Seeds I

by J.C. McDaniel

I sit here (15 September 1978) with a plastic pan in my lap, using thumbnails to extract red-ripe seeds from a parcel of *Magnolia acuminata* fruits that Mick Terry sent from Indianapolis in late August. In a few minutes I have extracted over a hundred to go into the refrigerator, and will find many more when the fruits dry a little longer.

Most of these will be further processed to go soon to the AMS Seed Counter.

This is the second lot of such fruit from Indiana this year. Earlier I had picked most of the crop from a small tree in a yard near Marion, which the blackbirds had for some reason not troubled this year. Soon after I returned home to Illinois, the U.P.S. left at my door the unexpected package from Mick which I was glad to have. He wrote that they were from a nice tree with shaggy bark in Crown Hill Cemetery that we had looked at two or three years ago.

Although *M. acuminata* is widely known and grown, it deserves, I think, much more planting. I am happy to get good seeds of it from any source, and to pass them along to professional or amateur growers where they can be put to good use. Each year, if I can, I gather what seeds I can find in several Illinois towns and farmyards of my area.

Perhaps in earlier times the great flocks of fruit eating passenger pigeons scattered *M. acuminata* seed far and wide — Ontario to Florida, west to eastern Oklahoma, — and they made trees wherever they came to rest in a suitable spot of rich earth not too occupied by another plant.

The pigeons are gone now — extinct, as some think the cucumber trees are becoming, partly through man's activities, partly through the depredations of another bird species, the purple grackle. This bird seeks out immature *acuminata* fruits and pecks them to pieces, reducing the chance they will reach maturity. Then the seeds may be eaten by other birds or by squirrels.

Not all *acuminata* flowers get fertilized. A necessary agent may be a nitidulid beetle, to transfer the pollen from an aging flower to a fresh one during its brief hours of receptivity. Perhaps the pollen may need to be transferred to another tree, and often there are not enough beetles to carry enough loads of pollen that distance. The nitidulids are not present on every tree at blooming time.

So if *M. acuminata* is not to go the way of the passenger pigeon, it needs help from man. One way is to save and pass on what seeds we can. Isn't it worth a few dark-stained fingernails?

Magnolia × *'Emma Cook' is a cross of* M. denudata *and* M. stellata *'Waterlily,' made by Dr. Frank Galyon in Knoxville and registered in 1975. Its 11 tepals and 3 sepaloids make a flower six inches across, lavender-pink on outside, borne on a small, twiggy tree.*

Bag Propagation

Archalie Harman's method of rooting cuttings of magnolias: "I use half-ripened wood taken the latter part of June or in July. I consider it ready when twigs of the spring growth will snap when bent. If they just bend they are still too soft. I treat the ends of cuttings with Hormodin No. 2 before inserting in pots or boxes of peat and sand. I water them in well, let drain, and insert the whole pots in plastic bags and tie them up tight. No more watering is necessary if the bags are tight.

"I use wire for supports to keep the bags from settling on top of the cuttings. My cuttings did not make sufficient roots to support the new growth the following spring and would die after leafing out, but when they were left in the rooting medium all the winter, the bags opened in the spring and fed lightly with liquid fertilizer, then potted and put out in late summer, they did well."