

# Magnolia Sharpii in the U.S.

by Eugene R. German

Early in December 1962 the late Don Tomas McDougall collected one cone of *Magnolia sharpii* in the wilds within the State of Chiapas in southern Mexico. The collection area was in the highlands around San Juan Chamula, close to San Cristobal. Don Tomas turned the fruit over to John S. Druecker of Fort Bragg, California. Mr. Druecker passed the seed on to Charles W. (Bud) Richards of Fort Bragg who planted the seed in the spring of 1963 for germination. Great care was taken from collection to planting to keep the seed moist.

Nine seed germinated. Four were weak and soon died. The other five grew into small trees. Mr. Richards retained one plant, which was killed when temperatures at Fort Bragg dropped to 12° F in early December 1972. Mr. Druecker's plant is located in a protected place which probably does not receive enough light, hence has not branched out. Dr. Paul J. Bowman received one plant and it is still in a container in his lath house. Floyd Cogburn received a seedling and planted in the open near a large pine tree. It suffered some damage in the 1972 freeze. These plants are all in Fort Bragg.

What happened to the fifth plant is not entirely clear. Mr. Druecker remembers delivering a plant to Strybing Arboretum in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. But there seems to be some confusion in Strybing's records about this time and that arboretum could find no record of it.

In February 1969 Prof. J.C. McDaniel of Urbana, Illinois, visited Fort Bragg and



*Magnolia sharpii* in flower on September 11, 1975, in the garden of Floyd Cogburn, Fort Bragg, California. Photo by John S. Druecker.



Dr. Aaron J. Sharp (bareheaded) and the late Dr. Faustino Miranda pose in the village of Pueblo Nuevo, Chiapas, Mexico, with branchlets of *Magnolia sharpii* brought from the far side of the mountain by Dr. Frank Galyon, who took this picture.

obtained scions of the Richards and Druecker clones. He turned over one each of these to Peter Sullivan of the Strybing Arboretum who grafted them onto *M. grandiflora* rootstocks. Only the Druecker graft took and it is still growing in the Arboretum. Evidently Prof. McDaniel gave some to the Huntington Botanical Garden, San Marino, California, but they failed to take. Prof. McDaniel budded scions onto *M. grandiflora* and *M. guatemalensis* and rooted one cutting. At last report only the one on *M. grandiflora* (in a greenhouse at Urbana) was alive and was not doing very well.

In May 1970 Mr. Sullivan of Strybing Arboretum stuck three cuttings that rooted easily. It seems unlikely that the graft he made in 1969 would have produced enough wood a year later for three cuttings and my opinion is that these came from the fifth original plant. No one now remembers what happened to this plant. Marshall Olbrich, of Occidental, California, has one of the plants resulting from the Strybing cuttings. What happened to the other two is unknown.



This 1977 photo of *Magnolia sharpii* by the author shows the size of the plant, fenced for deer protection.

Thus, records show existence of only six plants of *Magnolia sharpii* in the United States. It is possible that there are others from this or other collections.

When measured in the fall of 1977 the grafted plant in Strybing Arboretum, which was 114 inches in height and 60 inches across with many branches, was the largest of the plants from this collection, exceeding the size of the original seedlings. The Bowman plant (still in a ten inch pot) was 56 inches high and had a stem  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in diameter. The Druecker plant was 77 inches high (it had been cut for scions and cut again to force it to branch). The Cogburn plant was 75 inches high and 63 inches wide, well branched, with a stem  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches in diameter. The Olbrich plant was 72 inches high and still in a pot. Mr. Druecker reports that a plant in the city of Oaxaca, Mexico, planted 20-25 years ago, has attained a height of about 15 feet high and is five feet wide. As far as is known only the Cogburn tree has flowered among all these cultivated plants, including the one in Oaxaca.

New growth takes place with *M. sharpii* in late summer in the Fort Bragg area. In August of 1975 a bud developed on the tip of one branch of the Cogburn plant. By September 5 the bud started to open and a slit of white one-fourth inch wide was showing. On September 11 the flower was nearly open but the stamens still didn't show. Then on September 13 the stamens were starting to fall and the tepals had turned brown.

Two years later, on September 9, 1977, this plant again produced one flower. Tepals

were about  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches long and the bloom  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches across. The bloom had a light lemon fragrance. The appearance of leaf and flower and the short life of the flower is reminiscent of *M. delavayi*.

The foliage of *M. sharpii* is very pleasing and worth growing for its greenery alone. Even though one is obliged to wait some time for it to flower and even though the flower has a short life, it seems to be worth waiting for. The areas of the United States where this species will grow are probably quite limited. For those who can grow *M. sharpii*, it is worthwhile, but it's likely to be a long time before plants are available. For a magnolia lover it holds considerable attraction even though it cannot be grown in most areas. It would be interesting to learn more about the several other tropical and subtropical species that the average magnolia lover does not see.

Dr. Frank B. Galyon Jr. reports that *M. sharpii* was discovered in 1953 and named by Dr. Faustino Miranda for Dr. Aaron J. Sharp, chairman emeritus of the University of Tennessee Botany Department. Evidently other attempts to introduce the species into the United States have been made but failed.

This writer has not had the opportunity to make a library search and has seen only two papers on the species - one pretty much an English translation of the other (from Spanish).

Miranda, Faustino. 1955 *Dos Nuevas Especies de Arboles del Sur de Mexico*. Sobretiro de los Anales del Instituto de Biología, Tomo XXVI, No. 1 Mexico 1955.

Galyon, Frank B. Jr. 1965-66. *Sharp's Magnolia: a New Discovery*. University of Tennessee Arboretum Society Bulletin, Winter 1965-66.

*Gene German gardens in Fort Bragg, California.*

## The Grackles Grabbed 'Em!

"The *M. acuminata* bloomed profusely but we just don't get any seed because the purple grackles nip the cucumbers just as they are forming. Our *M. hypoleuca* had several flowers again but set no seed." — Oliver D. Diller, in Robin No. 1.