

Magnolia 'Hattie Carthan'

By Lola E. Koerting

In June 1984, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) named one of its new magnolia hybrids in honor of Mrs. Hattie Carthan, the founder of the Magnolia Tree Earth Center in Brooklyn, New York. She died in April at the age of 83.

Magnolia × 'Hattie Carthan' is a selection from a number of seedlings derived from cross pollination of *Magnolia × brooklynensis* 'Evamaria' as seed parent and *M. × brooklynensis* #209 (BBGRC test number) as pollen parent. In contrast to most *M. × brooklynensis* plants, *M. 'Hattie Carthan'* has a yellow flower with purple veins ascending from the base of the tepals. Only the outer whorl of tepals shows a slight green tinge.

It was most appropriate to name this magnolia in honor of a very deserving woman. Hattie Carthan has left a strong imprint on her Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood and also on all who knew her work in neighborhood beautification. People still fondly remember her as the "Tree Lady."

Hattie Carthan came to Brooklyn in the late 1920's, and eventually settled in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section. During the post-war depression, she saw this once prosperous area deteriorate. Being very concerned about this, she decided to do something to prevent further neglect. When the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corp. was formed as one of the "Great Society" programs, she was appointed president, an office she held for 15 years. This was a vehicle through which Mrs. Carthan started an extensive program of neighborhood restoration and tree planting.

Her initial achievement involved a tall, possibly 100-year-old *Magnolia grandiflora* which, through her relentless efforts was saved from

destruction. The tree was designated by the City Landmarks Preservation Commission as a "Living Landmark." This tree became the focal point of Hattie Carthan's efforts, together with those of the volunteers she attracted, to create an environmental center to improve the neighborhood. Consequently, in 1973, the Magnolia Tree Earth Center Inc. of Bedford-Stuyvesant, a non-profit, environmental organization, came into being. Funding the center was no easy task. A variety of fund-raising events was organized, and a campaign was launched to secure support from the private and public sectors.

Magnolia Tree Earth Center is still, as originally meant to be, a center for environmental and horticultural education for children and adults.

In recognition of the persistent endeavors of Hattie Carthan to serve and improve her neighborhood, she was presented the Jefferson Award by the American Institute for Public Service. She received other awards from various groups.

In appreciation of Mrs. Carthan's achievements, and her close connection with the BBG where she had served on the board of trustees, this new yellow magnolia was dedicated in her memory. On September 23, 1984, during the Hattie Carthan Founder's Day garden party held at the BBG, Donald Moore, president, dedicated the tree during a short ceremony. It was planted on the grounds of the BBG and an additional tree will be planted at the Earth Center in the spring of 1985.

As noted, the parents of *M. 'Hattie Carthan'* are two *M. × brooklynensis* hybrids. They originated from a cross made in 1954 between *M. acuminata* as seed parent and *M. × quinquepeta* (*liliflora*) as pollen parent. Therefore, *M. 'Hattie Carthan'* is considered a *M.*

× *brooklynensis*, though not an original hybrid but a second generation hybrid, or F₂.

The considerable variability of the *M.* × *brooklynensis* crosses, attributed to the presumed heterozygosity of *M.* × *quinquepeta* (*liliflora*) is well known. The color range of the blossoms reaches from dark purple to magenta-rose, to pale yellow in combination with purple rose. Most of the crosses show a distinct green-orange tinge on the flower buds, which may still be noticed on the three outer tepals (sepals) after the flowers open. The shapes of the flowers are equally diverse.

In 1968, Doris Stone, who was in charge of the plant breeding program at the BBG, cross-pollinated several *M.* × *brooklynensis* hybrids. Among others, she selected *M.* × *brooklynensis* 'Evamaria' and *M.* × *brooklynensis* No. 209 as parents. *M.* × 'Evamaria' was the first magnolia introduced by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. It was patented in 1968. This cultivar is in the middle range of magenta-rose, with a slight yellow-green hue on the outer tepals and flower buds. The inner side of the tepals is pale pink. The blossoms keep their erect shape almost through the entire flowering period. The flowers on *M.* × *brooklynensis* No. 209 can best be described as 'washed out' yellow with purple-magenta veins, extending over the entire length of the 10-12 cm long tepals, and a very distinct green coloration of the flower

buds and outer tepals. They open to an unattractive "floppy" shape, the tepals bending over towards the center.

It was somewhat unexpected, therefore, that this parentage produced a tree — *M.* 'Hattie Carthan' — with bright yellow flowers and delicate magenta-rose veins extending from the base to approximately halfway upwards in the center of the tepals. The flower buds show a green tinge which occasionally remains on the outer tepals after opening of the flowers. The tepals have a length of 10-12 cm and are 6-8 cm wide. The attractive shape of the blossoms lasts almost the entire blooming period, which extends up to three weeks and coincides with the leafing out of the tree. *M.* 'Hattie Carthan' starts blooming the same time other *M.* × *brooklynensis* do, which is later than *M.* × *soulangiana* and *M.* × 'Elizabeth.' The advantage of a late blooming period, of course, is reduced damage from late frosts. This pyramidal-shaped deciduous tree is quite hardy at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Research Center in Ossining, New York (Zone 5-6). This hardiness makes it an attractive magnolia for colder climates (much like its "cousin" *M.* 'Yellow Bird').

Propagation of this new cultivar will be started full scale in 1985. At present, grafting is the best method. However, more testing will be done to find a suitable procedure for rooting cuttings. Not many trees are available at this time but it's hoped, that with the help of the nursery industry enough plants soon will be made available.

The new magnolia cultivar 'Hattie Carthan' was registered in June, 1984 with the International Registrar of Magnolia Cultivars, (checklist of the cultivated Magnolias).

References

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- Neil G. Treseder: Magnolias. Faber & Faber, London-Boston, pp 130-135
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