

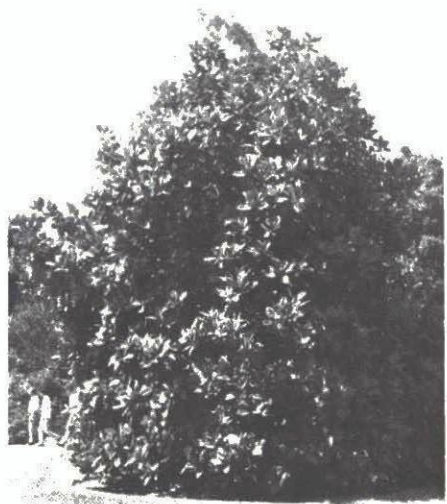
Magnolia Delavayi Franchet

This fine Magnolia has the distinction of being the largest leaved evergreen that can be grown out-of-doors in the British Isles. Strictly speaking, it is only properly hardy in favored parts of the Kingdom, more especially in Cornish gardens. At Kew, however, it can be grown against a wall. It flowers freely, producing large cup-shaped, waxy blossoms whose spicy odor fills the air around. Its erect, cone-like fruit when the scarlet jacketed seeds hang suspended is handsome. This tree is a native of Yunnan where it was discovered in the western parts of the province in May 1886 by Pere J.M. Delavay.³ Later it was found as far east as the mountains north of Mengtze by A. Henry. Its altitudinal range is from about 4500 to 7500 feet above sea level.

On my return from Szemao in October 1899 I came upon it quite accidentally. There was one large tree near the village of Lutung-po, at an altitude of 7500 feet, growing along side of several trees of *Pinus Armandi*. The tree was in ripe fruit, and clambering up among the branches I quickly secured fifty or more cones. These were carefully transported to Hongkong where I extracted the seeds (#99 Veitch seed) and sent them, some packed in earth and some in paper packets, to Messrs. Veitch. The seeds in the packets all perished en route, but those in earth arrived in a variable state and a number of seedlings were raised and were later distributed. The plant presented to Kew and planted in the Himalayan House flowered for the first time in July 1908. Since then many other plants have flowered in the

British Isles, especially in Cornwall, where the finest specimen known is growing at Caerhays Castle and is fifty feet tall (in 1971) with a spread of branches 4 feet. Its normal season of flowering is May, but intermittently throughout the summer and autumn blossoms open. This Magnolia does not appear to be in cultivation in America, though it would certainly thrive in California and other warm states.⁵ Millais in his work on Magnolias says of this species:

"The best plants I have seen are two placed close together in a high wood above the castle at Caerhays, and they are about the finest evergreen trees in that wonderful garden. The largest of these is now 25 feet high and 74 feet round the whole spread of the tree. There is a fine plant against the wall of Gunnersbury House, near London, and



Magnolia delavayi at Huntington Garden, San Marino, California.



Bud of Magnolia delavayi.

several good examples in the good gardens of the south-western counties. I have also seen it growing well in south-west Scotland. In my garden it has reached 18 feet on a wall where it flowers annually about the end of June or early July."

"Like all other Magnolias it is always a mistake to estimate the flowering qualities of a 'species' until the plant attains some degree of maturity. *M. delavayi* seldom flowers until it is 12 or 14 feet high, and then puts out a few blossoms which fade and fall almost in a day. This is disappointing in a tree of such great beauty, but Mr. J.C. Williams, who is capable of estimating the qualities of this species since he possesses fairly large specimens, thinks highly of its flowering qualities, for although individual flowers may be evanescent, yet when mature groups of flowers, following the first ones, as in the case of *Magnolias hypoleuca* and *parviflora*, are seen in quantity, then the general effect is good and may advance the garden quality of the species. We must, therefore, have a little patience and one

day we may think very highly of the flower qualities of a Magnolia which has few equals as an evergreen tree. *M. Delavayi* layers very easily, and I have increased it in this manner. These layers take about two years to root."

This Magnolia was one of the very first good finds I made in my plant hunting career.

3. The type of this species is the collection Delavay #2231 made in 1886. No herbarium specimens by E. H. Wilson have been seen.

4. Wilson left blank spaces in the manuscript, apparently intending to acquire the information in person or by correspondence. The frequency with which Wilson refers to the Caerhays plants suggests that a special trip to the Cornwall garden would be desirable. Mr. J.F. Williams has been helpful in supplying some bits of information but can not be expected to answer all questions. Caerhays may have the largest number of Wilson introductions and most certainly the largest number obtained from Veitch of the first two Wilson expeditions.

5. "An Annotated Checklist of Woody Ornamental Plants of California, Oregon and Washington" by E. McClintock and A.T. Keiser (1979) is useful to determine many of the plants under cultivation in the western states. The "Microfiche of the Plant Science Data Center," American Horticultural Society (1979), and Mulligan's "Woody Plants of the University of Washington Arboretum" (1977) are useful in determining distribution in relation to Wilson's forecasts of hardiness. *Magnolia delavayi* is hardy only in southern California, according to available records.

Magnolias
and other plants

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