

Buc'hoz: The Smell Lingers On

by Neil Treseder

Both amateur and professional growers of Magnolias will be wondering who has rocked the boat of Magnolia nomenclature and for what reasons. Some of the proposed changes adopted recently in America by Dr. Stephen Spongberg, and also by Hortus Third, are taxonomical and therefore the concern of the professional botanist. These include the recognition of Dr. Benjamin Blackburn's treatment (1955) whereby *M. stellata* becomes *M. kobus* var. *stellata*, which leads to *M. × loebneri* being relegated from hybrid status to *M. kobus* var. *loebneri*. Then a veritable cascade of demotions in rank has been recommended by Dr. Spongberg's treatment of *M. salicifolia*, whereby he has scuttled *M. × kewensis* together with *M. × proctoriana* and *M. × slavini*, to sink them among the variants of that species.

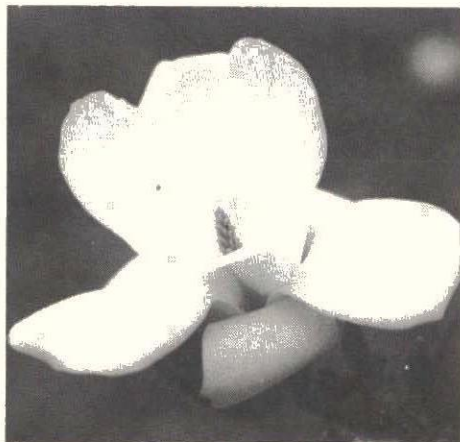
Maybe we should accept without criticism the conclusions of those who have made far more profound studies of Magnolia taxonomy than any layman, but some other proposed changes in nomenclature are open to comment.

For many years we have come to know *M. denudata* and *M. liliflora* by these self-descriptive specific epithets which, in spite of

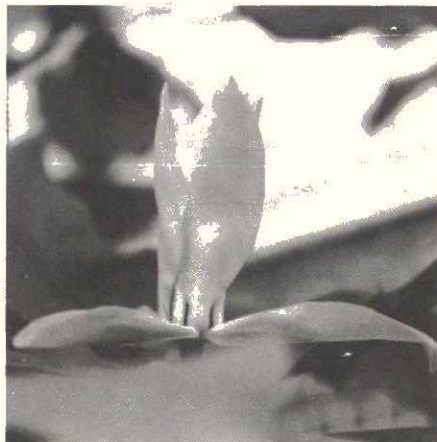
their latinized form, readily conjure up mental images of these two quite different species. The same can never be said of the names likely to replace them, when *M. heptapeta* (7 petaled) replaces the name *denudata*, which has nine tepals, and when *M. quinquepeta* (5 petaled) replaces the name *M. liliflora*, which never has fewer than six petaloid tepals and sometimes as many as nine, in addition to the usually three sepaloid tepals of the false calyx.

When these names—first published in 1779, but ignored by botanists until recently—become universally accepted, future listings will express the parentage of the *M. × soulangiana* grex as *M. heptapeta* × *M. quinquepeta*, which should satisfy the accepted priority either of alphabetical sequence or that of the female parent first since, in this instance, there are no known named hybrids of this parentage where *M. quinquepeta* (as *M. liliflora* or under one of its other earlier names) was the female or seed parent.

It can, of course, be argued that the first of such botanical inexactitudes was published even



Three rows of three tepals each are visible in this photograph of *Magnolia heptapeta* (*denudata*).



Et tu Linnaeus? Two of three long, reflexing sepal-like tepals of *Magnolia tripetala* are shown here.

earlier (in 1759) when that venerable creator of modern botanical literature, the Swedish botanist, Carolus Linnaeus, gave the name *tripetala* to a Magnolia known to him only in the form of a very accurate painting which had been made in America by the English botanist Mark Catesby and which had been published in *Flora Caroliniana* 2:80 (1741). Catesby's plate clearly depicts a flower with nine tepals, the six innermost ones poised more or less vertically around the stigmatic column whilst the outermost three are reflexed sub-horizontally, in a manner which Catesby described as *petalis exterioribus dependentibus*, adding, "flowers white, ten to eleven petals, the three outermost pale green, later hanging downwards." Had Linnaeus named it *M. triseptala* he would have satisfied both botanists and horticulturists but, strange to relate, nobody appears to have criticized the selection of such a misleading specific epithet for a Magnolia which later became the type species of Section *Rytidospermum*.

Quite a different story can be told concerning the *heptapeta* and *quinquepeta*, which were coined by the French botanist P. J. Buc'hoz just two centuries ago. In 1779 he published in *Plantes Nouvellement Découvertes* 21, t 19, fig. 2, under his newly invented name *Lassonia quinquepeta*, a flower which had been obviously copied from a Chinese impressionist representation of the plant known long since as *M. liliflora*; but the stigmatic column, so characteristic of Magnolia flowers, had been replaced by a flattened boss of stamens. The same type of configuration appears at fig. 1 for a plant (intended to represent *M. denudata* but with only seven tepals) which he christened *Lassonia heptapeta* and, to make matters worse, the outer whorl of tepals is shown in the form of a fringed calyx. *Lassonia*, named in honor of M. de Lassone, who was a physician to the French royal household, was later merged with *Magnolia*. The Buc'hoz practice of publishing inaccurate drawings and paintings taken from artistic representations of Chinese flowers of which he had no other knowledge and of applying to them botanical names of his own creation, caused him to fall into ill repute, not only among other botanists of his own generation, but also amongst those who succeeded him. Thus it came about that a fellow botanist with an obvious sense of humor decided to com-

memorate his name in a new genus with an evil odour: *Buchozia foetida* (subsequently renamed *Serissa foetida*).

Consequently, succeeding generations of botanists, when reviewing the family *Magnoliaceae*, chose to ignore *Lassonia* until it appeared in *Appendix to the Index Kewensis* 2, 1289 (1895) where it was designated "Genus spurium Magnoliacearum." In 1913 the American botanist Alfred Rehder dismissed the Buc'hoz name and description as being "manca falsaque," inadequate and false, when he adopted the name *denudata* which has since become established in botanical literature as the accepted specific epithet for this Magnolia.

In 1934 J. E. Dandy contributed notes on "The Identity of *Lassonia Buc'hoz*" in *Journal of Botany* 72:101-3. Dandy discussed the misleading Buc'hoz epithets *heptapeta* and *quinquepeta* and argued that they are not more so than Linnaeus's epithet *tripetala* for a Magnolia with nine to twelve or sometimes fifteen tepals. He considered that they were legitimately published and, being the oldest for these two species, "they necessitate name changes that are particularly undesirable because the nomenclatural history of the plants concerned is already very complicated."

He considered that the Buc'hoz discrepancies in the published descriptions are fully accounted for by defects in the drawings. From the drawings Buc'hoz counted seven tepals ("petales") in the white-flowered species, which he then named *L. heptapeta* (it normally has nine, or occasionally ten to twelve subequal tepals); and five in the purple-flowered species, which he named *L. quinquepeta* (it normally has six to twelve plus three small outer ones which represent the false calyx). Dandy then proceeded to list "the necessary new combinations for the two species. . . along with their most important synonyms" under *Magnolia heptapeta* (Buc'hoz) Dandy and *M. quinquepeta* (Buc'hoz) Dandy.

Dandy's notes were published over forty years ago and, although these Buc'hoz names have been used on a few rare occasions (the 'Purple Eye' clone of *M. denudata* received a Royal Horticultural Society Award of Merit as *M. heptapeta* in 1926, probably from Dandy's naming), they were completely ignored by John G. Millais