

A ray of light on *M.* × 'Wieseneri'

by Sir Peter Smithers

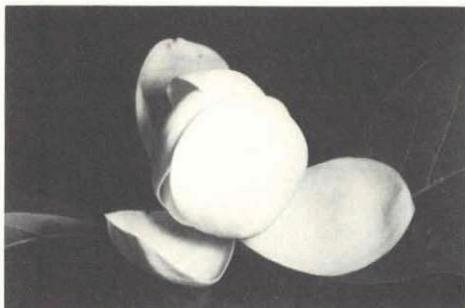
Thanks to the kindness of Mrs. Polly Hill in sending me photographs of her plant of *M.* × 'Wieseneri' in flower and fruit, it is now possible to clear up one mystery surrounding it. The photographs of the flower of my plant and of hers, and of the seed pod of my plant and of hers, seem to make it clear that we are growing entirely different *Magnolias* under the same name.

Typical *M.* × 'Wieseneri' as distributed in England and as grown by me exactly corresponds with the description in Treseder (p.186-7). The perfectly spherical 'golf-balls' with three pinkish outer tepals, are unmistakable. Treseder goes on to say that he "is of the opinion that more than one clone of this hybrid (sic) is in existence and that they differ only in minor details. In one the flower buds appear to be spherical throughout their development, and the slender creamy-buff stamens with their rosy-crimson filaments are surmounted by the pale green stigmatic column. In another form the fat-pointed buds are shaped like those of water-lilies (*Nymphaea* sp.), enshrouded by the outer tepals which are stained bronze pink and green..." and he goes on to describe the floral parts in some detail. He then describes yet a third

alleged variant of the 'hybrid' cultivated in France in the 1800s.

So far there is nothing new to note, and it seems from the foregoing and from the attached photographs, to be quite clear that my plant is the first form described by Treseder and in general cultivation in England, and that Mrs. Hill's plant, sent to her from Japan by our friend Dr. Tsuneshige Rokujo, is the second form described. In addition I must say that from Mrs. Hill's photographs the foliage of her plant and of mine are entirely dissimilar, though I shall not enlarge upon the details now.

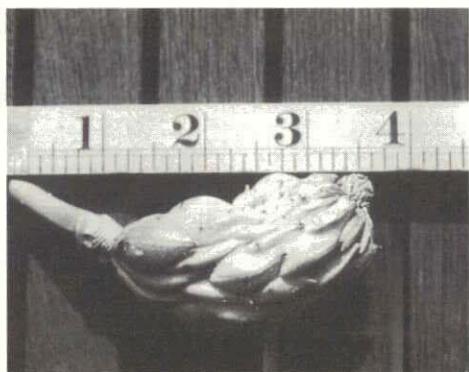
The important new element which can be introduced into this confused situation is the nature of the fruits of the two plants. Mrs. Hill's plant seeds regularly, as did the reported plant of *M.* × 'Wieseneri' at Spetchley Park in England. There is no other record that I know of which describes the regular fruiting of any form of *M.* 'Wieseneri.' It is therefore reasonable to conjecture that the Spetchley Park tree was the same as or similar to that of Mrs. Polly Hill. Except for the isolated instance of a fruiting in my garden reported in *MAGNOLIA* Vol. XVIII No. 2 [Issue 34] 1982, I am unaware of any drawing, photograph or record of the first form of '*M.* × *Wieseneri*'



M. × 'Wieseneri' (Smithers)



M. × 'Wieseneri' (Hill)



M. x 'Wieseneri' seedpod (Smithers)



M. x 'Wieseneri' seedpod (Hill)

described by Treseder having borne seed even once, let alone regularly. On my tree there was but one fruit, narrowly saved from destruction, which has produced a number of extremely vigorous seedlings. The tallest of these plants is now a single-stemmed affair standing twelve feet high. So far from Treseder's 'small bushy tree with long gangling branches arising from a short basal trunk,' which exactly describes my plant of *M. x 'Wieseneri'*, it is a most vigorous strongly apical-dominant affair which clearly intends to grow into a big tree much as *M. hypoleuca* does. The leaves seem to my inexperienced eye intermediate between *M. x 'Wieseneri'* and *M. hypoleuca*, which in this garden grows close to *M. x 'Wieseneri'* and flowers at the same time. I do not therefore doubt that my seed pod is the product of *M. hypoleuca* pollen on *M. x 'Wieseneri'*.

That speculation, however, is not the purpose of this note. Whatever the male parent of the fruiting of my *M. x 'Wieseneri'* may have been, it has enabled us to see the fruit of the 'golf-ball' form of *M. x 'Wieseneri'* for the first time and to appreciate the quite extraordinary difference in form of the fruits of Mrs. Hill's tree. It seems to me to set the two plants so far apart that if *M. x 'Wieseneri'* in any form is a

species, it is inconceivable that both these plants are varieties of that same species. Furthermore, the fruits are so different that if *M. x 'Wieseneri'* is in fact a hybrid in either form, it seems doubtful that both plants could belong to the same group. It seems probable that if either of these plants is a species, it is more likely to be Mrs. Hill's, which is fertile. Does this leave us with the possibility that my plant, the typical English-grown form, is a hybrid of the fertile plant, perhaps with *M. sieboldii*? These are very complicated matters upon which the cytologists and taxonomists ought to be able to throw some further light, particularly if information is forthcoming about the nature of the progeny of Mrs. Hill's plant.

Meanwhile it is important that growers of Magnolias should be clear that there are two separate and easily distinguishable plants distributed under the name *M. x 'Wieseneri'*, and that they should have some provisional means of referring to them. I suggest that for this purpose the typical English-grown form, the infertile golf-ball plant, be referred to as "Hooker's form," since it corresponds closely with the plate in the Botanical Magazine to which Hooker's text is appended. I suggest that plants similar to Mrs. Hill's *M. x 'Wieseneri'* be called "Hill's form."