

## **The Performance of Yellow Magnolia Hybrids in a Modified Continental Climate**

Stefan Cover

Nowadays we take the existence of yellow-flowering *Magnolia* hybrids for granted, so it is difficult to imagine the excitement among magnoliaphiles when the Brooklyn Botanic Garden introduced the very first one, *Magnolia* 'Elizabeth,' to horticulture in 1977. The large, light yellow flowers of 'Elizabeth' were an immediate hit with gardeners, and stimulated an enduring interest in new and improved yellow-flowering hybrids. Since then, many cultivars have been introduced, and new ones continue to appear nearly every year. How does one sort through the possibilities and decide what to plant? The task is not easy. Even at this late date, more than 25 years after the introduction of 'Elizabeth,' we have little useful comparative information.

This article is an effort to supply some comparative context, at least for those who garden in cool, more or less continental climates. What I attempt here is to briefly describe and evaluate commonly available yellow cultivars in New England (USA), based on personal observations of plants growing in USDA zones 5-6. These results should be applicable in areas with similar climates throughout much of the northeastern and north central United States, southern Canada, and parts of eastern Europe, temperate China, Japan, and Korea. Hopefully, *Magnolia* growers in other areas will find this information useful, as well. The task of comparing these plants has been greatly facilitated by Dick Jaynes, Andy Brand, and the staff of Broken Arrow Nursery in Hamden, Connecticut (USA). Each year in early May, the nursery holds a special "Magnolia Day." The Broken Arrow crew kindly invites me to participate as a so-called "magnolia expert" and one of the many benefits of participation is that I get to see many of the yellows blooming in Broken Arrow's extensive collection.

The climate in New England is technically "modified" continental, with cold, often seemingly interminable winters and reasonably warm to cool summers (depending upon location) that feature lots of sunlight. Precipitation is generous [35-40in (76-101cm) year] and usually reasonably well distributed throughout the year. While gardeners in the region make an art form of complaining about the weather (we have early frosts, late frosts, deep freezes, heat waves, no snow cover, snow up to our ears, horrendous summer droughts, torrential rains that would sink Noah's Ark, etc. ...), the good news is these appalling conditions are actually favorable for growing yellow-flowering magnolias. The primary reason for this is that all yellow hybrids contain at least some genetic contribu-

tion from our native Cucumber Magnolia (*Magnolia acuminata*), the sole source of yellow flower pigments in temperate magnolias, and a tree well-adapted to climates featuring long, cold winters. In addition, the expression of yellow flower color in New England is by and large good. Residents of many other regions where magnolias grow well are not so lucky. In cool montane or maritime climates, flower colors are often paler, tending towards "cream" instead of yellow, perhaps because the relative lack of summer heat does not allow full development of yellow flower pigments. Paradoxically, the same effect is seen in warm temperate climates like those of the southeastern US, where spring hot spells can "bleach" yellow to cream in no time at all. Neither set of conditions occurs often in New England, so yellow colors are well-expressed most springs.

Before discussing plants, two other topics must be addressed. The first is *bloom time*. While bloom time in magnolias varies from year to year depending upon conditions, yellow *Magnolia* hybrids may be broadly characterized as "precocious" (first flowers emerging before the unfolding of the leaves), or as "late bloomers" whose first flowers appear with or after the unfolding of the leaves. In general, it is best to think of bloom time as a broad spectrum of possible plant responses, rather than as an early or late dichotomy. Even so, the distinction between precocious and late flowering remains useful because the timing of bloom affects the visual magnitude of the floral display and the vulnerability of flowers to late frosts. Precocious plants are valued by many because they put on a big show of flowers that are not obscured by the developing foliage. They also tend to bloom relatively early and the flowers are, therefore, comparatively susceptible to damage by late frosts. Though still lovely, the floral displays of late bloomers tend to be less visually overpowering because the flowers may be partly obscured by the developing leaves. On the plus side, these plants tend to flower somewhat later in the spring and the flowers are less likely to experience frost damage.

The second topic is plant evaluation. Aesthetic judgments are inherently subjective, but we all know folks who sort plants into "bad" and "good" in the same arbitrary manner "sinners" are scheduled to be separated from the "saved" at the Last Judgment. Such dogmatism is seldom informative or useful and the same can be said about the commonly encountered assumption that hybrids with deeper yellow flowers are somehow inherently superior to those whose flowers are lighter yellow. This prejudice arose because the early hybrids were light yellows and later introductions with deeper yellow flowers were hailed as "advances" over previous cultivars, as indeed they were, in a technical sense. In the garden, however, the choice between a lighter or a darker yellow depends *entirely* upon what *you* want to accomplish. In general, lighter yellows look stunning against darker backdrops, especially those created by forest or woodland; deeper yellows are better able to stand out in more open contexts that are generally lighter and brighter. Many light yellows are astonishingly lovely. Don't miss them. The same is true of deeper yellows too. Likewise, the overall quality of a flowering tree is not dependent on flower color or flower

size alone. Flower form, growth habit, eventual size at maturity, foliage quality, delicacy, grace, and charm are also important elements in the overall aesthetic package. As for the following comments, they are both descriptive and *personal opinion*, but I do try to explain the basis for the opinions expressed. I hope they will be useful, but take them with a grain of salt. Plants may vary widely in their performance from place to place and your taste in plants may be different from mine. This is by no means a comprehensive list of yellow *Magnolia* hybrids. I discuss only cultivars available in American horticulture in recent years, and with which I have some personal experience. Cultivars are listed in alphabetical order.

**'Butterflies'** A cross of *M. acuminata* × *M. denudata* by Phil Savage, this plant caused a sensation among the magnolia faithful when it was introduced in 1988. Initially, 'Butterflies' was lauded for its excellent flower color (a somewhat deeper yellow than 'Elizabeth'), good flower shape and poise, and neat, restrained growth form. I have not been so impressed, but my attitude improved a bit after seeing well-grown landscape-sized specimens at Broken Arrow. Flowers are early, small [4in (10cm) in diameter], truly precocious, have nice form and poise, and a bright medium yellow color. It generally forms a small tree, more delicately branching and more finely textured in flower and foliage than 'Elizabeth.' A sizable plant in bloom is a beautiful sight. The flip side of the coin is a history of uneven performance. I've heard more than a few reports of failure to thrive, of long time required to reach first flowering, and of several years in addition being required to develop a decent floral display. The plant has also been justly criticized for poor growth form. Young grafted trees often seem reluctant to form a strong leader and may become awkward or misshapen over time if not pruned carefully to encourage better form. Lastly, as an early-flowering plant, the display can be damaged by late frosts. I have never seen seeds on this plant. *Verdict: a temperamental beauty.*

**'Brenda'** Reportedly a seedling of *M. acuminata* var. *subcordata*, this plant has become available in the last several years. It is mentioned here because the relatively late flowers, though small [3in (7cm) in diameter], have a good, short, cup-shape and an exceptionally deep yellow color. I like the flowers, but they emerge with the leaves so I remain uncertain if the display as a whole will be memorable. Perhaps a polyploid, it forms a small, slow-growing, rounded tree. The leaves are reminiscent of those found in normal northern-type *Magnolia acuminata* and they are coarse for the smallish size of the plant. Likewise, the new twigs are relatively robust and glabrous (as in northern-type *acuminata*), not pubescent as in its supposed *subcordata* parent. The plant bears seed readily. *Verdict: the jury is still out.*

**'Elizabeth'** A cross between *M. acuminata* and *M. denudata* introduced by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. For sheer flower-power this is still one of the finest precocious yellow magnolias. Most of the flowers emerge before the leaves, are relatively large [5-7in (12-17cm) in diameter], light yellow, and have a good

form intermediate between the flowers of its parents. The plant is floriferous and a well-developed display is a visual knockout, forming a spectacular mass of color. A 35ft (10m) tall specimen at Broken Arrow dominates the landscape when in bloom, so this plant is not for the fainthearted. Forms a medium to large tree with a rounded canopy and dense, dark green, medium-textured foliage. Flowers early for a yellow, so the display is occasionally damaged by late frosts. The flowers fade to cream in hot weather and towards the end of the bloom period, but look good nonetheless. A robust, resilient *Magnolia* and a good "all-rounder," as our brethren in the UK say. Rarely produces seed in New England. *Verdict: still one of the best precocious yellows.*

**'Goldfinch'** A cross between *M. acuminata* and *M. denudata* from Phil Savage. Early blooming, precocious, light yellow flowers with elegant form, erect poise, and nice foliage quality—all even better than 'Elizabeth,' in my opinion. Forms an elegant, strong-growing, upright tree. The downside is that it blooms quite early for a yellow (slightly earlier than 'Elizabeth' in New England) and thus it is almost guaranteed to disappoint if you are plagued by late frosts. Otherwise a very fine plant. Does not produce seed in my experience. *Verdict: a little-known treasure.*

**'Gold Crown'** A cross between *M. × brooklynensis* 'Woodsman' and *M. 'Sundance'* from Augie Kehr. An apparent polyploid, this plant has thick, glabrous twigs, large, dark green leaves, and well-shaped, light to medium yellow flowers that emerge with the leaves. Forms a narrow, upright tree that flowers and leafs out very late. I like the flowers a lot; they are sizable [6–8in (15–20cm) in diameter when open] and have an appealing blowsy, luxurious quality. The foliage (coarse, lustrous, dark green) and the growth form (narrow, upright) are also distinctive and the growth rate is moderate. Late frosts should not be a problem unless you live in the frost pocket of the century or your next door neighbor is Nanook of the North. Produces seed and was used in hybridizing by Augie Kehr. *Verdict: lots of character in an attractive package.*

**'Gold Cup'** A cross of *M. × soulangeana* 'Lennei' and *M. 'Elizabeth'* by Augie Kehr. The outstanding feature of this plant is its large, broadly cup-like, light yellow to cream flowers, occasionally with a reddish flush at the base of the inner tepals. This is a tetraploid plant with thick twigs and coarse, puckered foliage that forms a small, broadly rounded tree. Flowers and leafs out mid-season. The tree will never win any beauty contests and the flowers appear "wrinkly" as they open, but fully open flowers are striking. An important parent in Dennis Ledvina's breeding program because of its unusual flower form. *Verdict: perversely fascinating.*

**'Golden Gift'** An interesting plant (*M. acuminata* var. *subcordata* 'Miss Honeybee' × [*M. acuminata* × *M. denudata*]) from the late David Leach introduced in 1997. Remains relatively small [say 15ft (4m) tall and wide ultimately], forming a rounded tree or large shrub with medium textured foliage. Flowers are abundant, precocious, 4in (10cm) in diameter, have a nice form, a good medium yellow.



*Magnolia* 'Golden Gift.' Taken at Broken Arrow Nursery.

low color, and recall the blooms of 'Butterflies.' The floral display is impressive and bloom time is extended because of secondary (pseudo-axillary) flower buds that continue to open after the leaves begin to emerge. An appealing choice for smaller gardens and perhaps the only yellow *Magnolia* with such a restrained growth habit. *Verdict: some good things do come in small packages. (See photo.)*

**'Golden Goblet'** Another David Leach hybrid introduced in 1997. Flowers are tulip-shaped, 4in (10cm) in diameter, have six tepals, and sit upright on the branchlets, and are a strong, bright, medium yellow. The tree is upright, vigorous, neat in foliage and habit, and an excellent choice, especially if a relatively deep yellow color is desired. Flowers as the leaves emerge, but somewhat earlier than 'Yellowbird' or 'Ultimate Yellow' in New England. *Verdict: a fine, mid-season, darker yellow.*

**'Gold Star'** A *Magnolia* 'Miss Honeybee' × *M. stellata* 'Rubra' hybrid from Phil Savage. The only *stellata*-like thing about the tree is the flowers. The first ones appear just before the leaves emerge and are 5in (12cm) in diameter, light yellow, have 12-15 tepals, and resemble spidery Star Magnolia blooms. Otherwise, the resemblance to *subcordata* is apparent: 'Gold Star' becomes an upright medium-sized tree with *subcordata*-reminiscent foliage, branching pattern, bloom distribution, and a rounded crown. The flowers are very attractive and the emerging leaves have a light bronzy-tinge. An exceptional hybrid that has impressed many magnoliaphiles. Bears seed and was used successfully by Augie Kehr in hybridizing. The only comparable yellow is Augie Kehr's 'Stellar Acclaim,' which has similarly sized, pale yellow, *stellata*-like flowers with a light rose flush at the base. *Verdict: unique and charming, but not small. (See photo.)*



*Magnolia* 'Golden Star'. Taken at Broken Arrow Nursery.

**'Golden Sun'** A relatively recent (1997) David Leach hybrid (*M. acuminata* × *M. denudata*) that is a personal favorite. It has abundant, large, light to medium yellow flowers with six tepals that emerge just before the leaves do, and open flat before falling. Flower form is excellent and the tree is handsome, broadly pyramidal, and has attractive, large, "paddle-shaped" leaves that are more *denudata*-like than in most hybrids of this cross. A mid-season bloomer. New leaves are slightly but endearingly fuzzy for a short time after emergence. Bears seed readily. One of the very best large-flowered precocious yellows. 'Golden Gala' is a sister seedling said to be very similar, but slightly later flowering. *Verdict:* spring couldn't have a better harbinger. (See photo.)

**'Hattie Carthan'** A *Magnolia* × *brooklynensis* hybrid from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Forms a small or medium sized tree with many 5–6in (12–15cm) diameter flowers with an odd yellowish-tan "parchment" color and a basal purplish flush on the inner tepals that emerge relatively late as the leaves do. In my opinion, the flower color is peculiar, rather than appealing. Frankly, I can't imagine why this plant was named and introduced. *Verdict:* what were they thinking?

**'Honeybelle'** A recently introduced *M.* 'Miss Honeybee' × [*M.* × *loebneri* 'Ballerina'] cross by Phil Savage and named by Dennis Ledvina. Numerous, smallish, sturdy, six-tepalled, light yellow flowers that emerge with the leaves on a small upright tree. Leaves are reminiscent of the seed parent and have



*Magnolia* 'Golden Sun.' Taken at Monahan/Cover garden at Stow, MA.

a light bronzy tinge when young. The plant is so new I can't say how it will perform, but I like the flowers, and with its parentage it should be very hardy and tough. See also 'Maxine Merrill,' which is a similar cross. *Verdict: a promising newcomer.*

**'Hot Flash'** An Augie Kehr hybrid (*M.* 'Woodsman' × *M.* 'Elizabeth') with numerous 5–6 in (12–15 cm) diameter, bright, medium-yellow flowers often (but not always) with a rose flare at the base of the tepals. The flowers are striking and attractive. Forms a strong-growing, upright tree with medium to rather coarse-textured, dark green foliage. Flowers open relatively late, as leaves begin to emerge. Augie Kehr (no mean judge) rated this plant very highly. Bears seed. *Verdict: a solid choice in a mid-season medium to darker yellow.*

**'Ivory Chalice'** An older David Leach cross (introduced 1985) between *M. acuminata* and *M. denudata* that has precocious, beautiful, creamy white to pale yellow flowers of good size and form. Remarkable because it forms a large, impressive upright tree with dense, luxurious, coarse-textured foliage reminiscent of the *denudata* parent. Barry Yinger, who gardens in southern Pennsylvania, says the plant is perhaps the fastest growing magnolia hybrid he has ever encountered, and I agree. Bears seed. *Verdict: Not very yellow but an outstanding tree if you have the space.*

**'Judy Zuk'** Another recent introduction by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, this plant was named after a late former director. A complex cross [*acuminata* × (*acuminata* × [(*liliflora* × *stellata*)])], this tree has sizable medium yellow flowers with an orange-y, reddish basal color. You either like this kind of thing or you don't—and I don't. In addition, it blooms when the leaves emerge and the later flowers are partly concealed by the new leaves. *Verdict: Not my cup of tea.*

**'Legend'** Another older David Leach (1985) *M. acuminata* × *M. denudata* cross, broadly similar to 'Ivory Chalice.' Beautiful, precocious, pale yellow flowers of good size and form on a sizable, shapely, attractive, upright tree with pleasing medium-textured foliage. An excellent fast, growing hybrid. Bears seed. *Verdict: a little-known class act.*

**'Limelight'** A sister seedling of the better known 'Yellow Lantern' from Phil Savage. Large, narrow, vase-shaped, bright, large, light- to medium-yellow flowers that stand upright on the branchlets whose prominent, pointed flower buds start out bright green, go to chartreuse, and then become yellow as they open. A vigorous grower. *Verdict: an excellent choice, especially when large flower size is important.*

**'Lois'** A relatively recent introduction by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 'Lois' [*M. acuminata* × (*M. acuminata* × *M. denudata*)] is sort of a modified 'Elizabeth.' The flowers are a tad smaller, but are deeper yellow in color, more graceful in form, and appear just a bit later. The foliage is pretty similar to that of 'Elizabeth,' also. Some images I've seen show an intense yellow flower color you'd sell your sister to the devil to obtain, but no blooms observed so far measure up to this (perhaps unfair) expectation. Just recently I saw a wonderful 35ft (10m) tall 'Lois' in flower growing in a woodland setting next to a similar sized 'Elizabeth' at Henriette Suhr's garden in Mt. Kisco, New York. Late in the bloom period, the flowers of 'Elizabeth' were cream colored; those of 'Lois' a true light yellow, and had better form. Both these plants form sizable forest trees if given the chance. *Verdict: a little-known but outstanding precocious yellow.*

**'Maxine Merrill'** The Broken Arrow crew called my attention to this plant, a little-known *M. 'Miss Honeybee'* × (*M. x loebneri* 'Merrill') cross by Phil Savage. In general, it reminds me of 'Honeybelle.' It features numerous, small, light yellow flowers with six firm tepals that emerge with the new leaves. I like the flowers a lot. They are simple, elegant, and endearing. The leaves are reminiscent of the seed parent, but a bit smaller. The new growth lacks the bronzy tinge found in 'Honeybelle' and the mature leaves are somewhat darker green. Will form an attractive, small tree. *Verdict: I'll take half a dozen, please.*

**'Solar Flair'** An Augie Kehr hybrid [*M. 'Woodsman'* × *M. 'Gold Star'*], this plant has abundant, medium-sized [4–5in (10–12cm) diameter] flowers that begin to emerge as the leaves unfold. The first flowers start out small and an unusual pale, cold, greenish white, and slowly turn a luminescent, cool (as opposed to hot) medium yellow as they open and enlarge. The outer tepals have

some basal green, especially as the flower is opening. The inner tepals are supposed to have a light pink blush at the base, but I have not seen any such thing. Late flowers are a beautiful pale yellow. Flower form is graceful and the tree is long flowering, attractive, and has good foliage quality. I love the transition from greenish white to yellow, and the plant is more than the sum of its parts, if you know what I mean. An outstanding lighter yellow and a sister seedling of the darker, but comparably meritorious 'Sunburst.' Like all yellow hybrids with *M. liliiflora* in their bloodlines, 'Solar Flair' can get some late season foli-



*Magnolia* 'Solar Flair.' Taken at Monahan/Cover garden at Stow, MA.

ar mildew, particularly in wet years. *Verdict:* one of the best mid-season light yellows. (See photo.)

**'Sunburst'** A sister seedling of 'Solar Flair,' this is another excellent, later flowering Augie Kehr hybrid. It has abundant, smallish [4–5in (10–12cm) diameter], upright, vivid medium yellow flowers that have relatively narrow tepals and a distinctive, spiky, appearance. A later bloomer, but the earliest flowers emerge with the first leaves and later flowers stand out from the attractive foliage. Forms a good-looking, narrow, upright tree with good foliage quality. A strong grower that flowers young. 'Solar Flair' and 'Sunburst' are my two favorite Augie Kehr yellows. As in 'Solar Flair,' some foliar mildew is possible late in the growing season, particularly in wet years. *Verdict:* an asset in any garden. (See photo.)



*Magnolia* 'Sunburst.' Taken at Broken Arrow Nursery.

**'Sundance'** A *Magnolia acuminata* × *M. denudata* cross introduced by Augie Kehr in 1986, grown from seed given to him by Joe McDaniel. Produces well-formed, precocious, light yellow flowers of good size on a vigorous medium-sized tree with medium-textured, dense foliage. The flowers are lovely! An attractive alternative to 'Elizabeth' that has never received the attention it deserves. Note: in the *Magnolia* literature this plant is consistently described as having "Barium-yellow" flowers, despite the fact that I have never yet met anyone (other than a chemist) who knew what Barium yellow is! *Verdict: another little-known beauty.*

**'Sunray'** A tetraploid version of *M. 'Sundance'* from Augie Kehr with coarse leaves and twigs, and large [7-8in (17-20cm) diameter], early, precocious, light yellow flowers. Broken Arrow has a sizable specimen that looks good in flower, but I can't recommend it because in my zone 5B garden, the plant's flower buds are blasted consistently by late frosts while other yellows have remained unscathed. Forms a medium-sized tree with a broad, rounded crown. Perhaps a desirable plant where large flowers are desired and late frosts are not such a problem. *Verdict: pass.*

**'Sunsation'** An Augie Kehr cross of *M. 'Woodsman'* × *M. 'Elizabeth'*. You will either love this plant or ... well, perhaps not. Broken Arrow has a well-established specimen about 15ft (4m) tall. It is a dense, vigorous, upright tree

with coarse, dark green foliage. The flowers are large [6-7in (15-17cm) in diameter], substantial, abundant, emerge as the leaves do, and are a good light to medium yellow color. There is, however, a strong reddish or purplish basal flush on the inner tepals and a pronounced green flush on the outer tepals. I find the flowers unique and striking rather than beautiful, but many *cognoscenti* consider this plant one of August Kehr's finest yellows and Augie himself rated it very highly. This is definitely something unique in the realm of yellow *Magnolia* cultivars and it deserves consideration on that basis alone. *Verdict: you be the decider.*

**'Sun Spire'** An Augie Kehr hybrid (*M.* 'Woodsman' × *M.* 'Elizabeth') that has substantial medium to deep yellow flowers (with a slight pink flush at the base in pictures I have seen), but the plant is especially noted for its nearly fastigate growth form. I haven't seen a mature plant myself, but am not entranced by the thought of a magnolia that will grow 25-30ft (7-9m) tall and only 6ft (2m) wide, as has been claimed. However, if you have overplanted your garden and have only a microscopic amount of space left, this may be the magnolia for you. 'Sun Sprite,' a sister seedling, is similar, and is said to be slower growing and to mature at a smaller size. *Verdict: for special situations only.*

**'Ultimate Yellow'** A *Magnolia* × *brooklynensis* × *M. acuminata* cross made by Joe McDaniel and introduced by Harry Heineman in 1996, this is my favor-



*Magnolia* 'Ultimate Yellow.' Taken at Monahan/Cover garden at Stow, MA.

ite among the late-flowering, darker yellows. The plant becomes a handsome, narrow upright tree with attractive foliage that resembles a *M. × brooklynensis* hybrid. It flowers for about two weeks beginning as the leaves emerge. The flowers are 5–6 in (12–15 cm) in diameter, show *liliiflora* influence in the elongate shape of the 6 tepals, and are a rich medium yellow with a bit of basal green on the outer surfaces of the outer three tepals, which I like a lot. In most years, the yellow floral color is soul-satisfying, especially on cloudy days or when backlit, and once the plant settles in, the floral display is memorable. Bears seed readily. *Verdict: I love it. (See photo.)*

**'Yellow Bird'** A cross of *M. × brooklynensis* 'Evamaria' × *M. acuminata subcordata* introduced by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in 1981. Broadly similar in growth form and flowering time to 'Ultimate Yellow,' but the foliage looks more like that of a typical northern form *Magnolia acuminata*. The first flowers come out just as the leaves emerge and flowering continues against the backdrop of the new foliage. The flowers are pleasing and a fine medium yellow, but are a bit smaller and are "shorter" and more *acuminata*-like in their form than those of 'Ultimate Yellow.' Dick Figlar once observed that, "'Yellow Bird' looks like an improved *subcordata*" and I think he is right. While the floral display is not as visually overpowering as those of precocious magnolias, 'Yellow Bird' will add character and beauty to almost any garden. A wonderful specimen at Broken Arrow has become a medium-sized tree. Bears seed readily and



*Magnolia* 'Yellowbird.' Taken at Broken Arrow Nursery.

has been an important parent in hybridization. *Verdict: One of the very best late yellows. (See photo.)*

**'Yellow Fever'** A *Magnolia acuminata* × *M. denudata* cross selected by Ken Durio. Abundant, well-formed 6in (15cm) diameter, precocious, light-yellow flowers with a slight pinkish tinge at the base on a floriferous medium-sized tree. Harry Heineman has a large specimen and it is more delicate in flower and leaf than 'Elizabeth.' A gratifying sight in bloom, especially against a dark woodland backdrop, which shows up the light yellow of the flowers to advantage. Seldom bears seed in my limited experience. *Verdict: a refined and beautiful light yellow.*

**'Yellow Lantern'** A cross of *M. acuminata* and *M. × soulangeana* 'Big Pink' by Phil Savage. Abundant, large [7–9in (17–22cm) diameter), upright, precocious, light- to medium-yellow blooms on a medium sized tree. Truly memorable in flower. A striking and distinctly different alternative to 'Elizabeth' because the flowers are larger, are vase-shaped, and stand out individually, even on larger trees. In contrast, on larger trees the flowers of 'Elizabeth' stand out less as individuals, but form a mass of color when viewed at some distance. Bears seed readily. *Verdict: a great plant, especially if large bloom size is a priority.*

### Future developments

Another exciting new generation of yellow-flowering *Magnolia* hybrids is currently being introduced. A number have been developed at Arboretum Wespelaar in Belgium. The new cultivars appear to offer improvements in deep yellow color, flower form, display, and/or compact growth habit. Plants to watch out for include: 'Anilou,' 'Daphne,' 'Honeyliz,' 'Green Bee,' and 'Olivia.' Another striking plant from Wespelaar yet to be offered in the US is 'Lemon Star,' a plant that features small, six-lobed, light yellow flowers with excellent form. Another promising new cultivar form is 'Golden Rain' from Dennis Ledvina. Vigorous and very hardy, the tepals of the light yellow flowers droop gracefully at maturity, offering a new type of floral display in the yellow color range in magnolias.

As you can see, the yellow *Magnolia* story is far from over. Once a dream, then a horticultural novelty, yellow-flowering *Magnolia* hybrids have now joined the ranks of the world's most beautiful flowering trees and are widely available throughout temperate regions worldwide. There are, however, important goals yet to be reached. We have yet to develop an evergreen plant with yellow flowers because crosses of *M. acuminata* and *M. grandiflora* have proven difficult or unrewarding so far. Likewise, we do not yet have yellow-flowering plants with the flower size, form, and grace of the tender Himalayan and western Chinese *M. campbellii* or *M. sargentiana* var. *robusta*. *Magnolia acuminata* has been crossed successfully with these plants, but so far the offspring have not had yellow flowers. However, given the present rapid progress in *Magnolia* hybridizing, I'm certain there will be many new and exotic yellow magnolias for us to enjoy in the foreseeable future.

*All photos by Stefan Cover.*