

# 'Nimbus'—A New Hybrid Magnolia Cultivar

by Frank S. Santamour, Jr.

*Magnolia* × 'Nimbus' (NA 31312-8, PI 433307) is a new hybrid *Magnolia* cultivar developed at the U.S. National Arboretum. The cultivar was selected from a group of seedlings derived from the cross of *M. hypoleuca* Sieb. & Zucc. (= *obovata* Thunb.) NA 1419 as female with *M. virginiana* var. *virginiana* L. NA 1418 as male. The cross was made by William F. Kosar at the U.S. National Arboretum in 1956, and one fruit was harvested. Of 112 seed sown, 25 germinated, and 19 seedlings were planted in the field in 1959. All of the plants developed into upright, multiple-stemmed trees. First flowering of any of the seedlings was in 1964.

Mr. Kosar selected one plant that flowered at an early age as superior and attempted to

propagate this clone from cuttings by conventional methods. Between 1965 and 1970, more than a thousand attempts failed to produce a single rooted cutting.

During the winter of 1972-73, one to three trunks of several trees, including the Kosar selection, were cut back to encourage trunk sprouting. Cuttings were made from these sprouts at various times in 1973, and some success at rooting was achieved. Best results were with very soft cuttings, treated with Hormodin No. 3, and rooted under mist in coarse perlite. Further rooting trials were conducted during 1974, but the Kosar selection was still among the most reluctant rooters.

Critical examination of all the hybrids



Flowers and leaves of *Magnolia* × 'Nimbus' (right) and its male parent *M. virginiana* var. *virginiana* (left).

during the 1974 growing season led to the selection of the present cultivar. One characteristic that was decisive in the selection of this plant was the uniform pale green color of the sepals. In the majority of the hybrids, the green sepals were streaked with purplish anthocyanin pigment, and appeared brownish and senescent when the flower was at peak bloom. The sepals of 'Nimbus' do not interfere with the "white cloud" appearance of the flower.

#### **Description:**

'Nimbus' is an upright tree that will probably mature at about 40 feet in height at 25 years of age. Although it can be grown as a single-trunked specimen, the whorled branches and leaves of such a tree present an unattractive "open" crown. When grown with multiple (3 to 5) trunks, the "gaps" in the crown of one trunk may be filled by the foliage from another trunk, thus creating a fuller appearance. The bark of the trunk is smooth and dark gray in color.

The elliptical leaves, up to 30 cm. long, are generally arranged in whorls. The upper surface is a dark shiny green, while the underside is white glaucous and pubescent. Both the leaf base and leaf tip are acute at about 75°, and the leaf margin is entire. Leaf fall occurs between Thanksgiving and Christmas in the Washington, D.C. area.

The extremely fragrant flowers are borne upright and, encircled with a whorl of leaves, resemble a white cloud. Flowering occurs throughout the month of May in Washington. There are 3 pale green sepals, obovate with rounded tips, 8-9 cm. long by 4-5 cm. wide. The 8 petals are creamy white, elliptic and strongly concave, with the tip rounded or remotely apiculate. The petals are arranged in three whorls: the 3 in the outer whorl 9-10 cm. long by 5-6 cm. wide, the 2 in the middle whorl about 9.5 cm. long by 5 cm. wide, and the 3 inner petals 7-8 cm. long by 3-4 cm. wide. Each flower carries about 152 stamens (140 to 160) with purple-red filaments and about 75 pale green stigmas. A flower of 'Nimbus' is shown in the photo in comparison to a flower of its male parent. The flowers are sterile and no fruit has been seen on 'Nimbus' or its sibling hybrids in the past 15 years.

All of the morphological and growth features of 'Nimbus,' including the floral fragrance, give the plant a distinctly "tropical" nature. However, it is probably quite cold-hardy to at least -10°F. We have not evaluated 'Nimbus' outside the Washington

area as rigorously as we would have done if the cultivar were considered to have a general and widespread appeal as a nursery item. Rather, we consider 'Nimbus' to be a unique addition to the landscapes of magnoliaphiles and botanical gardens, but entertain the hope that its popularity will increase as more people grow it and observe it.

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## **Hellbox**

*Wherein the editor, erring often and human always, contritely owns to commissions and omissions in past issues, humbly and tardily attempts restitution, begs forgiveness for misleading readers and misprinting authors, shrives himself, delivers homily and opinion and incidental intelligence, and sheds sundry weights from his conscience.*

The game of the name in horticulture and botany has always rubbed some raw spots and this is no less true in the naming of Magnolias. Not one person I know has had anything kind to say, so far, about the recent resurrection of two obscure Magnolia names *Magnolia heptapeta* (for *denudata*) and *Magnolia quinquepeta* (for *liliflora*), not even Dr. Stephen Spongberg, who has conscientiously disinterred what others heretofore have left discreetly undug. Some authorities have ignored these unwanted names or simply shrugged them off. Jack Fogg, for instance, has put tongue in cheek (I suspect) to say that, well, the more familiar names are already stamped on the plant tags at Barnes Arboretum and changing them would be a lot of bother. Others have mentioned the misleading or inaccurate nature of the names, the tenuous link to legitimacy, and the folly of following a nomenclatural rule, no matter how well intended, right out the window.

Now Ben Blackburn, in this issue, raises more questions about the so-called Buc'Hoz names and suggests that some respected taxonomic authorities of the past not only



knew where these opprobrious names were buried but saw that they stayed that way because they in fact had no legitimate basis, even under the applicable rules.

Ben Blackburn's arguments are persuasive, and give rise to another question, at least in my own mind: if a consensus of experts has it that these unloved names ought to be consigned once more to oblivion, just how do people go about shoving them back into the closet? We don't have the answer, but we recall that Prohibition failed for lack of support and ultimately was formally repealed when its adherents dried up. If a law or rule is patently absurd or unreasonable, people have a way of managing without it until somebody gets around to backing or filling or, as the lawyers would say, codifying on the books what's already happening out there in the world. Several issues ago we announced we would use the Buc'Hoz names but would still give our authors free rein to use whatever names they please (including spellings) so long as readers aren't misled about actual plant identities.

We don't pose as arbiters, but we do intend to report current thinking and respected opinion on the subject. If the weight of expert opinion favors *denudata* and *liliflora* we are about as ready as Huck Finn to shuck the new and strange and get back into the old and comfortable. As Huck says, we been there before.

The Hellbox was originally intended to be, in part, a kind of catchall for correcting serious typos, garbled words or sentences, and other lapses in articulation that appeared in past issues. By serious, I mean mistakes so awful that they cause the reader to smirk or swear or want to seek justice with pen or horsewhip. A couple of baddies that got into print in the



Fig. 1. *Lassonia heptapeta*. Nobis.

Fig. 2. *Lassonia quinquepeta*. Nobis.

These facsimiles supplied by courtesy of M.J. Rowlands, Head of Library Services, and the Trustees of the British Museum (Natural History), Cromwel Road, London.

past issue (fall-winter 1979) may have caused serious inconvenience. One was the wrong dates for the Society's Seattle meeting, which by now has already taken place (March 28-29 instead of March 30-31 as erroneously given). The other was a wrong zip code number for August Kehr, who runs the association's new Magnolia pollen bank. The correct dates for the Seattle meeting were given in Joe McDaniel's card to members outlining the program before the meeting. We hope this was soon enough to prevent problems for those who planned to attend the meeting. A corrected address for August Kehr is carried on page 2 of this issue. We deeply regret these errors.

West Virginia is one of our wealthiest states in Magnolias, predominantly the cucumber tree, which occurs almost throughout the state. Others, as we were told in an article by Maurice Brooks (fall-winter 1977), are the umbrella magnolia (*M. tripetala*), and the

## PLANCHE XIX.

Fig. 1. *LASSONIA HEPTAPETA*: la *Lassonia* à sept pétales.

Fig. 2. *LASSONIA QUINQUEPETA*: la *Lassonia* à cinq pétales.

LA figure de cette plante, qui se trouve représentée ici, nous a paru trop incomplète, pour la pouvoir parfaitement caractériser, mais elle suffit pour démontrer que nous ne connaissons encore aucune plante qu'on puisse lui rapporter: aussi en avons-nous confié un genre nouveau, auquel nous avons donné le nom de *Lassonia*, en l'honneur de M. de Laffone, premier Médecin du Roi en survivance, &c. de la Reine, également recommandable par son amour pour le bien de l'humanité, &c. par son savoir. Ce genre de plantes a un calice d'une seule pièce, mais frangé; la corolle est de sept pétales dans une espèce, &c. seulement de cinq dans l'autre; chaque pétale est grand, supérieurement obtus, &c. presque sensible au pétale de la tulipe; mais cette dernière en diffère, en ce qu'elle n'a point de calice; d'ailleurs les étamines dans ce nouveau genre de plantes paroissent suivant la figure, très-nombreuses, tandis que dans la tulipe le nombre en est fixé, aussi nous croyons devoir classer cette plante, parmi des polyandriques; on a représenté ici deux espèces de ce genre: la première est la *Lassonia* à sept pétales, *Lassonia heptapeta*. Dans cette espèce, la fleur paroît avant la feuille; les pétales sont d'un blanc verdâtre, &c. au nombre de sept; le calice est frangé &c. bruniâtre, les étamines paroissent violettes; chaque fleur paroît au bout de chaque branche; la tige de cet arbrisseau est tortueuse, raboteuse, &c. griffée: la seconde espèce est la *Lassonia* à cinq pétales, *Lassonia quinquepeta*: cette espèce, suivant la figure, n'a que cinq pétales; chaque pétale est d'une couleur violette, &c. leurs bractées sont jaunâtres; les étamines sont d'une couleur rougeâtre; on a représenté cette espèce avec les feuilles mûssantes, dont la partie supérieure est obtuse: elles sont alternes &c. entières; on trouve ces deux espèces colorées, dans notre *Calliopsis priensis*: des fleurs qui se calèvent, sans dans les jardins de la Chine, &c. dans ceux de l'Europe, Tom. I. Pl. IV. &c. pl. IX.

southern mountain magnolia (*M. fraseri*), both occurring there in smaller numbers than *M. acuminata*. But in that mountain state it's the cucumber that impresses one, with its sweep of foliage and, as summer wears on, its warty candles that turn into crimson fruits studded throughout the greenery.

When I had a visit not long ago from a wartime buddy who lives on 600 acres of mountain woods in Summers County, West Virginia, and after we closed the long gap of aridity with a drink of cold spring water, I began to confide a concern I thought might, if some cure wasn't found, cause me to lie awake nights. I reminded him of his sugar maples and black walnuts, his chestnut stumps, his sourwoods and mountain rowans, his drifts of rhododendrons and flaming azaleas, his lofty pines and murmuring hemlocks, his beds of ginseng, trailing arbutus, teaberry, and club moss, and, ah me! his queenly cucumber trees, too many blushing unseen along pathways that, with years and cares, become less trod. Did he know that West Virginia, so rich in Magnolias, had not a single native on the rolls of the American Magnolia Society?

This shameless proslyting had its half intended effect. As the haze of sentimentality lifted for a moment I could see that he had one hand on his checkbook and the other over his heart in mock excess of emotion. As I well knew from olden times there is no greater patriot than a West Virginian properly stirred, and as I expected, our Society now has no more loyal member than Elgie Smith, who is already beginning to install some flatland magnolias to keep company with the *acuminatas* around the house, up the hill a piece from Big Creek. If I sometimes have a qualm or two about the ethics of dragooning new members by extortionist tactics, flag waving, and thirst quenchers, I just take a look at all the Figlars that have appeared on our membership list since Dick Figlar first found out there was an American Magnolia Society, and I wonder whether blood or water is thicker.

At some ill defined point heading south you begin to hear the inhabitants refer to the planted area around a house not as a garden but as a yard. Most southerners reserve the word garden for that special piece of earth where the snap beans are stuck, the tomatoes are stobbed, the English peas are strung, and the bugs are picked off the Irish potatoes or, in my youth, were also dosed with arsenic or paris green until they tumbled to the ground

dead (no, that's not why some beetles are called tumblebugs). If you are dyed in the butternut, you think of a gardener as a man with a hoe and high resolve to keep the butcher and Caesar Chavez off the payroll, at least for the summer.

A southron who comes across the word gardening in his outland reading is obliged to switch gears from collards, okra, and purple crowders to crabgrass and twig prunery. Copyreading or editing a southerner's horticultural writings to make them understandable to wider readership can be as dismal as running a guillotine. I have got the requisite calluses to convert certain unreconstructed southernisms to the coin of the country without coming down with the fantods, but there are times when I squirm. Therefore, if you should sometimes see, in articles written by that old Yarder and chief contributor to these pages, references to Magnolias growing in the yard, you'll know that Joe McDaniel is once again nipping at that bottle of cotton gin and the guillotinish has been smitten by weltschmerz.

Ben Blackburn went abroad before we could get his copy of the drawings published in Buc'hoz's *Plantes Nouvellement Decourvertes* (1779), but we found at the last minute that he had sent it to Joe McDaniel and we include facsimiles of drawings and French text on page 37. The drawings recently appeared in an article by Nigel Holman in *The Plantsman*, British publication.

Most of those who want to put a stop sign on Magnolia name changing are willing to concede that the name *M. × wieseneri* has proper credentials (seniority of publication) to replace the name *M. × watsoni* for the hybrid of *hypoleuca × sieboldii*, but somebody ought to check out the story told by Ed Hetzer, who on his way to the Society meeting in Seattle went by to see the nursery of Ernest Iufer in Salem, Oregon. Noticing that a Magnolia was labeled *M. × watsoni*, Ed informed the owner that the name had been changed to *M. × wieseneri*. But no, Iufer replied, this is *M. × wieseneri* right over here (pointing to an entirely different kind of tree). Can there be two venerable clones of the same presumed cross with separate lineage?

There are some tasks that require at least three hands. Soldering is one. Bud grafting is another. Inevitably, old Butterfingers lets go of the budpiece a sec to wrap the strip of rubber around it and the stock and, almost predictably, the bud escapes into the tall grass





President Joe McDaniel was behind the camera in this picture shot in front of the motel at the Seattle meeting. L to R: Carl Ferris Miller, Mary Nell (Mrs. Joe) McDaniel, Karl Flinck, and Joe Hickman.

to the accompaniment of a couple of heartfelt doggoness! Some ingenious soul(s) has come up with a soldering "jig" that functions as an extra hand, so the other two can be employed to complete the union. But in budding the jig is not yet up. We must have, we are almost bound to have, a member or two who are inventive enough to devise some kind of foolproof budding jig or clamping device that will hold the bud delicately but firmly in place while we just take this little old strip and ....

## Magnolias in China

Last November I had the opportunity to visit the Peoples Republic of China for three weeks. I had hoped to be able to gather some Magnolia seeds but the time was too late. However, I and other horticulturists on the tour had a chance to meet with a group of 13 botanists from the Academy of Sciences in Peking. We had a half day of interesting discussion, and although nothing may come of it, we at least exchanged ideas and opened a chance for contact later with perhaps exchange of seeds. As you know they have not had time to recover from the setbacks of the disasters of the 'Cultural Revolution' and the work of the Gang of Four. I was impressed with the fine specimens of *M. denudata* (*heptapeta*) in the temple gardens and the botanical gardens, and so many of our *M. grandiflora* used for landscaping purposes, especially in the Hangchow, Shanghai area.

—Roger F. Luce

## Trautman Takes Over 1980-81 Seed Counter

The Society's Seed Counter will be handled for the 1980-81 season by Herb Trautman, Trautman Nurseries, Rt. 3, 5108 Highway "K," Franksville, Wisconsin 53126. Herb, who is experienced and well equipped to handle large quantities of seed properly, volunteered for the job after Perry Narten, the present Seed Chairman, was detailed by the U.S. Department of Interior to go to Borneo for several months on a program of the Agency for International Development (AID) of the U.S. Department of State.

Contributions of Magnolia and other seed of interest should be sent by Society members and friends as soon as possible after collecting. Magnolia seed should be soaked in water and the pulp removed, then given the "float" test. Only those that are "sinks" should then be shipped to Herb in moist condition in plastic bags, free of packing or other materials and untreated by fungicides or other chemicals.

## Collection Trip to China

The China trip will become a reality when I arrive in Peking on August 15 for three months. Our party will spend most of its time in the Mt. Shennungia area of western Hupeh Province. What Magnolias and other magnoliaceous plants we will locate remains to be seen, but rest assured I will have my eyes open.