

## Beautiful Ohio

# How Wooster Got That Way

by Ruth Remy

Wooster, Ohio, for some years has come to be called "Dogwood City" because of the extensive planting of dogwood trees throughout the city since 1956. A more recent project adding sweetbay magnolias to the city's plantings has been cause for redesignation of Wooster as "Tree City U.S.A." by the governor of Ohio and the National Arbor Day Foundation.

Whatever the name, the city's growing reputation as a beautiful spot with its thousands of dogwoods and magnolias reflects in large part the inspired and inspiring work of Dr. Oliver Diller. Ollie, as he is known to friends and to members of the American Magnolia Society, added his

professional talents and his love of trees to the energy and purpose of local civic groups looking for ways to beautify their town and improve their surroundings. Together they appealed to and captured the interest and enthusiasm of another group that guaranteed success: the city's schoolchildren, whose planting projects, conducted on Arbor Day each year have made the Wooster cityscape the showplace of the region.

Since 1956, each first grader in Wooster's parochial and city schools has been given a dogwood seedling on Arbor Day. Wooster Noon Lions Club pays for the dogwoods and members help pot each one individually before they are given to the children.

Distribution to the eight elementary schools is handled by the school administration. In 1981, for instance, 351 first graders received dogwoods, which they proudly planted in yards throughout the city. Not every dogwood has survived, of course, but with such a program going on for the past 25 years, the beauty of Wooster each spring is truly breathtaking.

In 1977, another local group, the Wooster Junior Women's Club began looking for a city beautification project its membership could undertake. Since the dogwood program had been so successful, they considered the possibility of another planting program.

They asked Ollie Diller for recommendations because he knows the name, family history, and health



*On Arbor Day Eve, 1981, members of Wooster Junior Women's and Noon Lions clubs had a pot party—getting 368 sweetbays and 251 dogwood seedlings ready to plant.*



*Bonnie Burrowes (at right) gets her magnolia from Sharon Nielsen of the Junior Women's club and Matthew Barkman (at left) gets his dogwood from President Wright Culbertson of the Lions club at Beall Avenue school on Arbor Day 1981.*

background of every tree in the city.

He suggested seedlings for fifth graders and recommended the sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana* L.) because it blooms over a long period (all of July and August), is relatively free of insects and diseases without spraying, and has a nice form—narrow and shrubby and doesn't get too large.

Although the sweetbay magnolia is not native to Ohio, it does well there, and specimens that were planted in Wooster in the mid-1950's have proved satisfactory. Both these and others planted in 1969 are on the north side of a building where they are exposed to lots of wind. But they have proved hardy and bloom beautifully.

Dr. Diller has been pleased with the choice of the sweetbay magnolia, but the use of that particular species has run into some difficulties. Sweetbay magnolia seedlings, he discovered, are in very short supply because of high demand. Almost all the sweetbays available at nurseries are sold as one-year seedlings, leaving few to advance

to larger and hardier two-year seedling status. The one-year seedlings are very small, which no doubt cuts down a bit on the survival rate.

Dr. Diller asks of the nurseries: "Why aren't more sweetbay magnolias propagated?" He has found Hess Nurseries of Cedarville, N.J. to be the best source for Wooster's project because "they have sent the best quality plants, with good root systems."

Ordering early is important, Dr. Diller says. He finds out from school officials how many fifth graders are enrolled (in 1981 there were 368) and orders more trees than needed so the runs can be sorted out and casualties replaced.

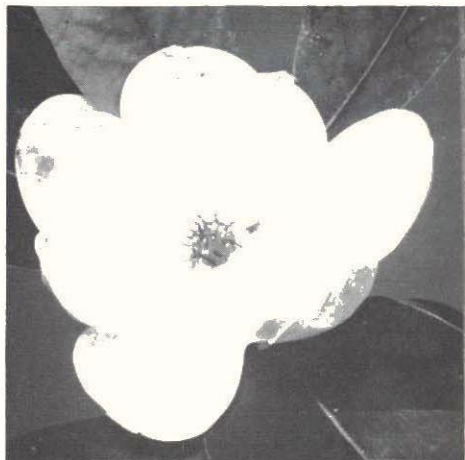
Seedlings arrive in Wooster in March, and Dr. Diller heels them into the ground at his home nursery facility to hold until Arbor Day. He does the same with the first graders' dogwoods.

True community spirit goes into action the day before Arbor Day. The seedlings are transported to the forestry department headhouse at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, located in Wooster. That



*Planting time at last, and Bonnie Burrowes (foreground) digs a planting hole for her sweetbay with help from her father (partially obscured).*





*Sometimes sweetbay seedlings from the nursery are too small for young inexperienced hands and they're put into Ollie Diller's lining-out nursery to come up to scratch for next year. Here Ollie and the author (right) look at some that made it.*

evening, members from the Lions Club and Junior Womens Club gather for a potting party. About 20 people spend several hours potting each magnolia and dogwood, after which they enjoy coffee and doughnuts provided by the Lions.

Each seedling is placed into a 6-inch, biodegradable paper pot, purchased by Wooster's Shade Tree Commission. The city also furnishes the necessary soil media. Wooster Garden Study Club provides the plastic bags into which each pot is placed, and also provides 2-foot bamboo stakes. The bamboo stakes are important, Dr. Diller points out, because of the small size of the plants.

Also placed in each plastic bag is a printed card 4x8 inches with detailed instructions for planting, a picture of the sweetbay magnolia and its flower, and an explanation of its background and how it should do in Wooster.

On Arbor Day, city school trucks take the seedlings to each elementary school, where the Board of Education

has them distributed to the children. At the potting party, Lions and Junior Women have counted out the number needed at each school and grouped each school's dogwoods and magnolias together to aid the distribution process.

A week or so before Arbor Day a letter is sent to fifth grade teachers explaining the small size of the seedlings and the care required. Even though instructions are included with each tree, Dr. Diller feels it is important for teachers to brief students in advance, especially about the small size of the seedlings they'll receive.

Teachers are also asked to stress the use of mulch for winter protection and the importance of a wire or low fence around the tree to ward off rabbits and lawnmowers. Students are also advised that blooms can be expected in 6 or 7 years, not this summer or next!

Fifth graders were chosen to receive the trees because this is a good age for interest in such a project. Also, all fifth grade classes in Wooster schools experience an overnight science and



*Patience is what's asked of the kids when they get their plants, a tall order. But one day when they're grown up, in the 8th or 9th grade, and have almost forgotten about magnolias, they'll walk out into the yard and suddenly spot something like this!*

nature session at a nearby camp located in the woods.

The success of Wooster's 25-year dogwood planting program has helped in promoting the magnolia project. For five straight years, Wooster has been named "Tree City U.S.A." by Ohio Governor James Rhodes—an award presented by the National Arbor Day Foundation. Dr. Diller, who is chairman of the city's Shade Tree Commission, was recognized in 1981 by the Arbor Day Foundation for his dedication to the planting of trees.

The award was well deserved and surprised hardly anyone in Wooster. Dr. Diller, an emeritus professor of forestry and long-time curator of the Secrest Arboretum at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, has devoted his life to promoting tree planting and city beautification efforts not only in Wooster but throughout Ohio and in many other states.

## More *M. Biondii* Ready

Peter Del Tredici of Arnold Arboretum reports that he has 35 more freshly rooted cuttings of *Magnolia biondii* available for AMS members who haven't received their plant yet. Those who have already sent in requests need not reapply. The cost of handling and mailing is \$5, but don't send any money until you receive a bill from Arnold. Send order to Dana Greenhouses, Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, Mass. 02130.

## ... Short Takes

Johnstone's "Asiatic Magnolias in Cultivation" was published in 1955, has been acclaimed for its excellent treatment of these Magnolias and its beautiful color drawings, and has already become a rare book. Sylvester (Skip) March has a copy that he reports is in good condition and which he is willing to part with for \$250 from any A.M.S. member who finds life impossible without it. If interested, write him at 4102 Chelmont Lane, Bowie, Md. 20715.

## ... Short Takes

The book "Magnolias" by Neil J. Treseder was published in 1979 and remains the most comprehensive single work on genus *Magnolia* and its species, hybrids, and cultivars. It brings between two covers basic principles and significant information about *Magnolias* that the amateur gardener or the professional may want to know. It's the standard reference to be kept handy where *Magnolias* are concerned. It's also pleasurable reading and contains many black and white drawings and a color insert of drawings and photographs. Members have already bought a great many copies for themselves and as gifts for friends, through this Society, which has just got in a new supply. Each copy is \$59 plus postage. Checks should be made to American Magnolia Society and sent to Richard B. Figlar, Secretary-Treasurer, P.O. Box 129, Nanuet, N.Y. 10954.

## Rare Native Plants

*Magnolia ashei* (Weatherby)  
*Magnolia pyramidata*  
*Stewartia malacodendron*  
*Rhododendron chapmannii*  
*Rhododendron austrinum*  
*Rhododendron speciosum*

Send self-addressed envelope for price list and inventory and shipping dates.

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