



Hardy, Jolly Friar Tuck

by PHILIP J. SAVAGE, Jr.

Magnolia liliflora is another of China's "mystery plants," being widely cultivated in gardens and grounds, but of undefined range as a wild species.

Plant hunters have found it in every part of China having sufficient rainfall, but nearly always cultivated or as a probable escape from cultivation.

Herbarium specimens collected in China that bear descriptions of the living plant, almost invariably describe flowers as "reddish purple outside, white inside" and it would seem likely that the variety *nigra*, so widespread here in the U.S. is a family of cultivars or selections from Japan, where *M. liliflora* was introduced from China many centuries ago.

Despite its confused origin, *M. liliflora* is a true and distinct species, and being a tetraploid with seventy-six chromosomes is more closely related to the American *M. acuminata* than to the hexaploids of section *Yulania*.

Although the dark (and rather sullen) flowers of the solid purple selections glow in many a northern yard, the species is more at home in Dixie where it is often a more reliable ornamental than *M. denudata*, or the early blooming and often frosted *M. X soulangiana* cultivars.



On Lochmoor Blvd. in the Detroit suburb of Grosse Pointe, Mich., grows a large and healthy specimen of *M. liliiflora* in the front yard of Dr. L. E. Tuck. For many years I took it to be a fine form of *M. X soulangiana* until a closer examination showed every characteristic of pure *M. liliiflora*. Reddish purple outside and white inside, its cheerful flowers are much larger than the solid purple selections seen in this area and have the typical scent of fresh-cut watermelon.

Dr. Tuck was kind enough to take some pictures of his beautiful magnolia to accompany this article. He is an enthusiastic amateur naturalist though his interests run more to Zoology than Botany. I told him if no other clonal name was reported for his plant, it should be registered with the Society under the obvious name 'Jolly Friar Tuck' and so propagated. I would guess the plant came from Alabama or Georgia some forty years ago. Perhaps the sharp eye of Tom Dodd Sr. picked it from a line of seedlings. Who knows?

If any younger members are unfamiliar with Robin Hood's jolly Friar, they missed out on many a boyhood game!
