

Magnolia 'Alexandrina'

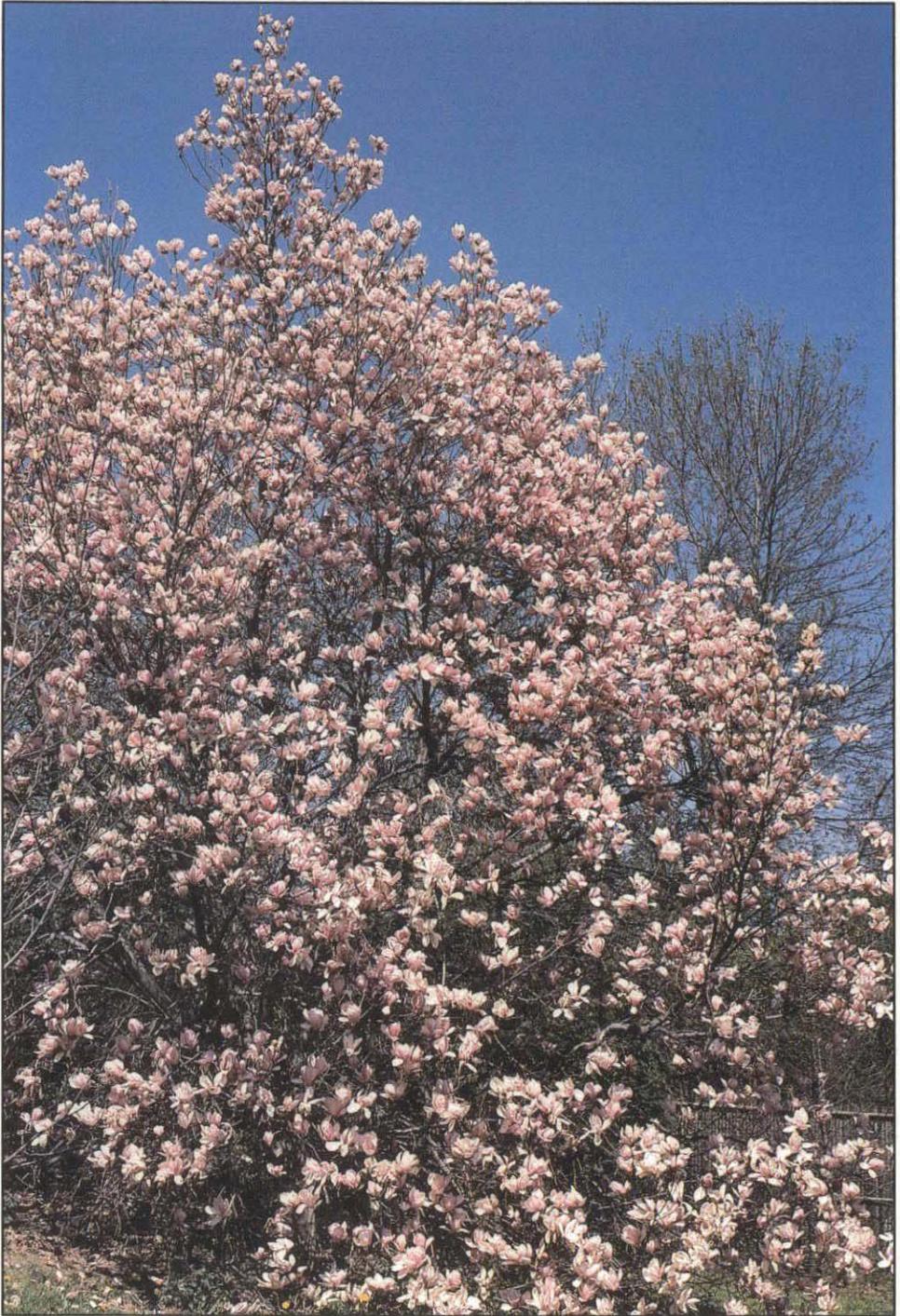
by FRANK B. GALYON, JR.

Having just returned* from the Magnolia Society Convention in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, of the many wonderful Magnolia trees we all saw on Phil Savage's acreage, I first want to discuss the tree that Phil received from K. Sawada in Mobile before the war. (K. Sawada's nursery is no longer in existence.) He received it as "Mag. Soul. Alexandrina." This is undoubtedly **the** finest tree in existence of the *M. soulangiana* ilk. First off, it is probably the latest flowering of all Soulanganianas. That in itself is of extreme importance to growers in the Southeast so as to avoid our many "late freezes." Second it is a beautifully shaped tree. Third, the individual flower is so large, beautifully-colored (pink soulangiana color), and the tepals are of a texture or constitution such that they are not broken off by a hard wind. And fourth, the plant is obviously fertile as Phil had raised a number of seedlings from it crossed one way or the other. I would guess that it is easily a hexaploid, or perhaps even of higher ploidy. If I could grow but one precocious flowering Magnolia, this cultivar would be the one that I would want to plant. It is my understanding that both Magnolia Nursery in Chunchula, Alabama and Louisiana Nursery in Opelousas, Louisiana grow and list this cultivar for sale. They both have it under the name "Big Pink."

Now to digress further. On page 80

of Millais' book *Magnolias* (published 1927) I quote the following under the name *M. Alexandrina*: "Owing to the number of hybrids, all very similar and coming from one or more sources, it is very difficult to say what is true *M. Alexandrina*. In some the white parent [*M. denudata*] predominates and in another the purple one [*M. liliiflora*], but the hybrid usually sent out by the Dutch and Belgian nurserymen under the name *M. Alexandrina* is usually in habit somewhat similar to *M. denudata* with larger flowers. Flowers, nine petals 4 in. long and 2 in. at widest part, heavily flushed rose purple and darker purple lines up to three-quarters of their length; interior of petals pure white. The leaves are developed at the same time as the flowers. The colour and size of the flowers seem to vary considerably according to season. The same plant will develop beautiful rose-flushed flowers in one year and in the next purple will predominate...."

M. Alexandrina is a hardy tree as vigorous and even more beautiful than its close relation *M. Soulangeana* (sic). It develops its flowers about the same time, April 5th-April 10th, and remains in bloom for three weeks if uncut by frost. In many respects it is superior to *M. Soulangeana*. Equally floriferous there is shade of rose in the flowers when first developed that is very charming, and it has few rivals amongst spring flowering trees of any kind....



The Magnolia 'Alexandrina' or 'Big Pink' in question.

M. Alexandrina is one of the essential Magnolias, and two or three specimens of both the typical and the large flowering white form should be planted in every southern garden.

M. Alexandrina, var. alba

There is another form with upright branches and larger and whiter flowers than the type. It surpasses the usual form in everything except the rose flush to the flowers; also it comes into flower about a week later. The petals are 4 1/2 in. long and 2 1/2 in width. Outer base shaded with purple which is not noticeable at a distance, the flowers appearing to be quite white.

No doubt there are other forms intermediate between this and M. Alexandrina, but this variety is very valuable as it continues the succession of early hybrid Magnolias and links the group up with M. Lennei and M. Brozzoni." (Mr. Millais has in his book a photograph designated M. Alexandrina.)

In the *Check List of the Cultivated Magnolias* is found under *M. x soulangiana* cv. Alexandrina the following: "(Introduced by Cels of Paris, France in 1831), Wister, Swarthmore Plant Notes, Ed. 3, 1(1): 87 (1955-56), 'outside purplish magenta all the way to the top, darkest at base; inside normally white. Flowers larger than type, cup rounder than (cv.) Verbanica. Buds semi-globular, deep saucer shape when fully open. Holds form well.' See *Arnoldia* 20: 22 (1960). In Overlook Nurseries catalog 1948-1949 Crichton, Mobile, Alabama, 'more vigorous than the Soulangeana. Flowers larger, 9 petals, color...dark purplish pink and white on the inside of petals. Blooms...two weeks later than soulangeana and usually

escapes...late freezes.... We obtained this variety from several nurseries and the flowers differ. The stock we are offering was propagated from a plant that was imported from France...now growing in Evergreen, Louisiana. It was recommended to us under the name Alexandrina...."

I personally obtained a clone called 'Alexandrina' from Don Shadow some years ago. He liked it the best of all the soulangianas, one reason being that it did not suffer from canker. This clone was identical to the one described by Wister, above. I did not like the flowers of bright magenta, so I gave mine away. Don Shadow's clone and Phil Savage's clones of 'Alexandrina' in no way correspond to the clone described by Millais (above) with accompanying photograph.

It is my feeling that the name 'Alexandrina' should be discarded, particularly in reference to the clone Phil Savage has. "Big Pink" is a much more apt description of the clone. If it has not yet been registered as such with the registrar either by Ken Durio, John Allen Smith, or David Ellis, then I think this should be done as soon as possible. ■

** This argument for the naming and registering of "Big Pink" was excerpted from a Round Robin letter written by Dr. Galyon shortly after the May, 1988 TMS convention in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. I would like to thank Harry Heineman, Round Robin Chairman, for bringing this review to our attention.*

-Editor