

'Dawn' A good pink *Magnolia stellata*

by Harold Hopkins

In late March 1974 while driving home in Bethesda, Maryland, I took an alternate route through a residential area I hadn't seen before as I often do to see what home plantings are visible from the street. Suddenly, a half block ahead of me I saw a cloud of pink, a vigorous *Magnolia stellata*. I didn't know if I was looking at a rarity, but I did know it was the first *M. stellata* I had ever seen with the pink color so obvious from a distance. After stopping abreast to make sure my eyes were not deceiving me, I hurried home and got my camera, loaded it with Kodachrome II, returned, and knocked on the door of Mrs. Charles McAfee, and praised her, her garden, and her tree. There were other *M. stellata* trees on the same street and she was naturally flattered that I had chosen hers for attention. Photos and sample flowers were taken and I was welcomed to take cuttings, but first I wanted to try to verify from more experienced heads that the pinkness was as unusual as I thought it might be. Photos of tree and flowers went to President Joe McDaniel, then later to several others, including Neil Treseder. All agreed it was an unusual tree.

The flowers in bud and for a few days after opening, depending on the amount of bleaching by sun and wind, are a fairly solid pink on the outside of the tepal, shading to a purplish stripe toward the bottom, the outside pigment darkening the inside of the tepals enough to give it a slightly translucent look. The opened flower produces a pronounced double effect, much more so than common *M. stellata*, which normally opens so that many of the reflexed outer tepals are individually distinguishable. The obvious reason for this pink *M. stellata*'s double appearance is that it has an unusually large number of tepals, especially on the earliest, and therefore most vigorous, flush of flowers, and this crowds the long, narrow tepals into a pompom effect. I played "she loves me," etc., with three random flowers and counted 38, 40, and 45 tepals.

When I first saw it in March of last year, the tree has just been subjected to a short, overnight freeze and most of the fully opened flowers were browned at the tepal tips. This tree flowers about 10 days later than my own common *M. stellata*, which does give it 10 days' grace from late freezes. This year I watched it almost every day and it waited cautiously until a warm spell lasting two or three days and then burst forth into full bloom, practically overnight, on April 2. A breathtaking sight! As luck would have it, a day or so later this and much of the middle Atlantic area experienced one of the freakiest, longest, and worst dry windstorms on record, lasting about three days almost without letup, and causing extensive damage to property, including trees and shrubs.

The National Arboretum here, for instance, was forced to close a couple of days to clean up debris from broken or uprooted trees. I was busy for several days getting part of my roof replaced and cleaning up a snapped pine top that fell across part of my yard, and did not see the pink *M. stellata* again for about two weeks.

Then in mid-April, Joe McDaniel was in Washington to make a speech to a horticultural group and took some time to go with AMS members August Kehr, Perry Narten, and me to view the last of the Asian Magnolia bloom at the National Arboretum. On April 19, the day before his return to Urbana, Illinois, he and I went to look at the pink *M. stellata*, and the last of the flowers on it, alas, looked no pinker than any other *M. stellata*, and none of these late flowers had more than 33 tepals. I had refrigerated some half-opened buds 17 days earlier for him to let open in his hotel room, so he knew I wasn't a complete fabricator! The previous August (1974) I had sent cuttings to him, and a week after he returned to Urbana from Washington he was able to report that one of the grafts he had made from these, including a terminal bud, had produced a fine pink flower with 43 tepals, so I felt vindicated.

Mrs. McAfee, the owner, said the tree was there when she acquired the property ten years ago and referred us to the previous owner, who remembered planting it but was unable to name the nursery source from which a Maryland landscaper brought it. We have been trying to find if it is a named clone, with no success. Theodore Klein of Yew Dell Nursery, Crestwood, Kentucky, reports that he has a fine pink *M. stellata* he thinks comes close to the description of the Bethesda tree, and which he obtained from Tingle Nursery, Pittsville, Maryland, about 25 or 30 years ago. Tingle, at present under changed ownership, does offer one clone, *M. stellata* 'Waterlily', and this introduces another mystery, since, according to Neil Treseder, there are two clones by that name (or 'Water Lily'). Whether one or both clones have been handled by Tingle, Mr. Treseder did not explain in his note to me, nor whether he has seen both clones.

(The 'Waterlily' of the American nursery trade was introduced in 1939 by Greenbriar Farms, Inc., of Norfolk, Va., and has since become very popular. It usually shows light pink in the bud stage, but fades quickly. 'Royal Star', introduced in 1960 by J. Vermeulen & Sons, Neshanic Station, N.J. is more nearly all-white seedlings of that 'Waterlily'. Both have larger, later flowers than the usual trade *stellata*, and more tepals per flower, but not as many as have been counted on flowers of Mrs. McAfee's tree. J. C. McD.)

Meanwhile, Mr. Treseder has propagated plants of the Bethesda tree and would like to have a clonal name to attach to them as would others who now have this clone in production. Can one give a plant a tentative cultivar name for identification purposes and restore any rightful prior name that may later come to light? If nomenclature protocol does permit a tentative name, there is no reason why it should not be an apt one. Joe McDaniel says the name 'Dawn', which suggests the flower color, has not been pre-empted in the Magnolia cultivar checklist he is completing. I like that. That pink tree really opened my eyes when I first saw it.
