

The guillotine arrives in Vico Morcote

By SIR PETER SMITHERS



Seedling of Magnolia x wieseneri, from a presumed cross with M. hypoleuca.

After this season's blooming of my spring magnolias I reflected upon the state of the community, our ecosystem, a *Magnolia* woodland with a closed canopy. After nineteen years of growth it could be fairly said that the

experiment had succeeded. Not only had it succeeded but, along the way, it had given me—and others—a great deal of pleasure and some instruction. But thinking further about this year's blooming, I realized with consternation

that while I recalled a wonderful showing on certain trees, and much pleasure derived therefrom, there were others which I had not really noticed. I supposed that they must have bloomed. They were fine magnolias all, which would grace any garden; but, somehow, amongst so many stars they had not succeeded in attracting my attention.

In the year in which the French are celebrating their bloodthirsty and destructive Revolution, my mind became infected. What if I were to guillotine some of the unnoticed trees, creating miniature glades in the planting, and thus showing off to better advantage some of our finest performers? Deciding to fell a thirty-foot magnolia in the prime of life at an age of twenty years is not an easy thing to do. I walked the collection many times, marked some eight plants, and went away for a few days, leaving my part-time gardener to operate the guillotine. When I got back the slaughter was over. I was delighted with the result. Overall, the garden looked better.

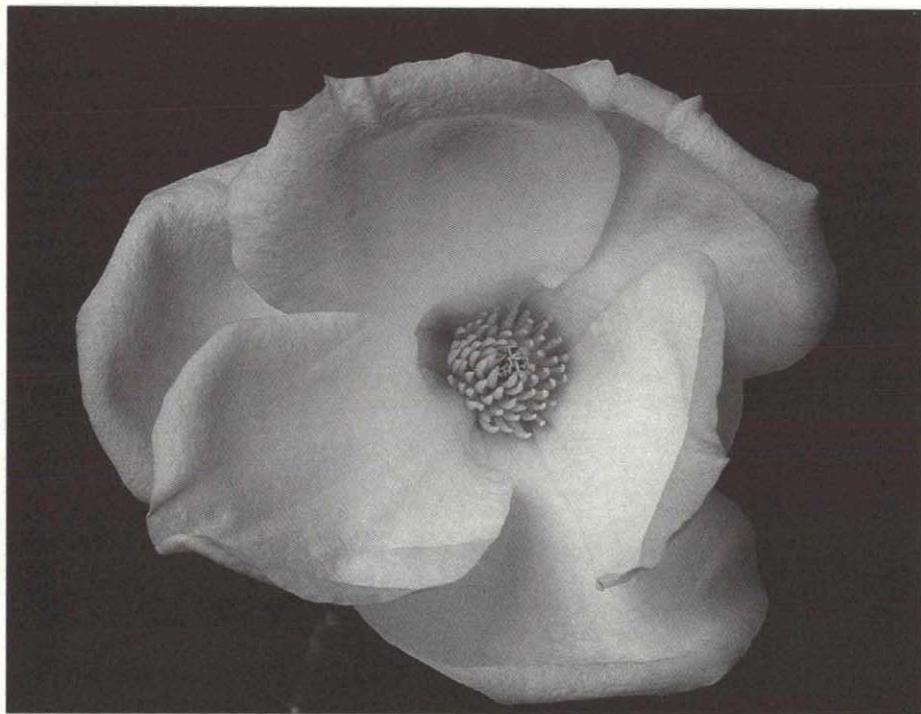
My late Aunt Evelyn had a stately home in Hampshire where unhappily the view from the drawing room windows across the lawns was totally obstructed by a gigantic and magnificent Lebanon Cedar, at least a couple of hundred years old. To cut such a magnificent thing was unthinkable. Or . . . was it? Auntie had the tree felled, and once it was gone we never missed it or thought of it again. It was a lesson learned. I shall not name the guillotined magnolias, lest I cause pain to those now proudly growing the same varieties. But I have to admit that now that they are gone, I never think of them and do not miss them. The remaining mature trees are shown off to much better advantage.

A dry period from late June to September, 1988, seems to have greatly offended my magnolias of the

campbellii group. Several of them refused to form any flower buds. So the spring flowering of these trees was poor. This year we have had plenty of rain during the same period, and the trees, as I write in mid-July, are already showing plenty of buds. There is also the most acceptable second blooming that we have ever had on three trees which have a marked tendency this way. They are 'Royal Crown', 'Star Wars', and 'Manchu Fan.'

An interesting form of *Magnolia grandiflora* has flowered for the first time. It is 'Millais variety'. Mr. Ambrose Congreve took me to see the parent plant some years ago and kindly sent me a propagation raised at Mount Congreve. The parent grows against a wall in the Botanical Garden of the University of Cork, in Ireland. This is situated on Fota Island. How it came to carry the name of the distinguished horticulturist and author of a monograph on *Magnolia*, I do not know. It carries a very large flower of excellent form. The foliage has a moderate amount of indumentum on the under-surface and is unremarkable. In my garden it challenges comparison with 'St. George' and 'Samuel Sommer', and is of similar first-class quality overall. Its interest is therefore historical rather than horticultural.

Readers of these notes may recall that the flowering of a seedling from *M. wieseneri* was a sensation of this garden last year. Since then the plant has grown with outrageous vigor, with powerful vertical-thrusting stems and a strong leader. It is clearly its intention to grow rapidly into a very large tree indeed, in the manner of *M. hypoleuca*, its presumed pollen parent which grew and flowered nearby to my *M. wieseneri*. Tested against the flower of *M. wieseneri* once again, the perfume is almost indistinguishable from the parent. My wife, no mean judge of a perfume, considers it marginally



Magnolia 'Snow Queen' - Pickard's seedling selection from *M. 'Picture.'* (This cultivar was described in Issue 45, pp 23-24.)

superior. The flower is substantially larger. However, *M. wieseneri*, with its straggling and moderate growth presents something of a display of flower at the height of its long flowering season. The new seedling is such a rampant grower that it will present itself more in the manner of *M. hypoleuca*, which in proportion to its size carries relatively much fewer blooms. They are, however, presented in style in the center of great whorls of leaves, as is the case with that *Magnolia*. All in all, I would plant this new seedling, rather than *M. wieseneri*, as a parkland tree. In the medium or small garden it would be better to plant the latter. I shall therefore cut my plant back and retain it for providing budwood for Mr. Eisenhut, in case there is a demand for it.

However, the most remarkable event of the season had nothing to do

with the weather or the plants. Instead, it was the postman, who one day in spring delivered a package from Brooklyn Botanic Garden under the name of Lola Koerting, our President. Unpacked, to my astonishment it turned out to be a handsome plaque, the D. Todd Gresham Award. My first reflection was that it was I who should be giving an award to The Magnolia Society, for the great amount of pleasure and help which I have derived from it over the past two decades. However that may be, it is a particular pleasure to receive a pat on the back in old age--I am 75. We achieve our little triumphs and successes along the way of life, but inevitably most of them fall into the middle part of it. As the young ones replace us in the front line, we recede into the background. At this time recognition by one's friends is doubly and triply welcome. ■