

Mid-Atlantic Region – 1998

The fourth meeting of the mid-Atlantic members of The Magnolia Society was held April 19, 1998 at the Lewisberry, Pennsylvania, home of Barry Yinger and Andrew Wong. It is also the site of Asiatica Nursery and trialing grounds for Hines Horticulture, Inc., Barry and Andrew's employer. Thirty-five members from Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Maryland braved the rain in intrepid Magnolia Society fashion.

The nursery is located at Barry Yinger's boyhood home. It is a farm of 73 acres currently divided among open fields, meadows, and woodland. The elevation is approximately 450 ft. The soil is mostly sandy loam over sandstone, but there are pockets of heavy clay and some decomposing red shale. The soil is generally fertile and well drained which renders it excellent for the cultivation of a wide range of plants. There are two ever-flowing surface springs at each end of the property. These feed three man-made ponds, two near the existing buildings and the other at the opposite end of the property. There are many interesting sandstone outcroppings and a wide variety of microclimates.

The climate in Lewisberry corresponds to the middle of USDA zone 6. Widely fluctuating winter temperatures in recent years have put otherwise hardy plants to the test. The historical low of -28°F was set in the winter of 1993–94. Normal lows are in the range of 0°F to -5°F .

The existing buildings were built around 1881, after the original house burned. Like many farms established by German settlers, the buildings are located near the center of the property. Farms established by English settlers usually had the buildings located along a public road. Interesting artifacts from the original farm include the outbuildings, the spring house, and three old oaks that were left standing near



*Magnolia 'Golden Gift,' a cross of M. acuminata var. subcordata 'Miss Honeybee' x (M. acuminata x M. denudata) by David G. Leach.
Registered in 1997.*

the barn, probably as shade for livestock. These three oaks are probably the only healthy trees remaining on the farm that were alive at the time of the original Penn land grant. The barn is currently being renovated to provide living space and an office for the nursery. The other outbuildings are in various stages of renovation and eventually will be returned to their original appearance.

The introduction and evaluation of plants for the nursery trade are a personal interest as well as the focus of the work of Barry Yinger and Andrew Wong. Asiatica Nursery is almost three years old and is currently a part-time venture. The nursery imports, propagates, and sells Asian woodland plants wholesale. Asarums, arisaemas, hepaticas, and hardy terrestrial orchids are of particular interest. One goal of the nursery is to make available Asian woodland plants that would be otherwise unavailable or difficult to find. There are plans to add some American natives, which include trillium propagation in a new bed in the shade house.

Barry has been gardening in this location since he was a young boy. But it was not possible, until recently, to plant more than a small area below the house because of livestock and farming activities. Barry and Andrew are now beginning to develop intensively planted areas near the buildings, leaving the meadow below in a managed but natural condition.

Planted areas have been developed with clusters of trees, followed by an understory of shrubs and herbaceous plants. An effort has been made to provide a succession of seasonal color, as well as interesting combinations. Color theme hillsides have been developed in two areas, one for plants with yellow and orange ornamental features and another for plants with purple, red or pink ornamental features. Two large sunny borders are planned with small trees, shrubs, as well as low maintenance perennials and grasses. A double flowered specimen of *Cornus florida* was universally admired. Daphnes grow well and the fact that they are doing better than just surviving was astonishing to the visitors.

The first magnolia Barry planted there was a garden center soulangiana in 1970. He gradually became more selective, and

by the late 1970s he had planted *M. ashei*, *M. x 'Galaxy'*, *M. sprengeri* 'Diva,' *M. fraseri*, and a few other choice species and hybrids. Specimens such as *M. biondii*, *M. zenii*, and other documented Asian species were added in the 1980s. The most recent burst of planting started in the early 1990s, when Barry made arrangements to move back to Lewisberry permanently.

Including the young plants in the nursery, there are more than 200 different magnolias there now, but most of these are not large. The Asian magnolias that bloom in April to early May are really not very good there. They seldom have a year when they bloom all the way through in a satisfactory way. Barry and Andrew greatly prefer the late-blooming species and hybrids, and a few of the very early, frost-resistant species and hybrids.

Among the early blooming types, they usually get satisfying bloom from *Magnolia zenii*, the Arnold Arboretum introduction. Their tree is about 25 feet tall and has bloomed heavily for several years. It is worth growing for the fragrance of the flowers. The pink-striped flowers and unopened buds are remarkably frost resistant, down to the low 20sF. It bloomed after the record-setting -28°F winter. *Magnolia biondii*, from the same source, blooms at the same time, but the white flowers are less showy and less fragrant. Both are fast growing, symmetrical trees. *M. sprengeri* 'Diva' lost its top in the bad winter, but has bounced back. It often gets good bloom, and the flowers are huge.

They have two trees of *M. denudata* grown from seed that J.C. Raulston collected in the Imperial Palace grounds in Beijing. Barry states that he foolishly planted them further down the valley, and they almost always get frosted. Much better are the two trees of *M. stellata* 'Centennial' from the Arnold Arboretum. Barry and Andrew claim that is the most beautiful stellata that they have grown, and is highly frost tolerant. Another early favorite is *M. x loebneri* 'Spring Snow.'

They are trying many of the yellow magnolias, but most of them aren't very yellow there. Their two large trees of 'Elizabeth' are cream in most years, as are various Kehr and Leach varieties that they are trying. 'Yellowbird' is by far the

most yellow magnolia that they grow. Barry saw David Leach's 'Golden Gift' in bloom in Ohio and was very impressed. They have it now, but it has yet to bloom.

Some of their best magnolias are natives. The 30 foot trees of *M. fraseri* are always gorgeous with showy flowers that are pale yellow at first, beautifully displayed on the ends of the branches of the open-growing, structurally distinctive trees. The bright red fruiting cones attract attention too. These were grown from seed from the Pisgah National Forest. They have tried two clones of *M. pyramidata*, from north Florida and east Texas. The Texas form is far better in Lewisberry. It is much hardier, as it bloomed after the -28°F winter. The 10 foot tall tree blooms heavily each year, opening pale yellow, and is at least as good as 'Elizabeth.'

Magnolia grandiflora 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' is in the coldest part of the garden but is fully hardy, having come through the -28°F and -12°F winters without difficulty. The foliage has a beautiful rusty-red reverse, and it blooms sporadically throughout the summer. This is one of those rare trees that lives up to its hype.

They have many nice magnolias grown from seed from Korea, including seed Barry collected on various trips, as well as seeds from the Chollipo Arboretum list. They have a number of blooming *M. sieboldii*, and some unusually large-flowered *M. kobus*. Hybrids from *M. cylindrica* originally from Chollipo are distinctive and all beautiful. One with dark purple new growth might be worth naming at some point. Barry is threatening to call it 'Seoul Brother.'

Thanks to John Allen Smith, they have been able to try many Gresham hybrids. However, many don't work well there because of early bloom. One of the best is 'Jon Jon' with its enormous flowers. It blooms late enough to give a good show almost every year.

Since the meeting last spring, many more magnolias have been moved to their permanent positions. Their practice is to grow magnolias to six to eight feet in the nursery areas with occasional root pruning. This permits evaluation over a period of years and transplanting plants of this size does not appear to be a problem. ♡

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