

Magnificent Magnolias

by W. J. SIMPSON *

602 NEPEAN HWY.
FRANKSTON, VICTORIA
AUSTRALIA

Magnolias are amongst the most spectacular of the flowering trees and shrubs, and are quite hardy in temperate regions. They flourish on practically all types of soil, are tolerant of atmospheric pollution, and once established require a minimum of attention. When purchased in containers, they may be planted any time from March to December. A slightly acid soil is preferred (i.e., they do not like lime), and appreciate some protection from strong winds.

Allow plenty of room when planting and carefully choose the site, for with their thick and rather fleshy root system, they are somewhat difficult to transplant. Magnolias are little troubled by disease and insect pests, their only requirements being an annual application of fertilizer in the early Spring. As with most other shrubs, the roots should be gently loosened and spread when planting.

The various forms in cultivation come mainly from two sources - the evergreen varieties from North America, and the other larger group, which produce their colourful flowers from white to pink, deep pink, carmine and purple, before the leaves appear, from China, Japan and India. The first of the Asian magnolias, *M. denudata*, was introduced to the western world in 1780, and later was crossed with *M. liliflora* to produce *M. × soulangiana*, which is the most popular and widely planted of the magnolias, producing a profusion of large tulip-shaped rosy-purple flowers from late Winter to early Spring.

Amongst the good named cultivars which all flower when young are 'Alba Superba,' 'Alexandrina,' 'Amabilis,' 'Brozzoni,' 'Lennei,' 'Lennei Alba,' 'Rubra,' 'San Jose,' 'Speciosa' and 'Verbanica.'

M. soulangiana 'Nigra,' now generally known as *M. liliflora* 'Nigra,' is a more compact form with large flowers, grape-purple outside and creamy white within. One of the most outstanding of the new varieties is *M. soulangiana* 'Picture,' which forms a compact upright shrub and produces at an early age, large rosy-purple buds, which as they open, reveal the paler inner surfaces of the petals. The huge flowers are the largest of any of the *M. soulangiana* cultivars, and have the poise and substance of the well-known *M. campbellii*.

The star magnolia, *M. stellata*, is popular and well known, and is grown because of its compact bushy growth and easy full flowering habit with white strap-shaped petals. It is an excellent magnolia for small gardens, as its growth may be controlled by pruning after flowering. Amongst some of the good named clones of *M. stellata* are 'Rubra,' 'Water Lily,' 'Massey Rose,' 'King Rose' and 'Royal Star.'

* Mr. Simpson is a charter member of the A.M.S. and has kindly given us permission to reprint this article from the June 1974 issue of *The Rhododendron* (Australia).

M. denudata, the White Yulan or Lily Tree, has been cultivated in China for some 1,300 years. Growing to a large shrub or small rounded tree, its fragrant white cup-shaped flowers open in early Spring. *M. × loebneri* 'Leonard Messel' and 'Merrell' are two very fine new hybrids. 'Leonard Messel' being a cross between *M. kobus* and the pink form of *M. stellata*. It develops into a shapely flowering shrub with deep reddish-purple buds, opening to star-shaped blooms four to five inches across, creamy white inside with the outer surfaces heavily suffused red-purple. 'Leonard Messel,' which flowers at an early age, has a very long flowering season. 'Merrell' is a vigorous growing tree with large white flowers and is amongst the best of the early flowering white magnolias.

M. × proctoriana (*M. salicifolia* × *stellata*) is a large very full flowering shrub, carrying attractive white flowers; and a group of summer flowering magnolias, whose flowers are produced with the early green leaves are *M. wilsonii*, *highdownensis* and *sieboldii*, the white pendant fragrant flowers having contrasting stamens of an attractive crimson on purple.

One of the best known species from the Himalayas is *M. campbellii*, which is rather slow in flowering, often taking as long as twenty to twenty-five years to produce its first flower; although a pink form at "Wayside" flowered at the age of eight years after planting! The flowers on *M. campbellii* are large and globe shaped, and later spreading wide like water lilies. The petals are usually pink within, and deeper rose-pink outside.

M. mollicomata is a sub-species of *M. campbellii*, flowering usually at an earlier age, sometimes within ten to fifteen years. Two interesting hybrids between *M. campbellii* and *M. mollicomata* are 'Charles Raffill' and 'Kew's Surprise,' which produce magnificent large flowers of rose-pink. These flower earlier than the type and reduce the long years of waiting for most forms of *M. campbellii* to flower.

M. sprengeri 'Diva' is a small to medium-sized tree producing rich fragrant rose - carmine flowers, somewhat resembling those of *M. campbellii*, but having the advantage of flowering at a much earlier age, and with its entrancing beauty, makes it a most valuable garden subject.

M. veitchii (*M. campbellii* × *M. denudata*) develops into a vigorous medium-sized tree, producing at an early age large white flushed purple-pink blossoms.

M. grandiflora, a magnificent evergreen, has become one of the most widely grown ornamental trees in the world. The large leathery leaves are glossy green above and often reddish-brown below. Its fragrant creamy white flowers, up to ten inches across, are produced throughout the Summer and early Autumn. Named varieties include 'Exmouth,' 'Ferruginea,' 'Lanceolata' and 'Cairo.'
