Edible Magnolia Seeds

by J. C. McDaniel

Don't believe everything you read in a book. One of the best compilers of regional floras in his time was Charles C. Deam, a pharmacist and largely self-educated botanist of Bluffton, Indiana. His "Trees of Indiana" tells us that the seed of *Magnolia acuminata* are so bad tasting that no bird or animal will eat them.

Actually, once the outer fleshy integument is cleaned off with a fresh seed of the Cucumber tree you have a quite tasty little oilseed, comparable to a sunflower seed. The birds and squirrels of southern Indiana haven't read Deam's book, and will eat all the seed of *M. acuminata* they can find, which is most of them. So will the birds and squirrels of Louisiana go for seed of *M. grandiflora* in the woods. Louisiana squirrel hunters know their quarry and when the season opens, many will hunt out a stand of *grandiflora* where the squirrels are feeding.

The seed of all Magnolia species I have sampled appear to be edible, though for most the flavor will be improved by removal of the outer integument. *M. officinalis biloba*, sampled from Gus Krossa's tree in Livonia, Michigan, tasted good with the skin on, though you may be beginning to wonder if the former proprietor of the AMS Seed Counter put his scientific curiosity ahead of increasing his stock in trade.

Although Magnolia seeds can thus be added to the list of edible forest products and no doubt have been eaten by some food-gathering tribes in the past, they appear to have escaped the notice of the late Euell Gibbons.

In a scenario giving a demand for Magnolia seeds for any purpose other than reproduction of more Magnolia trees, attention would turn first to seed available for the taking on both wild trees and those grown for ornament. Among natives, *M. grandiflora* would qualify in the southeastern U. S. and *M. virginiana* and *M. tripetala* northward. Among prolific Asians, *M. kobus* and some clones of *M. kobus loebneri* would produce good yields in areas where their flowers regularly escape spring frosts.