

The Gresham hybrids

D. Todd Gresham, who bred his Magnolia hybrids at his home, Hill of Doves, in Santa Cruz, California, beginning in 1955 and ending shortly before his death early in 1969, in 1966 chose Gloster Arboretum in Mississippi and the Tom Dodd Nurseries at Semmes, Alabama, as the two locations where the plants he bred could be grown on and eventually evaluated for their ornamental potential.

This large-scale transfer of the hybrids followed arrangements Mr. Gresham made with Tom Dodd, Jr., representing the Tom Dodd Nurseries, and Frank and Sara Gladney, representing Gloster Arboretum.

For Mr. Gresham, the transactions offered a way to provide posterity with the anticipated benefits of a dedicated, large-scale breeding program that, for one person, was getting somewhat out of hand. This initiative by the Dodd Nurseries, primarily a large scale propagator of those ornamentals in the highest demand, was not surprising to those who know that the Dodd family has always given real and tangible support to individuals and institutions engaged in horticultural research activities. Frank and Sara Gladney saw an opportunity to help Todd Gresham financially and preserve his creations for the future benefit of gardeners and the public.

The first shipment, to Gloster in January 1966, included 1600 hybrid plants ranging from small to large sizes in various containers. These represented primarily the earlier Gresham crosses, and it is from these earlier hybridizations that a number of selections were registered, first by Mr. Gresham himself, and in more recent years by the Gloster Arboretum principals, with evaluation and advice from experts such as Joe McDaniel, Ken Durio, John Giordano, Carl

Amason, and Joe Hickman.

But it is his later crosses included in three subsequent shipments of much smaller plants — 10,000 in 1966, 1900 more in 1968, and a final 2000 in 1969 — that have piqued the curiosity of Society members, especially for the reason that no selections from them have ever been made. All of the three later shipments went to Tom Dodd Nurseries, where they were grown on and then planted out. The casualty rate for these, especially certain species and hybrids with them, has been high. Some, even as potted seedlings, did not survive the southern temperatures and climate. Others succumbed after being lined out.

The ones remaining have for the most part grown to maturity in the original rows where they were planted out in an area of 2 to 3 acres on the nursery. Today they not only are crowding each other but are in turn crowded by the incursion of native trees, shrubs and vines that will occur where no cultivation is carried out (for some years the ornamentals at the Tom Dodd Nurseries, a wholesale commercial operation, have been 100 percent container grown, a practice that some



Todd Gresham, right, with Bill Dodd in 1966.



*M. 'Todd Gresham' is named for its hybridizer. Its flowers have 9 broad tepals of a violet-rose color on the outer surfaces with pink showing through on the white, inner sides. It is a hybrid of *M. × veitchii* × *M. × soulangiana* 'Rustica Rubra.' Photo Ken Durio.*

modern nurseries have put into effect to facilitate the shipment of plants with undisturbed roots to retail outlets and at the same time eliminate the costs of in-ground cultivation of plants).

The inspection of the Gresham hybrids at the Dodd Nurseries will be a highlight of the Mobile meeting. Bill Dodd, speaking for the nursery, has cautioned members not to expect too much. In some cases the trees, planted close together, have grown tall and sparse instead of broad and dense, and the flowers can be seen only in the top of the tree. Binoculars and telescopic camera lenses may be handy for flower inspection in such cases.

But even though some of the trees may be ungainly, their flowers have been under close observation for many years by members of the nursery, and those trees that have displayed especially fine flowers have been marked for possible selection, naming, and registration. These nursery favorites will be pointed out during the tour, so those members who want to see the front runners should stick close to the walking group.

It's expected that at some point during the meeting, the Tom Dodd Nurseries will announce the basic details of a plan recently agreed upon for

selecting and propagating some of the best specimens and introducing them to the trade.

The Gresham hybrids to be seen at the Tom Dodd Nurseries largely represent Todd Gresham's later work, in which he carried out methodical and extensive crossings he hadn't been able to make earlier because the breeder plants weren't to be had at the time. As Mr. Gresham conducted his work, feverishly and at times almost obsessively, new Magnolia species, clones, or cultivars he had ordered from many sources began to arrive from nurseries and Magnolia collectors in the U.S. and abroad, and were promptly incorporated into the breeding program.

In Todd Gresham's later work, too, some of the earlier hybrids he had made, by then producing flowers, were brought into the program as parents. Earlier crosses that had produced none or few seed were tried again in his determined efforts to get better and more varied results from which to pick and choose favorites. Alas, it was the old story: he did not live to see the results of his later work.



*M. 'Darrell Dean,' named for the late Darrell Dean Durio, son of Kenneth and Belle Durio, is a Gresham hybrid (*M. × veitchii* × *M. × soulangiana* 'Rustica Rubra') with large open wine-red flowers up to 12 inches across and of 9 to 12 broad tepals. Photo Ken Durio.*