

Is *Magnolia sinensis* x *wilsonii* 'Jersey Belle' the first hybrid of its kind?

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In 1983 Mrs. V. Lort-Phillips showed at Chelsea a *Magnolia* under the name of 'Jersey Belle'. Members of the Floral Committee B were of the opinion that 'Jersey Belle' was very close to *Magnolia* x *highdownensis* which they considered to be a hybrid between *M. sinensis* and *M. wilsonii*. In view of the similarity the committee did not feel justified in recommending an award.

We are interested in the justification used by the committee. We belong to those who consider the taxon *M. x highdownensis* Dandy obsolete, our opinion being based on evidence that has become available after Dandy published his name. In our view, *M. x highdownensis* is part of *M. wilsonii*. The names in this account are used as follows: *M. wilsonii* to indicate *M. wilsonii* Rehder; *M. sinensis* to indicate *M. sieboldii* subsp. *sinensis* Spongberg; *M. highdownensis* to indicate the (by Spongberg) invalidated *M. x highdownensis* Dandy.

The written documentation we have been able to find is the following:

- F. C. Stern relates in *Flora and Silva* how in the autumn of 1927 he was given three seedlings by J. C. Williams of Caerhays Castle, for which the label was missing. The seedlings were in 1960 still at Highdown, then about 15 feet high.
- J. E. Dandy of the British Museum (Natural History) described this

magnolia in the *Journal of the RHS* XXV part 4, April 1950, giving it the name of *M. x highdownensis*. He considered it a hybrid between *M. sinensis* and *M. wilsonii*.

- George Johnstone considered in the *Camellia and Magnolia Conf. Report* 1950, RHS, that the plants were a form of *M. wilsonii*.
- F. C. Stern relates in his book *A Chalk Garden*, 1960, the story of *M. x highdownensis*. He mentions that the progeny of those plants is uniform and therefore questions the hybridity claims.
- Hillier and Lancaster in *Hilliers Manual of Trees and Shrubs*, 1971, considered *M. x highdownensis* part of *M. wilsonii*.
- Bean, W., *Trees and shrubs hardy in the British Isles*, 8th ed. 1973, relates Dandy's claims without a critical evaluation.
- Nigel Holman in *Rhododendrons* 1973, RHS, refers *M. x highdownensis* to *M. sinensis*.
- H. S. Hillier and C. R. Lancaster repeat in *Rhododendrons with Camellias and Magnolias*, 1976, RHS, their opinion that *M. x highdownensis* belongs to *M. wilsonii*.
- Stephen A. J. Spongberg in *Journal of Arnold Arboretum*, 57 (3), 1976, considers that *M. x highdownensis* falls within the variation of *M. wilsonii*.
- Neil Treseder in *Magnolias*, 1978, claims that Dandy was never quite happy about its hybrid status.



Magnolia 'Jersey Belle'

● Kumihiko Ueda in Taxonomic study of *Magnolia sieboldii*, C. Kock. *Acta Phytotax. Geobot*, November 1980, confirms Spongberg's findings about crinkled hairs on the leaf undersides of *M. sinensis* as a qualitative difference between this taxon and others belonging to section Oyama.

Flinck has grown plants from various sources of all taxa belonging to the Oyama section of the *Magnolia* genus. He has so far never found a hybrid. In comparison with other magnolias, plants belonging to this section are highly self-fertile. Amongst several hundred seedlings that he has raised from *M. wilsonii* seeds, he has had several like *M. x highdownensis* in spite of the fact that no *M. sinensis* has grown in the area where the seedplant grew.

J. E. Dandy based his conclusions on the facts that *M. x highdownensis*, in his opinion, was intermediary in leaf shape between the parents and that both the presumed parents grow at Caerhays. He also was unable to find herbarium material that would justify an inclusion under *M. wilsonii*.

Spongberg has in comparing *M. x highdownensis* with herbarium material at Harvard University of *M. wilsonii* concluded that *M. x highdownensis* belongs to *M. wilsonii*.

The two factors that in our opinion very clearly decide on the placing of *M. x highdownensis* are the lack of crinkled hairs and its uniform progeny. Its habit is also similar to that of *M. wilsonii*.

M. wilsonii x *sinensis* 'Jersey Belle' is, however, very probably the first hybrid between *M. sinensis* and *M. wilsonii* that has been observed.

The following points are our justification.

- It has some crinkled hairs on the leaf undersides like *M. sinensis*.
- The leaf shape is closer to *M. wilsonii*.
- The habit is influenced by *M. wilsonii*.
- The seed parent is known to be *M. sinensis*.

There is in our mind no doubt about the taxonomical difference between *M. x highdownensis* and *M. sinensis* x *wilsonii* 'Jersey Belle'. ■