

A Chinese magnolia for American gardens

by GUO CHENG-ZE and MA PEI-ZHEN

Magnolia biondii Pamp. is a noted rare tree of central China. It is a tree, up to 12m high with smooth, pale grey bark. Its branches are slender and glabrous. The terminal buds are ovate, 1.7-3 cm long, pale yellow with dense soft, long hairs. The deciduous leaves are chartaceous, oblong-lanceolate, or oval-lanceolate, 10-18 cm long, 3.5-6.5 cm broad, the apex acute, the base broadly tapered or blunt. The upper surface is dark green and the underside pale green with depressed hairs later becoming glabrous. There are 10-15 pair of lateral veins. The petiole is 1-2 cm long with a stipule trace along 1/5 to 1/3 its length. The flowers appear before the leaves, 6-8 cm in diameter, fragrant, with 9 tepals. The outer 3 are near strip-form, 4-5 cm long, 1.3-2.5 cm broad. The inner whorls rather narrow and small, white, tinged with purple at the outside base. Stamens 8-10 mm long, filaments plump and slightly shorter than the anther, purple on the outside, white on the inside. The fruit is cylindrical, slightly twisted, 8-14 cm long. The fruit stalk is about 1 cm long, with long silky hairs. The follicles are black, globular and flattened on both sides, densely verruculose. Flowering is in March, and fruits ripen in September.

Magnolia biondii is native in

Taoyuan County, northern Hunan, where it grows in hills at elevations of 400m or so. Until recently, only a few plants remained.

The species is distributed in Hubei, Henan, Sichuan, Shaanxi and south Gusu Provinces in China. It occurs, scattered in hills or mountains, at elevations of 400-2000 (-2400)m.

In nature the species is a sun plant, liking a warm, moist climate. It is hardy, with a low temperature resistance of -25°C or so. A slightly acid soil is preferred, but it grows in yellow soil, brown earth or forest soil. Because it requires a rich, deep and damp soil, it grows rapidly.

The timber of this magnolia is very useful for furniture, building, packaging and other industrial material. The flower buds are valued medicinally as a substitute for *Magnolia liliiflora* Desr., and an extract from the flowers is used to ease pain. So, in a word, the plant is a very good ornamental.

The author and colleagues have been investigating *Magnolia biondii* in its native place in Taoyuan County, and photographed it in spring (late March) 1982. Due to flowering before coming into leaf, it was a magnificent and greatly admired sight. In the same year, in September, we collected seeds and sowed them in drills at the nursery



in early April of the following year at an elevation of 400m. Through meticulous cultivation, the seedlings grew vigorously. The species was successfully reproduced by seeds at Nanyue Arboretum, Hunan Province, China in 1983.

With financial support from the Forestry Bureau of Hunan Province, a Magnolia Garden was established in autumn of 1980 at the half way point of Mount Heng's main peak,

Zhurong, at elevations of 410-450m within Nanyue Arboretum. The largest individual seedlings of *Magnolia biondii* which were set out in the nursery in spring, 1984, have continued rapid growth.

Magnolia biondii is hardy outdoors in cultivation and should be suitable for American gardens. It should be a valuable acquisition for every collection of magnolias. 🌿

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