

# Sargentiana Robusta 'Multipetal'

by Peter Smithers

The great garden at Mount Congreve, near Waterford, Ireland, extends across a hundred acres of beautiful undulating country. In its present form it is the creation of Ambrose Congreve, who has been planting a collection of trees and shrubs on a grand scale for the past 40 years or so. The climate and soil were suitable for the great tree magnolias, and in the early days of the planting, a hundred or more seedlings of *M. campbellii* were planted, together with about 30 seedlings of *M. campbellii mollicomata* and a good 50 seedlings of *M. sargentiana robusta*.

In those relatively early days of the evolution of these magnolias, only a limited number of the selected clones which now carry clonal names and have obtained Royal Horticultural Society awards were available, and this massive planting was in the nature of a trial, the results of which can now be seen. As might be expected, there are a number of very fine forms now reaching maturity, a few outstanding ones, and a few which are — to my eye — disappointing.

This is clearly a unique collection which still awaits assessment and comparison with clones of these three Magnolias which have so far been named and in some cases awarded. I do not myself have an extensive enough knowledge of this material to be able to make such comparisons, but it is to be hoped that Mr. Congreve will be able to get blooms and photographs before the appropriate Committee in London for consideration.

However, I had the good fortune to visit Mount Congreve in the month of March 1983 — it took two days of concentrated attention to see what was to be seen — and my attention was

arrested at once by a tree of *M. sargentiana robusta* which had a most extraordinary — and beautiful — appearance. It stood amongst a group of some 20 trees of this species, which varied in habit from the broad spreading giant bush to much more fastigate forms, at least one of the latter being well worth introduction. The colours varied from almost but not quite white to good pinks. But the exceptional tree which attracted my attention, on examination proved to have far more petals than the normal forms.

According to authorities, this Magnolia should have 10 to 16 tepals (Bean) or 12 to 16 (Treseder). On taking to pieces several flowers of the tree at Mount Congreve of which I write, they proved to have 19 to 27 tepals. Otherwise, the blooms were carried sideways in the typical manner of the species, and were of a pale pink colouring externally, lighter within.



*Magnolia sargentiana* var. *robusta* 'Multipetal' is, for obvious reasons, the name proposed by the author for this magnolia growing in the Congreve garden (photo Peter Smithers).