

Magnolia Wilsonii (Finet & Gagnepain)

Rehder¹⁷

This is a very distinct species readily distinguished by a dense pubescence on the under side of the leaves, by the shape, and by the prominent scar on the peduncle left behind by the spathoid bract. The seedlings are without the characteristic pubescence on the leaf which does not begin to put in an appearance until the plants are three or four years old. The flowers point downwards and are seen to best advantage from below when the crimson stamens show in marked contrast with the pure white sepals and petals which are indistinguishable. The bud looks very much like an egg

hanging among the young foliage. The flowers are borne freely and are delightfully fragrant. The hanging cylindrical fruit, purple in color, with its scarlet jacketed seeds displayed, is handsome during early October.

This Magnolia, usually in the form of a straggling bush, is quite common in moist thickets and woods to the south-east of Tachien-lu between elevations of from 4000 to 8500 feet above sea level; in more recent years it has been found in western Yunnan. I discovered it in late May 1904 along side of a stream growing amongst a miscellany of broad-leaved trees and



Magnolia wilsonii in Brian Savage's garden.

shrubs. At its altitudinal limit it is associated with Rhododendron, Silver Fir, Spruce and Hemlock. In the autumn of 1904 I sent seeds (#1587 Veitch seed) packed in earth to Messrs. Veitch and a number of plants were raised at Coombe Wood Nursery.

In 1910 I collected a large quantity of seeds (#1374 A) and forwarded them, some packed in earth, others wrapped in oil paper, to the Arnold Arboretum. Many hundreds of plants were raised. Unfortunately this species, no more than any other of my Chinese Magnolias, has not proved hardy in the Arnold Arboretum. The young plants, however, were distributed far and wide, a great many being sent to M Leon Chenault, a noted French propagator and nurseryman.¹ This ensured their permanence in the gardens of Europe at least.

This Magnolia flowered for the first time at Caerhays Castle in the spring of 1915; the plant being one of the original seedlings raised by Messrs. Veitch. The following year the plant blossomed at St. Keverne. In 1919 it first flowered at Kew; it has since

blossomed in many gardens in the British Isles as well as in France and is appreciated as one of the best of its group under cultivation. The fruits are often ripe the end of August.

In his book on Magnolias, Millais¹⁸ says:

"This species of Magnolia is one of the best introductions we have had from China of recent years. It is quite hardy over the whole of Central and southern England and is, moreover, a vigorous grower, although its young shoots are not robust. Fortunately it comes freely from seed ripened in our islands, and there will soon be a good stock for distribution. After the second year young plants in favourable soil will grow as much as three feet in one season, though it is likely that after a few years this rate of progress will slow down as it does in *M. parviflora*. Wilson speaks of it as a small tree only 18 feet high, and that height it seems certain to achieve in this country. It flowers in quite a young state, and when it reaches a certain maturity, should be a great ornament to our gardens if it gives, as seems likely, a continuance of blooms over a long period as is the case with *M. parviflora*. The lovely pendant flowers when borne in masses should exhibit a sight similar to a glorified *Halesia tetraptera*; so we can look forward to a time when *Magnolia wilsonii* will be one of the treasures of English Gardens."



Magnolia wilsonii flower

17. This taxon was originally described as *Magnolia parviflora* var. *Wilsonii* Finet & Gagnepain (Mem. Soc. Bot. France IV: 39, 1906) where the collection Wilson #3137 (Veitch specimen) was indicated as the type. An isotype in the herbarium of the Arnold Arboretum has both flowers and fruit but is undated. Wilson's field books do not give sufficient data to associate the Veitch seeds #1587 with the type herbarium specimen #3137.

18. Millais, "Magnolias," p. 250. 1927.