

In Praise (and Anticipation) of the Morris Arboretum

by DOROTHY J. CALLAWAY

The Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia, is where I first came into contact with many of the magnolias I've come to love. The Morris is a well-established collection of Asiatic and American species, many of which were planted during the late 1950s and early 1960s under the directorship of Dr. John Fogg. Additions to the collection have been made since that time in an effort to include new selections. The large number of *Magnolia* species grown as well-established plants makes the Morris a choice place to see magnolias. The landscaping is beautifully done, the garden is well maintained, and the plants are well labelled, making a visit there most enjoyable.

I visited the Morris Arboretum in April, May, and October of 1987 in an effort to see the flowers and fruit of as many *Magnolia* species as possible. I thought a preview of the magnolias of the Morris might be appropriate since we will visit the arboretum during the 1991 TMS meeting April 12-14.

My first visit to the garden was on April 18. At this time most of the precocious species were in bloom. The rose garden, lacking glory itself at that time of year, was surrounded by large *M. x soulangiana* cultivars,

including the red-purple 'Rubra', whose flowers could be seen face-to-face from the terrace, and the distinct 'Lennei' on a slope facing the rose garden. A nice specimen of *M. kobus*, past its peak in flowering, sat in the corner providing an interesting mixture of unfolding leaves and fluttering white tepals.

Nearby there is a nice tree labelled *M. x loebneri*. The plant is probably one of the pink forms of *M. stellata*, but is nevertheless a sight to see in dappled shade. Across the walkway is a cluster of 3 or 4 large specimens of *M. x soulangiana* 'Brozzonii' with its pale pink (almost white) flowers. Further along the way are several massive plants of *M. kobus* var. *borealis* that are impressive at any time of year. The 40-foot tall trees are spreading in form and have huge, thick branches, some of which extend almost at right angles to the main trunks, which are about 30 inches in diameter. The flowers, though sparse, are large and have the fragrance of powdered Kool-Aid. By the iron gates at the rear entrance to the garden there is a beautiful plant of *M. x soulangiana* 'Norbertii' with dark, cup-shaped flowers covering the tree.

The greatest concentration of magnolias is found in the area of the garden appropriately named Magnolia Slope. The first eye-

catching specimen is a 25-foot tall rounded shrub of *M. stellata* standing alone on one side of the road. Opposite the drive are specimens of *M. x soulangiana* 'Alexandrina', 'Andre Leroy', 'Alba', and 'Alba Superba' along with *M. 'Orchid'*, allowing easy comparisons of the cultivars. At about 25 years of age, these plants are 15-20' tall and multistemmed.

The *M. x soulangiana* cluster is flanked by large trees of *M. x proctoriana* and *M. salicifolia*. Although they look suspiciously alike, the flowers have slightly different fragrances and *M. salicifolia* has the distinctive licorice fragrance to the leaves. During this visit, both had begun to leaf out and the flowers were past their prime.

The next tree to be seen along the walk is definitely my favorite plant in the garden. A single graceful specimen of *M. stellata* 'Rubra' stands at the top of the Magnolia Slope. Its form is that of a perfectly planned (but oversized) 15-20 foot bonsai. The smooth gray branches carried soft pink flowers during my visit. Against the green slope and the blue sky, this plant is a real work of art.

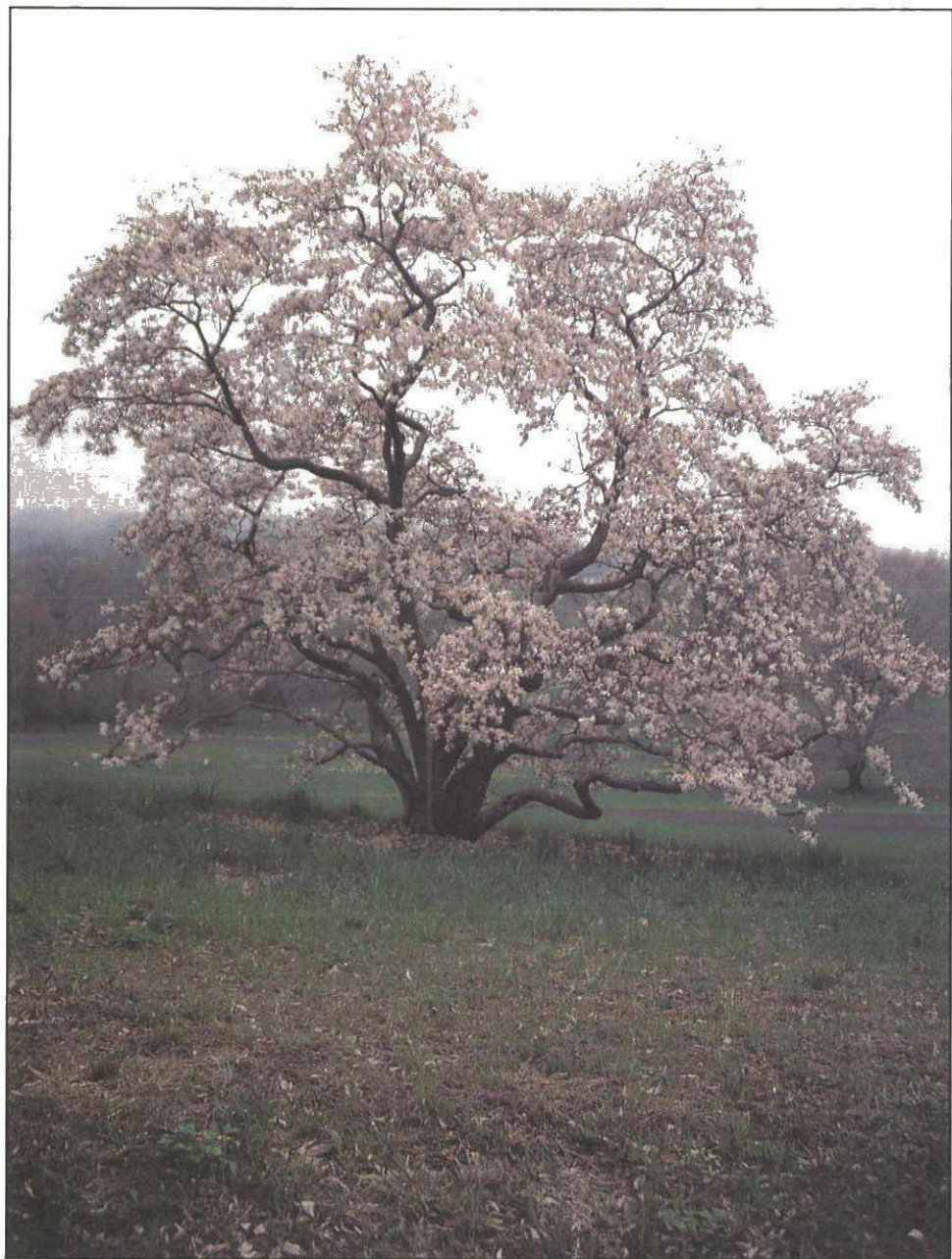
Nearby are small plants of 'Elizabeth' and some of the "Little Girls". Though only 4-5 feet high, they produced about as many blooms as they could support. During this April visit, the difference between the varieties of *M. virginiana* was most obvious. A large shrub of typical *M. virginiana* was leafless, while a nearby plant of var. *australis* 'Henry Hicks' had retained its glossy green leaves.

The Azalea Meadow offers

another magnolia display, including large specimens of *M. x soulangiana* 'Amabilis' (30-35 feet tall) and *M. denudata* (40-45 feet tall). These are planted along with weeping cherries and forsythia, and the combination is spectacular. A wooden swing under the big branches of *M. denudata* offers a good place to sit and enjoy the fragrant flowers.

My second trip to the Morris was on May 23, when I returned to see the summer-blooming Asian and American species. The highlight of this visit was seeing two plants of *M. sieboldii* in bloom. It was my first time seeing any of the Oyama magnolias and I have been hooked on them ever since. Both plants at the Morris have rounded habits and were loaded with flowers. Although it could never compete with *M. campbellii* in a contest for the most breathtaking flowers, *M. sieboldii* produces beautiful white flowers with maroon stamens, perfectly set off by a backdrop of velvety leaves.

My May visit to the Morris also found four of the bigleaf magnolia species in bloom. *M. hypoleuca* had impressive flowers, although the tree itself appears to have seen better days. As in all the bigleaf magnolias, the flower is produced in the center of a "whorl" of giant leaves. The flowers of *M. hypoleuca* are creamy white with rosy stamens and green stigmas. The closely related *M. macrophylla* was also showing off large flowers with purple spots at the base of the tepals. The big plant growing on Magnolia Slope has apparently been reproducing faithfully, since small macrophyllas can be found throughout the nearby wooded area.



Magnolia stellata 'Rubra' at the Morris Arboretum

Plants of *M. fraseri* at the edge of the woods were covered in the more sleek flowers characteristic of that species. Smaller and less "gaudy", the leaves and flowers of *M. fraseri* are more graceful than those of other bigleaf magnolias and are pleasantly fragrant. By contrast, the unpleasant smell of *M. tripetala* flowers was noticed before the plants were sighted. The 25-foot tall trees had apparently been damaged (perhaps by wind?) but suffered no ill effects other than loss of a few limbs. The flowers in *M. tripetala* are held upright and have more pointed tepals than other bigleaf species.

My third and final visit to the Morris in 1987 was on October 17 to look at fruiting characteristics of the species. Most species did not have fruit on them. The highlight of this visit was *M. grandiflora* 'Edith Bogue'. The 24-year old plant was loaded with fuzzy pink "cones", some of which had split open to release bright red seeds. Against the glossy green leaves, this was quite a sight. A plant of *M. salicifolia* produced small, deformed fruit, as did *M. x soulangiana* 'Brozzonii'. A 28-year old specimen of *M. x soulangiana* 'Andre Leroy' produced numerous, well-formed fruit. Plants of *M. fraseri*, *M. acuminata*, *M. macrophylla*, *M. sieboldii*, and *M. tripetala* had already released their seeds.

Although I timed my visits to the Morris to see the flowers and fruit of as many species of *Magnolia* as possible, I could not see them all. *M. acuminata* is represented in the garden by a 50-foot tall tree near Magnolia Slope, but I never saw it in flower. *M. x wieseneri*, on the slope,

never even put on leaves that I saw; it may not be there anymore. Hybrids of *M. grandiflora* with *M. acuminata* and *M. liliiflora* are found on the slope as well, but I never saw them bloom. *M. liliiflora* 'Nigra' didn't put on much of a show during my visits either.

At the time of my visits, *M. 'Galaxy'*, 'Royal Crown', the "Little Girls", *M. grandiflora* 'Majestic Beauty', and *M. sargentiana* var. *robusta* were all in the arboretum nursery waiting to be planted in the garden. Perhaps these have been moved into their permanent homes by now.

The Morris Arboretum is a great place to watch magnolias, and if my 1987 visit was any indication, there will be no disappointment when we meet there in April. ■

CELEBRATE OUR 40TH ANNIVERSARY WITH US

OUR NEW 1990-1991 CATALOG OF

MAGNOLIAS AND OTHER GARDEN ARISTOCRATS

(OVER 400 MAGNOLIA SPECIES AND
CULTIVARS LISTED)

\$5.00 PER COPY

(Deductible from your first catalog mail order)
\$20.00 per copy for overseas and foreign customers
(Air Mail), \$15.00 per copy for Canada and Mexico

This 150 page catalog lists nearly 2000 different
rare and hard to find
trees, shrubs, perennials, native plants, etc.
It has been updated to include hardiness zones,
cultural requirements and much more!

LOUISIANA NURSERY

KEN, BELLE, ALBERT & DALTON
DURIO
ROUTE 7, BOX 43
OPELOUSAS, LA 70570