

## If it's Tuesday...

There is a certain excitement in contemplating a train journey *under* the English Channel. I think it is fair to say the TMS members leaving London for Brussels following the IDS/TMS Magnolia Symposium were in the proper holiday mood and ready for an adventure. Being of sufficient number to occupy our own car, we quickly stashed the tons of luggage and other paraphernalia we had carted aboard and settled down to a most welcome, welcoming, glass of champagne. The trip did not disappoint. Flashing across northeastern France at a speed that would make an Indy 500 driver envious, we soon encountered Belgium, Brussels, waffle vendors, monk made beer, and fabulous gardens. Alas, we did not encounter much magnolia bloom. But then, you have heard this before.

We started at Thierry de la Motte Baraffe's garden located south of Brussels in gently rolling land. A young garden laid out in large beds forming vistas from and to an imposing Moorish house crowning the rise greeted us along with family and friends gathered to offer us a wonderful, and frequently repeated, example of Belgian hospitality. The weather had turned perfect and stayed sunny and warm for our entire tour. Subsequent days took us to Arboretum Bokrijk, Kalmthout, and the de Belter estate at Hemelrijk. All had outstanding collections of plants of many genera, well represented by mature and new plantings of magnolias. Every garden magazine in the world should run a photo of that magnificent *Cornus officinalis* at Hemelrijk. Specimen trees were superb everywhere.

Tour host and planner, Philippe de Spoelberch, opened his garden and those of his family to us as well. Making the most of the very flat landscape of northwest Belgium, the formal vistas of one portion of the garden were extended away to the horizon by plantations of native poplars, creating the effect of great size and serenity. The "natural" garden, planted heavily with rhododendron species and cultivars held countless treasures. A very extensive magnolia collection, still young, grouped sections and species.

A very sincerely felt thank you is due to all the organizers, garden owners and gardeners, and all who made our tour a memorable one. Can we try for bloom some other time? ❀



*Magnolia 'Athene' at the garden of Thierry de la Motte Baraffe.*