

Elementary, My Dear Wiesener

By Harold Hopkins

This is not going to be a fast piece, and those who demand more information for the time spent may want to read something a little swifter. For one thing, I don't know my subject very well; but I hope you'll stay with me, even though I am suffering from gappiness in my knowledge about *Magnolia* × *watsonii*, or *wieseneri*. One reason I don't know enough is that I've never seen the flowers of *M.* × *wieseneri*, or *watsonii* (what you call it tells something, perhaps, about your willingness to attach a new name to an old favorite).

I don't even know how to classify this piece. Calling it an article draws attention to one of its glaring weaknesses: it's long on enthusiasm, skimpy on facts and experience. Calling it a lovesong is worse because I've never met the lady and because prose does not rhyme or scan. Essay? Well, it seems to come a little closer, if it means that you can hold forth on the little you do know, suck some more out of your thumb, and fake it the rest of the way.

I'm emboldened to write, with all these deficiencies, because I feel that I must speak up for this most desirable of Magnolias (not that anybody has spoken up against it). I do have a *M.* × *wieseneri* (or *watsonii*) plant which hasn't yet bloomed, but I find it intolerable to wait any longer to praise this praiseworthy hybrid.

Phil Seitner has just sent me a color photograph of its flower and I am just not going to dillydally around until some occasion arrives to show it off to our readers. So even if you've seen it before, I hope you'll be indulgent

enough to have another look through Phil's camera. The picture will have to constitute the occasion, and as I write, on this wintry first day of 1981, there's no one around to try to argue me out of my resolve to get this flower on the cover of this issue if it harelips Hiawatha.

There are good reasons.

In the first place, this breathtaking hybrid has been dwelling in beauty for at least a hundred years. It resulted from the marriage, in Japan, of two natives of that country, *M. hypoleuca* × *sieboldii*, and it was introduced to the western world, from Japan, at the International Paris Expo in 1889. The name *M.* × *watsonii* was given it by J.D. Hooker, writing in Curtis's Botanical Magazine February 1, 1891, and the name *M.* × *wieseneri* to what is believed to have been the same hybridization, and possibly the same clone, by E.A. Carriere in the French publication Rue Horticole some months earlier, on September 1, 1890.

Neil G. Treseder in his book *Magnolias* (1978) expresses a belief that more than one clone of this hybrid exists in cultivation and that they may differ only in minor details. The recent adoption of the name *M.* × *wieseneri* by Dr. Stephen A. Spongberg honors the seniority of publication of the name. Use of the two names and the possible cultivation of more than one clone was suggested in a brief report in vol. XVI No. 1 of *MAGNOLIA* that the late Ernest Lufer had different plants under each name at his nursery in Salem, Oregon. Such multiplicity can compound the confusion. But enough