

The Siberian Express

by Dennis Ledvina

The winter of 1981-1982 was a real test for the hardiness of magnolias in eastern Wisconsin. A mass of extremely cold and dry air from Siberia made its charge over the Great Lakes, and was thus coined the 'Siberian Express' by local weathermen. All-time record lows, not just for the day, but for as long as records had been kept, were recorded. The low in Milwaukee was -26 degrees F, while the low in Green Bay was -28 F. These lows along with strong winds brought the wind chill down to 80 degrees below zero. I had expected severe damage to my magnolias, sweet cherries, and apricots, but much to my surprise only the apricots were extensively hurt.

Few members of the American Magnolia Society have gardens which must endure such severe conditions, but the hardiness of magnolias in this area may be of interest to other members. I am only evaluating plants that were above the snow line in Green Bay or Milwaukee.

M. acuminata: no injury, but a cool May gave me extremely poor seed production.

M. acuminata × *denudata*: no injury.

M. denudata × *sprengeri* 'Diva': slight injury.

M. hypoleuca: branch tips injured but bloomed later.

M. kobus var. *borealis*: slight flower bud damage.

M. liliflora var. *nigra*: slight injury with about 50 percent flower bud damage.

M. loebneri 'Merrill': slight injury, but 80 percent of the flower buds opened.

M. macrophylla: the 20-foot tree had slight injury, but bloomed normally.

M. 'Paul Cook': the ten foot tree had very slight damage.

M. salicifolia: no injury.

M. × *soulangiana*: many of the common trade trees in the area had extensive flower bud damage.

M. × *soulangiana* 'Alexandrina': bloomed normally. Probably the best tree of this group for cold climates.

M. × *soulangiana* 'Picture': some tip damage.

M. soulangiana 'Verbanica': about 60 percent flower bud damage.

M. sprengeri 'Diva' × 'Picture': no damage.

M. stellata 'Royal Star': no injury.

M. stellata "rosea": bloomed normally and produced a good seed crop.

M. tripetala: slight injury.

M. virginiana: slight injury, but bloomed normally.

I concluded that the magnolias which are commonly cultivated are much hardier than generally supposed.

The biggest surprise was *M. sprengeri* 'Diva.' Although the small plant I have was protected by snow, its hybrids proved to be extremely hardy. A plant of *M. sprengeri* 'Diva' × 'Picture' from Phil Savage had no damage, while adjacent trees of *M. soulangiana* had wood and extensive flower bud damage. I also have small plants of *M. acuminata* × *M. sprengeri* 'Diva' which I hope to test in the future. I also have, and plan in the future to use *M. sprengeri* 'Diva' in my hybridization program since it is producing extremely hardy hybrids.

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