drained.

Provide tropical vireya rhododendrons with the right environment, and you'll be well rewarded with their beautiful blooms, but as some parts of the flowers are believed to be poisonous, take care when handling them.

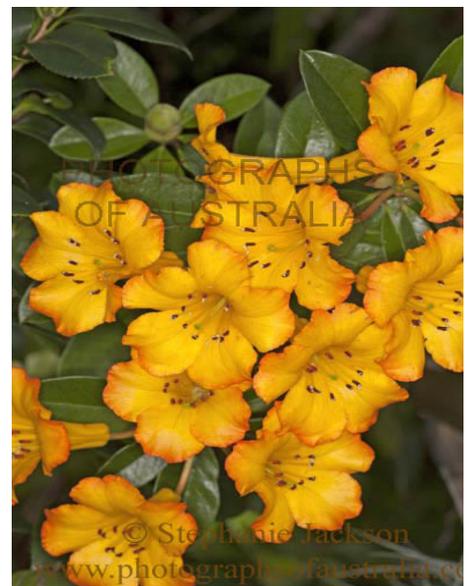


again. You're definitely correct as far as most species are concerned, but there's some good news in store if you live in a sub-tropical or tropical region, for it's in these warm climate zones that Vireya Rhododendrons are right at home. And believe me, you'll be gob-smacked by their clusters of stunning bell-shaped flowers that are produced in a wide range of colours, from white to vivid orange and red, at various times during the year, often in winter months.

Commonly known as 'tropical rhododendrons', these evergreen shrubs, with dark green shiny oval leaves, grow to a height of around 1.5 metres with a similar width. A shaded or semi-shaded position

home under shading trees where their flowers add a splash of colour in a situation where other flowering shrubs, intolerant of limited amounts of sunlight and unhappy with the competition from the vigorous roots of their neighbours, may not do so well.

During hot and dry weather you'll need to ensure that tropical rhododendrons are watered regularly, and if you provide a deep layer of organic mulch to ensure that their shallow roots are kept cool and that soil moisture is retained, and plant them in an area where they are protected from both strong and drying winds and from frost, there's a good chance that



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