

New cultivars of *Magnolia grandiflora*

by Richard B. Figlar

Although well over 100 cultivar names have been assigned to *Magnolia grandiflora*, until recently relatively few cultivars have been widely available in the United States. Moreover, many horticultural texts, monographs, and other published works typically list old European selections such as 'Angustifolia', 'Exmouth', 'Galissoniensis', 'Gloriosa', and 'Goliath' as the principal *M. grandiflora* cultivars. Although many of these are of superior garden merit and are available in the trade in suitable climates of Europe, they are little tested and have never been widely available in the U.S.

Since *M. grandiflora* is an abundant native tree of the Atlantic and Gulf coastal plains, it would seem obvious that many, if not the best, cultivars would originate from this huge genetic repository in the Southeast. Unfortunately, that was not to be the case. Since *M. grandiflora* was as easy to grow from seed as it was difficult and expensive to vegetatively propagate, new cultivars would often fade away soon after their introduction.

Of the 24 *M. grandiflora* cultivars described by J. C. McDaniel in 1973 [Reference 4], only five are still in large scale production (large scale being defined as more than 1000 plants per year). These are 'Majestic Beauty', 'Little Gem', 'St Mary', 'Samuel Sommer', and 'Russet'. Only half a dozen more, including 'Baldwin', 'Edith Bogue', 'Freeman', 'Galissoniensis', and 'Victoria' are in limited production (that is, fewer

than 1000 plants per year) usually by specialty nurseries.

Within the past twenty years a different pattern has emerged. Vegetative propagation techniques began to improve, and discriminating gardeners and landscape architects began to demand the superior and predictable qualities offered by select cultivars rather than seedlings. At the same time the retail nursery business, having been buoyed by the advent of container grown plants, found that these vegetatively propagated magnolias would bloom at a much younger age than seedling plants and often while still in their containers on the retail lot. This, of course, improved direct sales and further increased the demand for *M. grandiflora* cultivars.

In the fall of 1987, I made a survey among many of the wholesale growers of *M. grandiflora* cultivars in the United States. The results were quite interesting. First of all, it confirmed that of the older cultivars 'Majestic Beauty' continues to be the most widely available selection in the country and perhaps the world with an estimated 40,000 plants being produced annually by Monrovia Nurseries of Azusa, California. 'Little Gem' was second with half that amount, followed by 'St Mary', 'Samuel Sommer', and 'Russet' in that order.

More important, however, the survey revealed 5 new cultivars in large scale production. These are considered "new" in as much as they haven't been previously published in this journal nor did they appear in Joe McDaniel's list of 24 cultivars in 1973. They are 'Bracken's Brown

Beauty', 'D. D. Blanchard', 'Claudia Wannamaker', 'Monland', and 'Symmes Select'.

New cultivars

'Bracken's Brown Beauty' (Pat. #5520)—This patented selection was discovered by Ray Bracken in a seedling row at his nursery in Easley, South Carolina in 1968. 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' is distinguished by its very dense pyramidal habit, prolific flowering, and attractive brown backed foliage. Flowers are half the size of typical *M. grandiflora* and it is moderately remontant (blooming more than once in a season). Lustrous dark green leaves are elliptical with undulating margins and have good rusty-brown indumentum.

I have seen these plants in Ray's nursery and found them to be almost unbelievably compact trees, reminiscent of balsam firs on a Christmas tree plantation. The leaves are stiffer than usual, and this, coupled with the short stout pedioles, makes for very durable wind resistant foliage. The cultivar appears to be hardy, having withstood -20° with only slight damage.

Landscape size wholesale trees are available from Ray Bracken Nursery, Easley, SC and Shadow Nursery, Winchester, Tennessee. Public plantings of 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' can be seen at Disney World, Orlando, Florida and the Blair House, Washington, DC.

'D. D. Blanchard'—The original tree was discovered in the yard of Mr. D. D. Blanchard of Wallace, North Carolina in the early 1960's by the Robbins family of Willard, NC. After having initially propagated the tree by air layering, Robbins Nursery began large scale propagation in earnest in 1980. 'D. D. Blanchard' is characterized by its very dark glossy green leaves backed

with an intense copper indumentum. Flowering habit is typical for the species as is the size of the flowers. Leaves are broadly elliptic with slightly revolute, but not undulating, margins. The tree itself forms a compact pyramid.

I have not yet seen this cultivar, but photos of the plant most convincingly reveal its outstanding foliage and form. Good sized trees are available wholesale only from Robbins Nursery, Willard, NC. This clone has proved hardy in the Washington, DC area. The cultivar name 'D. D. Blanchard' is a registered trademark of Robbins Nursery.

'Claudia Wannamaker'—Selected by Johnny Brailsford of Shady Grove Plantation and Nursery, Orangeburg, South Carolina, this *M. grandiflora* cultivar has actually been in large scale production for quite some time (the late 1960's). Its chief attributes are its small brown-backed leaves and its miniature flowers which are said to be one-third the size of typical *M. grandiflora* blooms. The flat elliptical leaves are 4 to 7 inches long by 2 to 3 inches wide and are described as serpentine green with medium brown indumentum. It is also a remontant bloomer with a May through September flowering season. Individual flowers are 3 to 3½ inches in diameter.

Though the description of this cultivar resembles that of 'Bracken's Brown Beauty', I have seen both cultivars growing alongside each other and found 'Claudia Wannamaker' to be of a broader, more open pyramidal habit than the tighter form offered by 'Bracken's Brown Beauty'. They actually look quite different.

'Claudia Wannamaker' can be seen in plantings at many shopping malls and public places throughout the South including Epcot Center of Walt Disney World in Orlando,

Florida. Field-grown nursery plants are available via wholesale from Shady Grove Plantation and Nursery. Additional details on this cultivar are presented in a separate article authored by Johnny Brailsford in this issue.

'Monland'—Originally discovered by Bob Eiland of Charmwood Nursery, Millbrook, Alabama during the late 1960's, major propagation and naming of this selection didn't occur until Monrovia Nurseries acquired the plant in the early 1980's. The 'Monland' is an acronym of Monrovia and Eiland.

By far the most distinctive feature of this cultivar is the broad oval form of the tree which is quite atypical for *M. grandiflora*.

Apparently this characteristic is stable and comes true on successive propagation. Flowering is said to be very profuse and strongly remontant. For this reason and because of the apparent sterility of the seed of this selection, it has been suggested that 'Monland' may be a hybrid of *M. grandiflora* and *M. virginiana*. According to Frederick G. Meyer [Reference 5], "remontant flowering is a tendency found in both *M. virginiana* and *M. grandiflora*, but the trait is far more evident in the hybrids". I acquired a plant of 'Monland' this year and it continued to bloom well into November.

Individual flowers are large, 10 to 12 inches in diameter and consistently bear 12 tepals instead of the usual 9. The narrow, long petioled leaves are bright glossy green with light to moderate indumentum.

Monrovia introduced 'Monland' in 1987 and markets it as Magnolia hybrid Timeless Beauty™ 'Monland'. In its second year of release it will have already become the second most propagated *M. grandiflora* cultivar in America with an

estimated 30,000 plants per year. It has been hardiness rated at USDA Zone 6 and should be available—if not already—at many retail nurseries and garden centers throughout much of the U.S. Bob Eiland shares his colorful story of the discovery of this plant in an accompanying article. Monrovia has filed a plant patent application for 'Monland'.

'Symmes Select'—This cultivar was discovered by the late John Symmes of Cedar Lane Farm, Inc., Madison, Georgia in 1966 as a superior seedling derived from seed collected from trees in Westview Cemetery, Atlanta, Georgia. 'Symmes Select' is another very fine compact *M. grandiflora* characterized by its rich dark green leaves which have slightly undulating margins coupled with good brown indumentum. Its abundant bloom begins while cutting grown plants are still quite small. The well formed flowers are 9 tepaled and of typical size for the species.

In addition to its use as a landscape tree, it is said to be a favorite for cut foliage for use in flower arrangements. 'Symmes Select' is available wholesale from Cedar Lane Farm and beginning this year (1988), it will be available retail

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from Wayside Gardens via their mail-order catalog. It has been hardiness rated at USDA Zone 6 through 9.

New cultivars in limited production

Though generally not as widely available as the previously mentioned selections, several more new or little published cultivars are worth mentioning here. 'Overton' is a rugged 'St Mary' lookalike propagated by Robbins Nursery. From Shady Grove Nursery comes 'Margaret Davis' and 'Smitty', both with 8 to 12 inch blooms and fine brown-backed foliage, the former having narrower leaves than the latter. Cedar Lane Nursery propagates a fastigiate columnar form of *M. grandiflora* aptly called 'Mainstreet'. Magnolia Nursery, Chunchula, Alabama is propagating two nice cultivars. Their 'Fairhope' selection has nearly round blunt-tipped leaves while 'Spring Hill', the author's personal favorite, displays exceptionally elegant foliage. Ken Durio of Louisiana Nursery, Opelousas, Louisiana propagates upwards of 30 different *M. grandiflora* cultivars. Included are 'Workman', a compact tree with small 4½ inch flowers; 'Harold Poole' with its narrow strap-like leaves and compact shrub habit; 'H. D. Blackwell' which has very glossy undulating leaves with lots of indumentum along with an ability to bloom while still quite small; and 'Silver Tip' which displays thick silvery indumentum on the backs of its huge glossy green leaves.

Research and testing of potentially better cultivars continues by

amateurs and professionals alike. In the latter category, Tom and Bill Dodd of Tom Dodd Nurseries, Semmes, Alabama have begun propagating a form of *M. grandiflora* which not only displays superior foliage and form, but reliably produces double flowers. They are also testing seedling selections of 'Griffin' and 'Satin Leaf' as well as inter-cultivar "crosses" between 'Satin Leaf' and 'Charles Dickens'.

With such a vast array of fine new cultivars along with the continued groundswell of interest for developing even better ones, *M. grandiflora* has come a long way from the days of just 'St Mary', 'Exmouth', and 'Goliath', which is only fitting for the plant that some say is America's most significant contribution to world horticulture.

References

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*Top: Ray Bracken with
'Bracken's Brown Beauty'*

*Bottom: Flower of 'Brack-
en's Brown Beauty'*

