

# An AMS Scion Counter?

by P.F. Narten

Magnolia cultivars and species, old and new, have long been described and pictured on these pages. In more recent journals there has been a focus on asexual means of propagating magnolias, particularly by budding and grafting.

Our appetites presumably have been whetted by these means of increasing our collections and facilities to test more broadly the use of specific magnolias. But little has been published by the Society about how to bring the ends together through identification of sources of the various scions described.

A number of members have shared or exchanged scions through contacts at the annual meetings and through the Robin letters; but this may not begin to reach all interested members, and such contacts, moreover, can be personally taxing on both the giver and the receiver.

For some years proposals have been expressed informally through the Robins and elsewhere concerning the possible establishment within the Society of something comparable to its seed counter to close the gap. Harold Hopkins put some of these thoughts into a recent article in *MAGNOLIA* inviting comments. The article asked that responses be sent to the AMS secretary, Charles Tubesing.

At the Society's spring meeting in Eugene, Oregon, the subject was brought up, and the secretary indicated he had received several responses that generally were favorable. Unfortunately, these remarks and the discussion that followed were not definitive except for being favorable to the concept. The discussion also got somewhat mixed up with the concern over the distribution of seed-grown plants from specific cultivars under the

cultivar name, as well as another comment that members in the United States seem overly concerned with hybrids and should be making selections of native species magnolias.

Others felt that seed-grown magnolias, especially from selections offered by the seed counter, may eventually offer greater benefits in development of new, worthwhile plants for wide distribution, or for specific climates and environments.

One might add that, considering the number and quality of hybrid seedling selections now coming out of Gloster Arboretum and the prices being asked for them, people who have the patience needed may be greatly encouraged to grow their magnolias from seed!

Although the above discussion on seeds is somewhat of a diversion it has a relationship to a scion distribution system and the nursery trends. On the positive side, for the nonspecialist nurseries, and for new nursery people, scions provided through the AMS could be very beneficial in getting a wider selection of correctly identified (one would hope) magnolias into the trade and into public use—an AMS objective.

A successful scion system — success being measured as the propagator's success — might also have some negative impact on the specialist magnolia nursery trade. While some might judge this would not be appreciable, based both on the small percentage of AMS members who would likely try such asexual propagations and be sufficiently successful at it (in the Robin I'm in there are members, including myself, who seem to routinely bud, graft, seed *and* purchase), and judge that a nursery whose financial success is based only on the Society's magnolia purchases could not long survive, it might be perceived differently by

existing specialist nurseries.

Since the AMS members in these nurseries could be an important source of scions, their cooperation would be needed for a successful AMS venture into scions. As an example, our new president, nurseryman Ken Durio, has been a longtime major contributor to and a substantial force in making the seed counter successful in both quantity and variety of seeds offered.

Although the costs and delays in marketing associated with patented plants are regrettable and not consistent with the Society's objectives of promoting wide understanding and distribution of magnolias, this cannot be corrected via any AMS venture in scion distribution. Material of patented cultivars would, of course, be excluded from a scion exchange.

At the Oregon meeting, the writer was asked to look further into the potentials and report to the Society. This article is a first step.

Should the Society establish a scion counter similar to the one we already have for seed? Should it be regarded as a fund-raiser for the Society? How should it be run and managed? The Hopkins article suggests that one person operate a data bank to bring suppliers and users directly together,



*Magnolia stellata 'Dawn' has a pink flower with over 40 tepals. Here's how it looked at Adamstown, Md., last spring.*

with AMS receiving a service fee for each sale.

Either party here could soon bypass AMS, once contacts were established, and perhaps this is in itself satisfactory if the Society's primary goals are achieved. We do not want to create anything similar to the pollen bank, which failed probably both from misunderstanding and from nonuse.

In the nutgrowing associations, which are much more regionalized than AMS, nursery specialists and those hobbyists who have either plants or scions for sale have long advertised in their journals and newsletters. By this means many selections have been widely distributed by scion sales, and the difficulty implicit in transplanting many grafted nut trees has been overcome.

When I was most active in that field, everything was cheaper — scions were 25 to 30 cents per foot and postage inexpensive — and all scion wood was sold only in a dormant state. Since magnolias are not always easily moved, there is an analogy. Our needs basically are similar. Magnolia scions however may be more sensitive to storage and may lose dormancy more readily and, since both U.S. and worldwide members must be accommodated, including both hemispheres, there are cross-climate zone problems. Some of us have greenhouse facilities and some must work with outside understocks. Some of us use dormant wood and some of us use wood collected during the growing season.

These concerns have led Hopkins and Bob Adams, among others, to suggest that a centralized scion depository such as is used by the seed counter would not work well in that transshipments would introduce further risks to the viability of the scions.

I believe this might need to be tested, for dormant wood, at least. Unfortunately the Society as yet has no research programs to test these sorts of things. From my perspective, in a new AMS venture of this sort we would need to move a bit slowly and



experiment, and I propose here that we start with dormant scions only.

Although it's generally thought desirable to collect such scions as late as possible in their dormancy to ensure top condition, scions properly cared for can retain their viability a long time. On two occasions I have had the opportunity to collect scions of various genera, including magnolia, on the west coast, once in mid-October and once in late November, and I have transported and stored them successfully until late April grafting—over 5 months. Last fall Dick Figlar sent me a scion in a plastic bag with some moistened sphagnum while I was absent overseas. My family put this into the refrigerator, where it remained until this past April and was still in good condition.

On this basis, I believe transshipments in cool weather would not necessarily be detrimental to scions properly collected and cared for. Thus a central exchange point would be feasible. Perhaps we also need regional points. Initially, I would favor a central system. It could reduce considerably the volume of correspondence by the manager and others.

As time is always short when dealing with a perishable product, all such delays should be avoided. A centralized source could protect potential suppliers from possibly having to reply to large numbers of requests that no scions were available. It also might protect the user from receipt of scions unfit for use—the manager exerting some kind of quality control.

Nominally suppliers would send dormant scions to an AMS central point or points for cataloguing and listing as to relative quantity, much as is done by the seed counter manager. A charge would be made and the proceeds, less postage, would go to the AMS treasury, or a percentage would go to the supplier, if necessary. All scions would go out by air mail.

The best system to avoid the stocking of large amounts of less desirable scions would be to have users and suppliers report their needs and



*Magnolia 'Norman Gould.'*

availabilities to the manager. The manager could advise specific suppliers of the projected needs and issue a listing of expected availabilities.

Handling of growing season scions would be postponed at least until the strength of the scion market is determined. What seems most needed at this time is some projected measure of the size of the total market. How many prospective suppliers and users in AMS would participate, and how would they prefer to do it?

The questionnaire that follows is intended to obtain information about the potential market for scions and the feasibility of the Society setting up a scion counter, to meet the needs of such a market and how it should best operate. Those interested should respond within two months.

Although the combined results will be published in a future issue of the journal, or in some other mailing, I encourage those who would like to try whatever system seems most satisfactory to provide, a preliminary list of their scion availabilities and needs in their responses, since we might be able to make a trial beginning in the fall of 1984 (assuming this article is read in time). Initial announcements about an AMS scion test system will go only to those who respond.

The questionnaire seeks information from both potential suppliers and users of scions. To respond please write on a sheet of paper your name, address, and your telephone number (if you wish). Under this information please state whether, if a scion bank is organized,

you would likely be a supplier or a user or both. Do this by adding the words "user," "supplier," or "both user and supplier."

Then below this, write the numbers 1 through 7 vertically down the left margin of the paper to correspond to the total of 3 questions asked of potential suppliers and the 4 questions asked of potential users. Leave some space after each number.

Now read the corresponding questions and the possible answers designated by letters (A, B, C, etc.). Then write opposite the number the specific letter that designates the answer which most accurately represents your situation or preference. If you wish to select more than one answer, please do so. Where additional information is asked with some of these answers, please write it in along with the letter.

At the end of the questionnaire add any comments or suggestions you wish to make as a potential user or supplier.

Return to: Perry F. Narten, 3708 N. Randolph Street, Arlington, Virginia 22207, (703) 243-2076.

#### SUPPLIERS:

1. Scion distribution.
  - A. Prefer to supply scions direct to user, outside AMS system.
  - B. Could supply scions directly to user within an AMS system.
  - C. Not interested in supplying scions direct to user but could be identified as a scion source in an AMS system.
  - D. Would prefer not to be identified as a given source (to reduce direct contacts).
2. Scion costs (based on 6" - 10" scions).
  - A. Would donate at no cost to user or AMS.
  - B. Would donate at no cost to user or AMS but would want postage costs.
  - C. Would sell scions to user or AMS. Costs per scion should be \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Would sell scions to user or

AMS. Costs to be based on scion rarity at price range of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- E. Would sell scions inside or outside AMS with \_\_\_\_\_% of cost or \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per scion to go to AMS.
3. Scion type.
    - A. Could supply annual list to AMS at end of growing season giving scion material available and estimated number of scions.
    - B. Could send availability list directly to users, however identified.

#### USERS:

4. Scion acquisition.
  - A. Prefer to obtain them directly from individual suppliers, inside or outside an AMS system.
  - B. Prefer to obtain them through an AMS central distribution system.
  - C. Not particular how obtained.
5. Scion costs.
  - A. System should be entirely an AMS fund raising mechanism.
  - B. System should not be entirely an AMS fund raising mechanism but should pay for itself.
  - C. Costs should be standardized on a 6" - 10" scion at \$ \_\_\_\_\_ each for all scions.
  - D. Costs should be based on scion rarity.
  - E. Would be willing to pay up to \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per scion plus postage.
6. Scion kinds.
  - A. Would submit an annual want list to AMS by end of growing season.
  - B. Would not submit such a list.
  - C. Interested in named hybrids.
  - D. Interested in species and species selection.
7. Scion numbers (with AMS system).
  - A. Number of scions of each type ordered should be limited to approximately \_\_\_\_\_ per order.
  - B. Number of scions should not be limited for each type.