

*Its flowers lack the elegance  
of classic denudata  
And if held beside the 'Diva'  
they're purple more than pink  
They don't resemble wind-filled  
sails, like Lenné's armada  
But when everything's considered  
you'll label it, I think...*

## A Most Comfortable Magnolia

by Philip J. Savage, Jr.

I have six lawn-planted trees of a Magnolia clone and I would hate to be without them. They were bought, along with some other fine Magnolias, from K. Sawada, of Semmes, Alabama, in 1956, as M. × 'Alexandrina.'

I don't have Mr. Sawada's letter and catalog still, but as I recall he indicated his scion wood of this clone came from Mrs. Dan de Baillon's garden in Evergreen, Louisiana, and had arrived there with various plants from a nursery in France, many years before. Another nurseryman of my acquaintance, born in Japan, told me he was quite sure it was a Japanese clone. Friends of mine would order 'Alexandrina' from nurseries the country wide, and no two were alike. Although a few were handsome plants, most were simply the regular trade clone of Soulanguiana. I felt at that time that Tom Dodd Nurseries had the same clone as Mr. Sawada, and the Vermeulen and Princeton Nurseries in New Jersey did also.

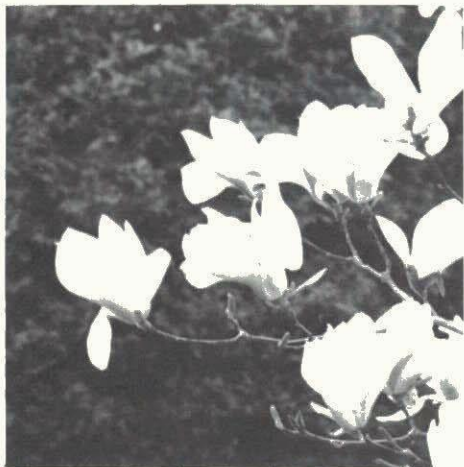
Although obviously one of the Soulanguiana grex, my six plants differ from the regular trade form of 'Soulanguiana' in many distinctive ways.

The plants are inclined to be tree-like, with a naturally attractive, spreading, but well balanced habit of growth. They have long, smooth-barked branches and twigs, less

tortuous and warty than those of other clones in the grex. Leaves are unexceptional but attractive, being smoother and lightly glossy when growing in partial shade. Flowers are durable and exceptionally long lasting, fresh until tepal-fall. They keep a "tulip" shape, without flopping or drooping, even during windy spring days. On the average, 'Alexandrina' blooms a week later than the type, but leaf buds vegetate so slowly that no green mars the display.

When showing first color, unopened buds are a homely gray-purple. This is the only bad mark on the score; fortunately, it is brief. Color of open flowers lasts very well, aging toward pink, rather than purple. To my nose 'Alexandrina' has the richest scent of any clone, or even species, in subgenus Yulania, with "rose-like" the best description I can think of. Seeds are few, and bright orange. 'Alexandrina' strikes well from cuttings and own-root plants seem indestructible once established and growing.

If this is the true clone of 'Alexandrina,' it is a very old selection. It appears to have been first listed by a nurseryman named Cels, at Montrouge, near Paris, in 1831. In 1835 both 'Alexandrina' and 'Norbertiana' were listed. These dates are quite remarkable when you



*Flowering branch of Magnolia x soulangiana 'Alexandrina.'*

consider that it was only in 1827 that Baron Hamelin of Franconville announced that *M. Soulange-Bodin* had the previous year flowered a "magnificent hybrid *Magnolia* seedling," which the Linnean Society of Paris had named, in his honor, *Magnolia 'Soulangiana.'*

When you also consider that it takes, on the average, six years to flower seedlings of *M. x soulangiana*, it becomes evident that there is something strange about the above dates. It not only takes time to flower seedling *Magnolias* but selecting exceptional clones and working up a saleable stock of them would take rather more years than the record shows. In any event, by the year 1842 plants named *M. conspicua* var. '*Alexandrina*' were on the lists of botanical gardens and nurseries in western Europe and Britain, and '*Lennei*' had been produced in the beautiful Italian province of Lombardy, near Lake Como.

I had always supposed that *M. x 'Alexandrina'* was named in honor of the handsome Danish princess who married Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1863, and became Queen Alexandra when her husband was

crowned King Edward VII in 1902. Again, the dates are wrong, since the flower-and animal-loving queen was born in 1844, when the *Magnolia* had been listed commercially for 13 years!

I suppose it's possible that *M. x 'Alexandrina'* was named for Tsar Alexander I, who treated Napoleon, and perhaps even *Soulange-Bodin* himself, with more generosity and chivalry than a ruthless, invading army deserved.

I have a copy of "*Magnolias*" by John G. Millais, which was published in 1926, and would like to reproduce here some of the sub-chapter devoted to *M. x 'Alexandrina'* in this book. Millais wrote:

"Owing to the number of hybrids, all very similar and coming from one or more sources, it is very difficult to say what is true *M. 'Alexandrina.'* In some the white parent predominates and in others the purple one, but the hybrid usually sent out by the Dutch and Belgian nurserymen under the name of *M. 'Alexandrina'* is in habit somewhat similar to *M. denudata*, with larger flowers. These have 9 petals 4 inches long and 2 inches at widest part, heavily flushed rose-purple and darker purple lines up to three-quarters of their length; interior of petals pure white. The leaves are developed at the same time as the flowers. *M. 'Alexandrina'* is a hardy tree as vigorous as and even more beautiful than its close relative *M. Soulangiana*. It develops its flowers about the same time, April 5th to April 10th; and remains in bloom for three weeks if uncut by frost. In many respects it is superior to *M. Soulangiana*. Equally floriferous, there is a shade of rose in the flowers when first developed that is very charming, and it has few rivals amongst spring flowering trees of any kind. The largest plant I have ever seen is in the lower part of the garden at the Chateau Eleanore, Cannes, once the residence of Lord Brougham; it was planted by Mr. Jesse Busby, the



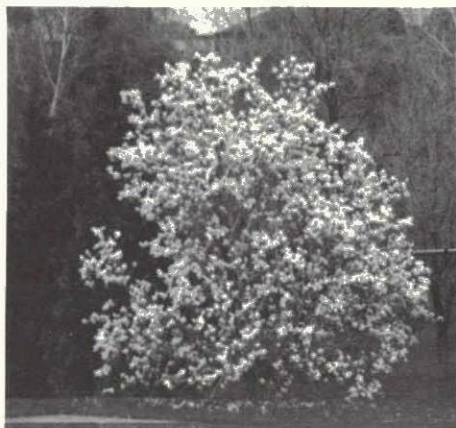
gardener, about 45 years ago, and is now about 35 feet in height. When I last saw it in March 1926, it was covered with at least 2000 flowers. In a few English gardens there are plants of *M. × 'Alexandrina'* over 20 feet, but good specimens are rare. In my garden it has reached 18 feet in the same number of years.

"*M. × 'Alexandrina'* is one of the essential Magnolias, and two or three specimens of both the typical and the large flowering white form should be planted in every southern garden."

Millais followed his description of *M. × 'Alexandrina'* with that of its variety, *M. × 'Alexandrina Alba'*, of which he says: "There is another form with upright branches and larger and whiter flowers than the type. It surpasses the usual form in everything except the rose flush to the flowers; also it comes into flower about a week later. Outer base shaded with purple which is not noticeable at a distance, the flowers appearing to be quite white."

"No doubt there are other forms intermediate between this and *M. 'Alexandrina'*, but this variety is very valuable as it continues the succession of early hybrid Magnolias, and links the group up with *M. 'Lennei'* and *M. 'Brozzonii'*."

The above description fits our subject clone fairly well, with only a few discordant notes which might be caused by differences in climate. Millais makes two statements that do not apply to this clone, at least in Michigan. He writes: "Leaves are developed at the same time as the flowers." Also: "It develops its flowers about the same time as *Soulangiana*." A photograph of a young tree of '*Alexandrina*' in the garden of the author's estate, "Compton's Brow," in Sussex, would appear to show leaf buds somewhat farther advanced than they would be here at a similar stage of flowering. Some of the flower buds appear damaged by frost, however. As to blooming "about the same time as



*Magnolia 'Alexandrina.'*

*Soulangiana*," we should remember that the clone bearing the grex name here may be an earlier bloomer than its counterpart "trade form *Soulangiana*" in England. For example, a *Soulangiana* at Kew, illustrated in one of W.J. Bean's books, is described as "pinker" and less purple than the clones in the continental trade.

I am now convinced that the '*Alexandrina*' Millais describes is the same as the clone I received from Mr. Sawada. About 15 years ago I saw several large specimens shipped from the Fiori Nursery, near Chicago, to Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and they are the same as mine.

I have one 20-foot flowering tree of *M. acuminata* × *M. × 'Alexandrina'*. Flowers are large and nearly pure white, with none of *acuminata*'s green or yellow. Flowers and leaves appear together, however, which is not good. Seedlings from this hybrid, back-crossed on '*Alexandrina*,' are growing, and many vigorous youngsters from pollen of the *F*<sub>1</sub> hybrid, used on '*Diva*,' are coming along. Another batch of seedlings, now near flowering age, resulted from '*Alexandrina*'s' pollen on Jim Merrill's *M. acuminata* '*Miss Honeybee*.' One of these has what Joe McDaniel calls "the spruce tree shape." '*Alexandrina*' was Jim Merrill's favorite

Magnolia and he wrote a nice article in praise of it in MAGNOLIA several years ago. I can't remember whether he got his budwood of 'Alexandrina' from me or another source, but it is the same clone at any rate.

It was interesting to re-read, in the March 1940 issue of the Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society, an article entitled "Magnolias at Bodnant," by the Lord Aberconway. Many of the species Magnolias now famous in that wonderful garden were just reaching maturity and commencing to bloom. What a comfort they must have been to that fine man during the terrible years that England stood alone against the overwhelming power of the Axis. He writes of growing "the hybrids Soulangiana var. 'Lennei,' var. *rustica flore rubro*, and var. 'Brozzonii,' and notes that "the other forms of Soulangiana are not grown at Bodnant, as they are not equal to the parent *M. denudata*, or to the three above named hybrids." I'm sure that if he had grown a large plant of *M. × 'Alexandrina'* in the true form, he might not have preferred it to *M. denudata*, but he would certainly have felt it was a most comfortable Magnolia.

## The Iufer Arboretum

"In the fall and winter issue of MAGNOLIA there is a sort of editorial about the late Ernest Iufer, Sr. First, I wish to thank you for the write-up. There are a few errors: It is the city of Salem that pledged \$125,000 if the citizens would raise \$170,000 to purchase. That was in 1978. Oregon real estate has gone wild in price the last few years. But more important is that I now have the greatest concentration of huge Magnolia trees in the United States. Some are native to the North American continent, some to China, etc. As to our Arboretum, we now have a 501 (c)3 tax exempt

nonprofit corporation. The real estate is in a trust, and I am trustee. We have 4,751 signatures of visitors who are constituents of U.S. congressmen. Mrs. Ernest Iufer is doing her best to preserve this head start on something outstanding." (letter from Mrs. Ernest Iufer, Iufer Magnolia Arboretum Foundation Inc., P.O. Box 3183, Salem, Oregon, 97302, March 29, 1981).

## Seed Counter Report, 1981

"Thanks to all of you for the support you gave us in the collection and distribution of seed for the AMS Seed Counter. Your help made the program run smoothly and only a few very late requests for seed were turned down after we had closed the Seed Counter for 1981. Without the seed donors none of this would have been possible. Contributors made an all-out effort to get good seed in generous amounts even though seed were short in some parts of the country. Members that bought seed deserve a vote of thanks also. I hope that they all got good germination and lots of nice plants for their efforts." —Herbert F. Trautman, Round Robin No. 1

## ... Short Takes

- Our statement in the spring 1981 issue about *Magnolia × watsonii (wieseneri)* that no one had said anything unkind about that cultivar quickly touched the quick with my friend Geoffrey Gorer in Sussex, England. Geoffrey says that for his money the flowers on his plant, though handsome, smell like rotting pineapple. Other offenders (to his nose only) are *M. delavayi* ("like a cheap concentrate of orange drink") and *M. tripetala* ("probably the nastiest of all — like a sewer").