

# Magnolia grandiflora 'Claudia Wannamaker'

by John F. Brailsford, Sr.

This tree was named for my cousin and dear friend, Claudia (Mrs. A. J.) Wannamaker. Claudia, a sensitive and industrious gardener, purchased the parent magnolia as a skinny 18" tree from a mail order nursery in 1945.

The tree came to my attention after I noticed a tasteful magnolia foliage and seed cone arrangement at a local flower show. When I complimented Claudia, she enthusiastically pointed out the advantages of her magnolia's small, brown-backed leaves, small flower (3-3½" diameter), and small seed cones over most *M. grandiflora* for cutting and arranging. Seeing that her excitement was contagious, Claudia graciously offered to let me see the tree in its full form. The pleasing effect of the relatively thick brown-backed foliage and small seed cones made Claudia's magnolia the most charming *M. grandiflora* I had ever seen.

I knew that a tree like that would be a tremendous asset to Shady Grove. Fortunately, Claudia was able to get a good growth response in the tree's early years, and she generously gave me enough scion wood for 100 grafts. I had enough seedling trees that I was eager to convert, so I hired the best professional camellia grafter in our area to perform this important task. To my dismay, however, he was only 10% successful. Fortunately, though, we did get a good growth response on our ten little magnolias.

In hopes of better success, we decided to try air layering, a propagating technique that we had only heard about. Our first attempts

produced near zero results.

Fortunately, we had a knowledgeable visitor come through who told us that our timing was wrong because this procedure worked best when used just after growth buds swelled in the spring. We tried again the following spring and were fairly successful. Unfortunately, the results of the next eight years were not consistent enough to allow us to get Claudia's magnolia into production. We were accumulating a few trees, however, with some excellent propagating wood on which we were hoping to capitalize.

About this time, a very dear friend of mine, Karl Johnson, Sr., of Bloomingdale Nursery, Bloomingdale, GA, told me that he had recently been successful rooting *M.*

*grandiflora* from cuttings, something that is very difficult to accomplish. Karl gave us a few pointers, and we stuck several flats of cuttings. We were elated when the cuttings rooted. Unfortunately, our head house burned with the cuttings in it before we were able to pot them off. Encouraged by the fact that the cuttings did root, however, the following summer we stuck several thousand with excellent results. The following years have been a mixture of good and bad, but with the knowledge we've gained, rooting from cuttings has proved to be a feasible method of propagating *M. grandiflora*.

*Magnolia grandiflora* 'Claudia Wannamaker' has been in production here for twenty years now. It hasn't been easy, but having an outstanding magnolia selection that blooms profusely from an early age and has an appealing pyramidal shape makes it worth the effort.