

A Scion Exchange in the Cards?

by Harold Hopkins

The possibility of the Society establishing and operating some kind of system for exchanging scions of Magnolia was discussed among several members during the Rochester meeting. Unfortunately, these talks didn't get put into the form of a proposal, so it wasn't brought up at the directors' meeting nor at the business meeting.

Such an exchange seems especially important for a number of reasons, the primary one being that many gardeners want certain magnolias, but are unable to get them — because most nurseries don't carry them, or because the person can't afford to buy every magnolia he or she wants. The society's recognition of and positive response to this problem is already evident in its establishment several years ago of a first-rate seed exchange counter now known the world over, and in the number of articles in this and past issues about grafting and other propagation of Magnolias.

So once your resolve to graft your own Magnolias is clear, your knife sharp, and your seedlings big enough to hold a graft bud, your next move is to locate scions of the plant you so ardently covet and get your hands on it, without fail.

Too often you may find, if your experience has been like mine, that you have lost the address of the member who promised you scions; or he or she is not as diligent as you'd like about providing scions in time for you to make optimum use of them; or the person who promised them in a burst of generosity several months ago may not have any to spare at this time. Any of a dozen turns of events can deflect

your aim or slow your momentum, and you're high and dry till next year, when you are entitled to go through the same procedure and buck the odds again.

The purpose of a scion exchange is to eliminate this delay or uncertainty and, perhaps more than anything else, help members of the Society get the plants they want, plants they perhaps couldn't have got otherwise.

There are two basic ways to organize an exchange under the Society's aegis.

The first is to appoint a person who'll arrange to receive and store the scions or budsticks and distribute them to members who order them. This would be essentially like our seed exchange is run. It has worked very well for seed, but a similar system for exchange of pollen hasn't worked as well, and the pollen committee chairman for that reason has announced that he's shutting it down.

Why didn't the pollen exchange work well? I think it's just that breeding magnolias requires more effort and sacrifice than the average gardener is able or willing to undertake: sophisticated planning, tedious and detailed work, many years to produce the resulting flowers, considerable land area to grow large numbers of trees to flowering size, and uncertainty of rewards. For some, it's worth all the time and trouble to get a look at that hole card, but others prefer to deal with what they see face up. It could take a long time, maybe forever, to create your own beauties as good as 'Diva,' 'Ruby,' 'Lennei,' and others.

The other way is for one Society member to act as a clearing house, listing availabilities of various

Magnolia wood, such lists supplied by contributors; then relaying the information to those who request information about material of one or more Magnolias for grafting.

I believe this type of scion exchange would work best. The chairman would simply be the go-between, putting the parties in touch with one another. To me, it seems this kind of scion exchange would have definite advantages.

Those with available scions could send lists of appropriate plants to the chairman along with the number of budsticks of each kind available (one to a dozen, or many), and stating the conditions under which scions would be dispatched. This might include costs such as the price per scion of each variety, or cost of packing and mailing, or both; offers to swap for scions of other Magnolias; time material can be sent; and similar conditions. (It's possible that the chairman might be able to receive and immediately redistribute bulk quantities of budwood for which several orders have already been made, if this would elicit better cooperation from a contributor shy about dealing with large numbers of recipients.)

The chairman might specify how the material should be prepared and shipped, as based on the recommended methods for maintaining freshness of material. There is no reason the same exchange could not be adapted to permit the shipping of cuttings for rooting propagation, too.

A scion exchange would keep the chairman busy at times conducting correspondence, but it would result in standardized treatment and handling of the material — and fair treatment to all.

What does the membership think about a scion exchange? Do you feel it would be desirable and would work?

Charles Tubesing, the Society's new secretary-treasurer and author of the article in this issue on chip bud grafting of Magnolias, was one of those who discussed a possible scion exchange at the Rochester meeting. Why not write to him and give him your ideas and suggestions about whether — and how — it could work? Opinions of members who are interested can be considered at the A.M.S. meeting next spring, and perhaps a chairman appointed who can get it into operation. That would be a good time, too, to provide general advice to the parties about quarantine restrictions that may apply between states or countries. Keep in mind that whoever runs the scion exchange will have plenty of work to do, and it's all volunteer work, so — unless you want to volunteer for the job yourself — try to think in terms of keeping the chairman's duties to the minimum needed to make the system function properly.

Remember also that although the function of such a system would be to provide plant material to all members at reasonable cost, there should be a nominal fee for each transaction, or perhaps each budstick shipped, to be paid to the scion exchange chairman when the transaction is completed. This will help pay for the postage and other expenses in the operation of the scion exchange and provide a little revenue besides for the Society's treasury. What do you think is a fair fee to pay the Society per budstick or transaction to keep this exchange in operation for distributing desirable Magnolia material to members?

Send along your suggestions, or your approval or disapproval of the idea, to Charles Tubesing, whose address is carried in the list of officers in this issue. I hope you'll agree the Society ought to offer its members this important new service.