

Choking Induces Magnolia Flowering

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It is well known that stress, such as a drought, enhances plant flowering in order to preserve the species. However, it is less well known that stress can induce the first flowering of a plant.

At the suggestion of another Society member who confirmed this with his own magnolias, I decided to try his technique. Two of my magnolias were over twenty feet tall, yet had never bloomed. The thick clay-chert soil of Chattanooga, probably the best for magnolias in the U.S., just made them grow tall without blooming.

One of my reluctant plants is 'Caerhays Belle,' a nursery purchase made in 1985. The other is from a *sprengeri diva* seed that I started in 1989. They had trunk diameters of over four inches and three inches respectively.

Following instructions, I tied a canvas strap from an old life preserver around each trunk two feet above the ground using square knots. This was done in April, 1995. New growth begins early in the southern U.S. Unfortunately, the straps rotted and broke before the end of the summer because of their age. No flower buds emerged in 1995.

I have been rewarded in 1996, however. Both magnolias have at least a dozen flower buds, and perhaps many more. Next year will indicate flower hardiness in the Southeast. To date, both plants leaf out somewhat later than the loebneries, and there has never been any dieback of new shoots. This contrasts with soulanganias and the Gresham hybrids whose flowers are usually killed by early March freezes. In fact, the *sprengeri diva* seedling replaced a Gresham 'Royal Crown' that I got tired of because blooms usually froze, once even in February. This was done despite the objection of my wife.

Choking of magnolias to induce flowering would have been

a boon to Sir Peter Smithers who waited many years to see magnolias flower and to decide whether they were worth keeping. This need not now be the case. The Society member who told me of this technique has had success with plants of 1 1/2" caliper. If he will let me know who he is, because of my bad memory, I will be happy to give him, and the person who suggested it to him, due credit in a future issue of the Journal. It is a great advance for magnolia growers to know that it does not take decades for slow-flowering magnolias to bloom. ❧

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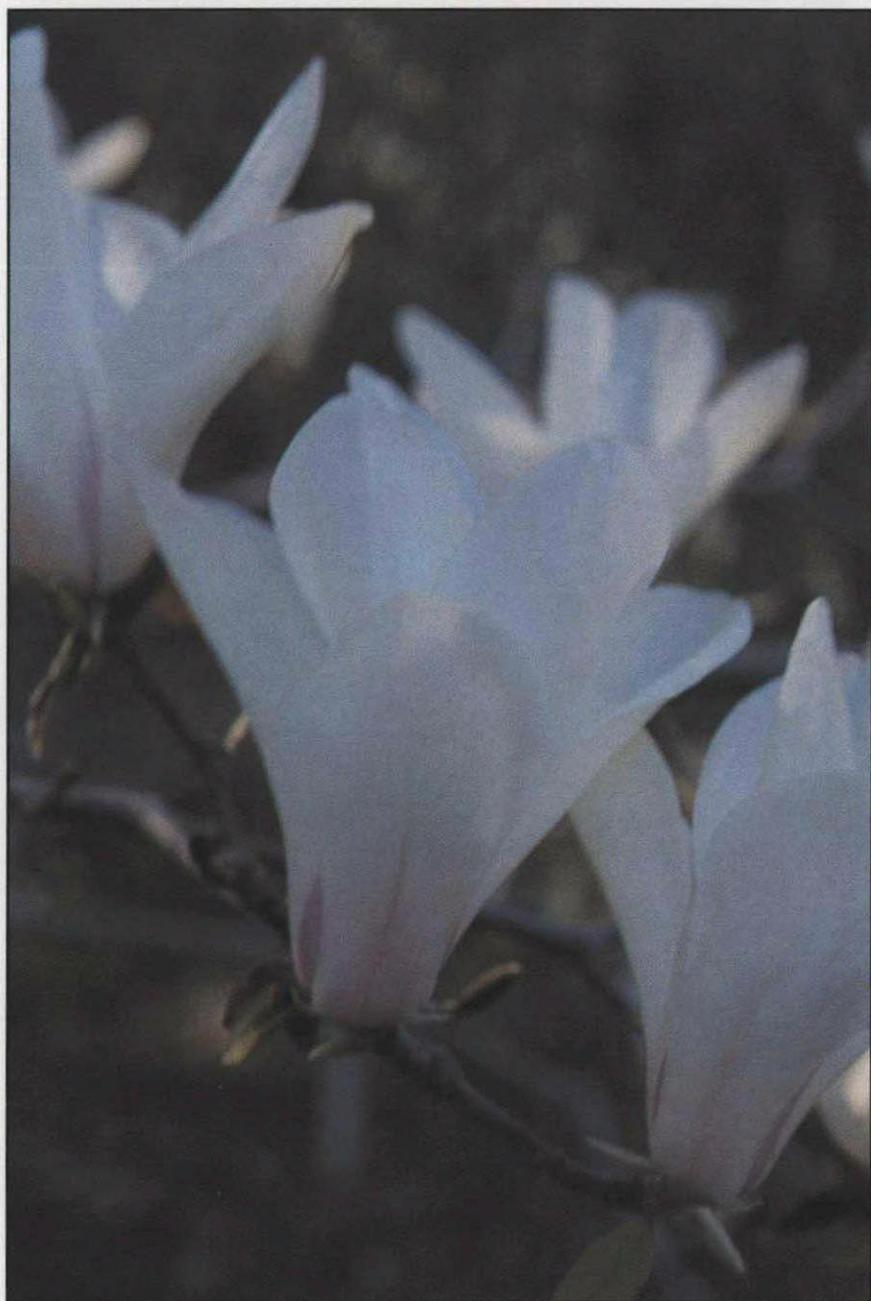
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