

Comments from Robin letters

Edited by Harry Heineman

From Carl Amason, on late planting: Beginning in late August, I helped to dig from Archalie Harmon's old place about 25 magnolias, about four of which were 3 or 4 inches in diameter, and I don't think we lost a one. I moved two, a large *Magnolia macrophylla* and a *M. salicifolia* to my place, and I watered them well, including saturation with "Superthrive" solution. "Superthrive" is a solution of plant hormones and vitamins and is supposed to be just the thing for moving large plants out of season. I have a feeling that magnolias move better and respond faster in warm weather than in cold anyway.

From Perry Narten, on fall blooms: It was a fine fall for the "Little Girl" type magnolia crosses and they seemed to bloom as well as in spring. Somehow plants blooming out of season always worries people. Instead of being grateful for such reblooming displays, they get upset that there won't be blooms when there are *supposed* to be next season. I feel sort of the same at times—but never really looked into it. Can anyone advise on this? Do magnolias, cherries, etc., that bloom twice in a season lose most of their ability to set buds for the following spring season?

On shade tolerance: My experiences are that many magnolias have limited shade tolerance—especially as they mature. Best evidences here are in *M. tripetala* which we have in abundance in our largely man-made woods. After reaching a certain height and size—perhaps a foot or so in diameter—they die back to the ground. I think

that without light and reaching the upper story, they just can't hold out very long. We do have real forest types that reach the upper story—*acuminata* and *kobus*—but it was successful competition that got them there.

On deer fencing: We have started fencing to keep deer out, with good results. It is really not all that expensive for what you get out of it. Over several years we have been putting up welded wire fencing 5 feet or 6 feet high—the former where one side is significantly higher than the other, the latter on the level. They both work but I'd go all with 6 feet another time. Getting rolls of 50 feet is easier to handle alone than 100 feet and especially so here with the route through line rows overgrown with shrubs and trees. These same trees serve as posts enough, so that putting in posts has not been a chore. It's not so pretty but it works. Best with two people working in brush but under my system do-able by one. A cheap slower method is to plant dense rows of tall plants. Our deer don't like to go through or jump over a lot of twiggy brush. The fencing used was galvanized welded wire fabric, class 1 coating, style 1972, spacing 2x4 inches, gauge 12½, manufactured by Forbes Steel & Wire Corp., Canonsburg, PA. It also prevents a lot of lesser-sized varmints from entering. All of this activity was promoted by a sudden and continuing devastation of our yew collection in the winter. They don't know it's poisonous!

On chemicals: While it is hard to be a plant collector and live with their hardiness problems, I'd take a basically different view from using

chemicals or biological tampering to modify nature to suit our whims and professed needs. As a long-time environmental fundamentalist, I'd think if sprays were developed to harden plants off—and based on the range of weather vagaries expressed in this Robin—everyone might spray on the *possibility* of need and we'd be swimming in its residue before long. The technical solution is not always the best solution. We all try again and again to grow plants on the chance of success when educated reasoning would say don't. We can count ourselves blessed to succeed some years even knowing that a hard winter or combination of local weather events will destroy them and we can try again using increased knowledge of their requirements, and site them in optimal microclimate and hope that our hybrids or seeds just might have the right stuff: all part of the horticultural game and risk-taking, but let's leave it at that. There really is an amazing amount of control at our disposal in mechanically adjusting ecological conditions without going chemical. Always amazed here by what just protection from winter sun and wind can do to help in hardiness. It certainly is an easier track to live with what has evolved in place or in similar places, but in the horticultural world a plant is usually much more honored outside its natural home than in it. We get so used to and fascinated by hybrids and exotics—these words alone making them desirable—that we forget the natives.

From Frank Mossman, on
hardiness: The late spring frost killed Magnolia 'Paul Cook' back, but it is growing from near the ground. Should not have planted it out at such an early age in a difficult spot. A *M. macrophylla*, now 30 feet high, froze back every winter till a series of mild winters allowed it to develop a truly ligneous main

trunk. Now it survives our worst with no apparent damage even on its smaller branches. The large summer blooms are well worth the wait, and the leaves are an added benefit.

On oil spray for mites: Augie, your suggestion of an oil spray for spider mites on magnolia leaves was a true life saver for them. I had a supply of oil from ten years ago, but needed a reminder. Orthene and Malathion were ineffective. The tiny pests had even been blown through the ventilating ducts from the basement potted plants to gardenias in the reception room above! Oil spray was effective on them, too.

From Augie Kerr, on oil spray
for mites: I am glad, Frank, that the oil spray worked so well for you. I use it outside for mites on my dwarf hemlocks. It is such an effective spray I am surprised more people do not use it for mites. Perhaps we have gone overboard for some of the sophisticated chemicals.

On fungicide for cuttings: Early last July Ginnie Melnick sent me 10 cuttings from 4 different magnolia clones. They rooted 100 percent, with long healthy roots. I had cuttings from some of my things in the same rooting frame, and they did fairly well but not much better than about 50 percent, and the roots were not anything to consider good or better. The only difference between the two lots was that Ginnie had dipped the base of the stems of her cuttings in a solution of Benelate (strength not known). Does it seem likely that this brief dip made the difference? I can recall that Benelate was reported, early after its development, to enhance rooting of rhododendrons, although very strong solutions had the opposite effect. Anyhow it is worth a try once again. Perhaps the only effect was to reduce the number of decay organisms and their action at the stem base, a likely possibility when one realizes the pith area is a good avenue of infection.