Names
by J. C. McDANIEL

In the 19th Century, there was a tendency (among nurserymen, particularly) to call any new horticultural clone a new variety, or even a new species. In the mid-20th Century, among botanists, at least, the tendency is more often in the other direction for magnolias. Some things that were published as separate species are now combined, by part of the authorities, anyhow, into a single species, with one, two or more varieties, and perhaps a forma or two, in addition to the various recognized clonal cultivars under it. Horticultrists, meanwhile, have continued to make new clonal selections, including numerous interspecific hybrids. For some hybrids and hybrid groups, new botanical names have been published.

Hybrid botanical names are subject to the same rules of priority as are the names of natural species. So the full name of a given clonal cultivar can vary, depending on which authority we accept regarding its parentage, and the status accorded its parents. There are some clones for which only the seed parent is known with any degree of assurance.

Let’s take a few examples among Asiatic Magnolias. First, the loebneri grex. Numerous clones of this have been grown from seed of the star magnolia, in some cases from seed produced after hand crossing with M. kobus pollen. Now the star magnolia, itself, has generally been called a separate species, M. stellata, but it is certainly closely related to M. kobus, and if it still exists in the wild, it is within a small part of the M. kobus range, on the Japanese island of Honshu. Dr. Benjamin Blackburn, citing the production of varying seedlings from stellata seed, some as dwarf as the seed parent, some intermediate, some like typical kobus, and some even as vigorous as the northern Japanese M. kobus var. borealis, in the 1950’s published a proposed new status for the star magnolia as M. kobus var. stellata.

If we accept Blackburn’s status for stellata, then loebneri is not an interspecific hybrid, but at most an intervarietal hybrid, M. kobus var. loebneri. If stellata is a full species, then its crosses with M. kobus are M. × loebneri.

Back-cross clones, such as my ‘Ballerina’, assumed to be (‘Spring Snow’ probably × ‘Waterlily’) will still be classified under loebneri, whether as a variety or a hybrid grex.

M. salicifolia, in cultivation, frequently has hybridized with both typical M. kobus and with stellata, so that many of its seedlings are not actually the pure species. M. × proctoriana was published for the salicifolia × stellata hybrids (or reciprocals) in 1939. Then, in 1952, the name M. × kewensis was published for hybrids combining salicifolia with kobus. If