

# Magnolia Sprengeri Pampanini

This lovely Magnolia is fairly plentiful as a scattered tree in moist woods and thickets between elevations of from 3500 to 5500 feet above sea level throughout western Hupeh and adjacent Szechuan. It occurs as a scattered tree and in early April when in blossom it is a striking feature of woodland landscapes. Trees from 20 to about 35 feet tall are the rule, but occasionally specimens 60 feet or more tall with wide-spreading crowns are met with. Indeed, it was one such specimen that first introduced this Magnolia to me.

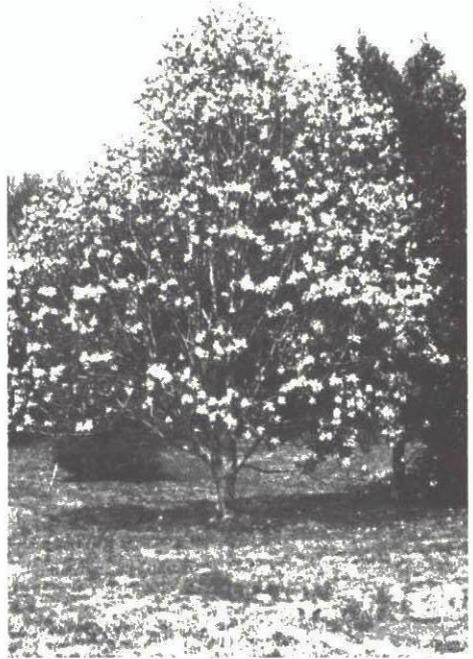
It was on the 6th of April 1900, I had just crossed a ridge into Changyang district and started to descend a narrow, cultivated valley margined by woodland when I descried, about a quarter of a mile away, a broad pyramidal mass of pink blossoms. Hastening forward I found it was a Magnolia. Thousands of flowers decked the naked shoots and a wealth of petals strewed the ground beneath the tree.

The opening cup-shaped buds were a rich rose-red, the expanded saucer-shaped blossoms rose-red passing to rose-pink without, pure pink to silvery pink within. The short massed stamens were about the same color as the fleshy concave perianth-segments and through them was thrust the green carpels tipped with rosy pink stigmas. The flowers were from six to eight inches across and emitted a soft fragrance and their charm and beauty fascinated me. Patches of snow lay here and there and the sky was leaden gray, but even in that light the glowing pink blossoms illumined the scene. Slender stemmed Bamboos, an occasional Rhodo-

dendron, and here and there a shapely small tree of evergreen *Quercus spinosa* relieved the monotony of a naked landscape and my noble Magnolia lorded over all.

About an hour before, I had gathered *Clematis armandi* in full blossom and in flower also *Rhododendron sutchuenense* - the first wild Rhododendron I had ever seen in blossom. The afternoon of that April day was indeed a memorable one for me.

In April 1907 I once more repaired to my Magnolia shrine, to revel once again in the beauty of this magnificent tree. During my different travels in western



Magnolia sprengeri 'Diva' at U.S. National Arboretum.



*Magnolia sprengeri* 'Diva.'

Hupei I saw several hundred trees of this *Magnolia* in varying sizes, some larger than the one mentioned, but not one did I ever find dowered in full blossom. This was due to the fact that the species blossoms early in April and before the roads are really fit for traveling.

This tree, though widely dispersed in western Hupei, is probably more common around the hamlet of Kuanpao, in Changyang Hsien, than elsewhere. The fruit is curious. It is spindle-like and often only one or two of the carpels are fertile. When these are thinly dispersed on either side of the fruit it is erect, but when a majority of the fertile carpels are on one side of the fruit only it becomes curled and contorted rather suggesting a wriggling worm. The fertile carpels are purse-like and have no beak; they open all round, thrusting out the scarlet jacketed seed, usually one, sometimes two in each carpel. The bark

of this tree and related species is valued for its tonic properties, and in the Chinese pharmacopaea constitutes the drug "mu-pi".

This *Magnolia* was discovered in 1888 on the mountains of eastern Szechuan by A. Henry. As already stated, I met with it first in early April 1900 and in the autumn of that year collected seeds (#395 Veitch seed) and forwarded them in paper jackets through the mail to Messrs. Veitch. These failed to germinate, having lost their vitality en route. Later I sent seeds (#688 Veitch seed) packed in earth but unfortunately mixed with them seeds of another *Magnolia* having identical fruits but white flowers.

It was an innocent blunder but one that has led to some confusion though it resulted in the introduction of two *Magnolias* instead of one. Not many seeds were obtained and only a few plants were raised at Coombe Wood Nursery. They were puzzlers from the first since the young leaves on both were narrow and suggested those of the Japanese *M. salicifolia*, and were not a bit like those of any Yulan. I can remember to this day the arguments with both Mr. George Harrow and with my good friend Bean. And in this connection it must be remembered that no one had had experience in raising the precocious flowered Oriental *Magnolias* from seeds, and the fact that the leaves on juvenile plants differed from those of adults was not known or even suspected. However, since I knew no *Magnolia* in China with willow-like leaves, it was easy for me to stand my ground and let time solve the problem, which it did, except that it gave two sorts instead of one.

It is regrettable that more care and attention was not given to these *Magnolias*, for, although in 1907 I sent seeds (#278 and #373) to the Arnold Arboretum, none germinated, and on no



*Magnolia sprengeri* 'Diva' flower.

other occasion did I succeed in introducing these Hupeh Yulans.<sup>15</sup> My pink-flowered beauty narrowly escaped extinction, it was only by a stroke of wonderful luck that the sole plant was secured by that enthusiastic lover of woody plants, Mr. J. C. Williams, and safely transported to his garden at Caerhays Castle. On a visit to Coombe Wood Nursery he picked it out together with other things and for no special reason other than it being a *Magnolia*.

Kew secured others but theirs all turned out to be white-flowered species. Mr. Williams' prize flowered with him first in early April 1919 and is, today, one of the greatest treasures that wonderful garden possesses. He has carefully propagated it from seeds and layers and distributed it amongst earnest friends of gardening.

Now a word as to its name. I have mentioned its discovery and its introduction but the name it bears is

based on specimens collected by Padre C. Silvestri in northern Hupeh either in 1912 or 1913 and by him sent to Florence where they were named but badly described by Pampanini. In 1927 the herbarium at Kew secured these specimens on loan and Mr. J. E. Dandy, comparing my material and Silvestri's was able to establish the conspecific identity of both. In 1913 my colleague, Alfred Rehder, and myself identified my Hupeh specimens as *M. denudata* var. *purpurascens*, a Chinese *Magnolia* cultivated in Japan and named by Maximowicz in 1872. We somehow overlooked the fact that the typical *M. denudata*, better known as *M. conspicua*, the Yulan of the Chinese, had cup-shaped flowers, the petals being erect, infolding at the summit and not spreading, and thereby missed a chance of giving a name to my pet *Magnolia*. The color I fear led us astray and for this we were properly punished.

In 1914, I collected in a garden in Tokyo flowers of the tree *M. denudata* var. *purpurascens* which has the cup-shaped blossoms of the typical white-flowered Yulan, and, moreover, a gynaecium only slightly exceeding the stamens in length. That this pink-flowered Hupeh *Magnolia* is a good and distinct plant I now do not question. Both these species and the Yulan proper (*M. denudata*) are known to the Chinese as "Yinch'un" trees—harbingers of spring—a name applied in China to all the precocious flowered *Magnolias* since, at least, the eighth century of our era.

15. Herbarium specimens of Wilson #278 (A) represent flowering material collected in April 1907 and fruiting material collected in September 1907. Wilson #373 (A) is all fruiting material collected in September 1907.