

## Chollipo and Korea, 1997

Dr. John David Tobe

(with excerpts and edits from John Gallagher and Robert Butts)

On the morning of April 19 the coastline of South Korea came into view shortly after flying over Japan and the Sea of Japan. As we began our descent toward the South Korean peninsula, the mountains enshrouded in mist slowly revealed the details of silver rivers and dark rows of peaks. The spring sunlight outlined the natural geography of Korea, unfolding the landscape into ever finer detail as we descended—roads, vehicles, houses, and individual trees came into view. Pink clouds, cherry trees in flower, drifted along mountain slopes punctuated by Buddhist temples and valley villages.

The 34th annual spring meeting of the Magnolia Society (TMS) was held in South Korea, graciously hosted by Mr. C. Ferris Miller of the Chollipo Arboretum, Chung Nam, South Korea. Also known by his adopted South Korean name, Min Pyong-Gal, Ferris has been an instrumental member of the Magnolia Society and has assembled, with great aesthetic sensibilities, one of the world's best collections of cultivated magnolias at the Chollipo Arboretum. The Magnolia Society will be forever grateful to the hospitality shown to the members during one of our most exotic and our only trip as a society to Asia. Ferris was careful to orchestrate our trip so as to introduce the Magnolia Society to the many botanical wonders of South Korea. He did so with great success. In addition, the tours of palaces, ancient cities and temples gave us a sense of the richness of the South Korean culture and history.

TMS members arrived in Seoul on or before April 19, the official start date for the tour. Our first day began with a tour of Kyongbok Palace. Kyongbok Palace was home to the first of eight kings of Korea and was the main palace of the Ein Dynasty. Restored in the early 1800, this palace is ornately decorated with carved and brightly painted beams. Geometric repetition in the form of repeated designs in the brick walls and tiles unified the architectural

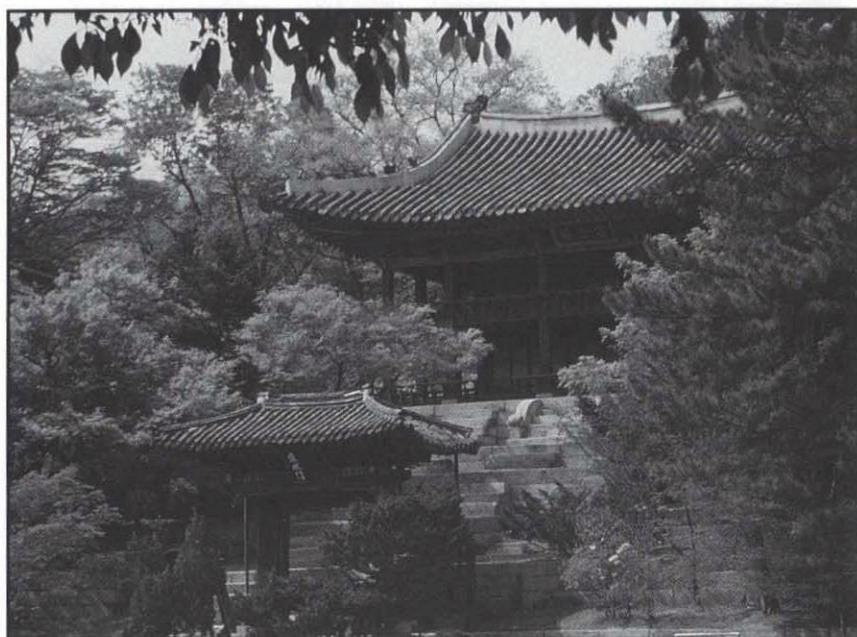
elements while the carefully positioned plantings softened the lines and sometimes complicated patterns and lent a grace and informality to a rather rigid design. Interestingly, magnolias did not figure prominently into the landscape design of this palace. This was the domain of the beautiful Korean maples (*Acer japonica* and *A. palmatum*) and cherries. The maples were selected from wild populations as they displayed great variation in leaf coloration from bright yellow-green to dark burgundy. The cherries were so floriferous that the slightest breeze produced a rain of pink and white petals. Flowering magnolias were not seen here, it seems that the early flowering forms of *M. liliiflora* and *M. denudata* were not traditionally part of the historic planting at this palace so their paucity was not unexpected. After visiting the palace and associated gardens we visited the adjacent National Folk Museum housed in a classic blue pagoda that dominated the skyline from the Kyongbok Palace grounds. This multi-storied building was reflected in a pool that surrounded a small temple aligned such that the mountains, pagoda and cherries balanced one another. This was underscored in the reflections of the pagoda superimposed on the mountains in the waters of other pools around the palace. These reflections were only obscured by a diaphanous layer of cherry petals and the floating red leaves of a hardy waterlily (*Nymphaea* sp.). Here the use of "borrowed" scenery seems to have been perfected, as the views from several elevated sections in the garden offered scenes of the granitic peaks with their slopes clothed with the ethereal pinks and white of *Prunus subhirtella* and *Prunus sargentiana*. We were indeed very lucky to witness this vernal extravaganza. But this would be only one such happy conjunction among art, horticulture and the South Korean peoples' keen sense of aesthetics. How could we know of the magnificence of scenery and gardens to follow?

Anxious to see magnolias in a land of maples and flowering cherries, our first close encounter would take place near a garden built around a 500 year old specimen of *Pinus bungeana* or lacebark pine. Although not native to South Korea, this plant was a gift from a Chinese ambassador many centuries ago. Fascinating to think of the many generations of Koreans caring for the welfare of a centuries old tree. Incidentally, the magnolia was a seedling of *M. x veitchii*, and, while beautiful in flower, it was eclipsed by the age, sheer size and magnificence of the lacebark pine.

On the second day of the trip we awoke to another of many days of picture perfect weather; mild and sunny days and cool evenings—ideal conditions for producing those perfect *Magnolia* flowers on early blooming magnolias. To see magnolias in flower without any



*Magnolia hypoleuca in a street planting near Seoul hotel.*

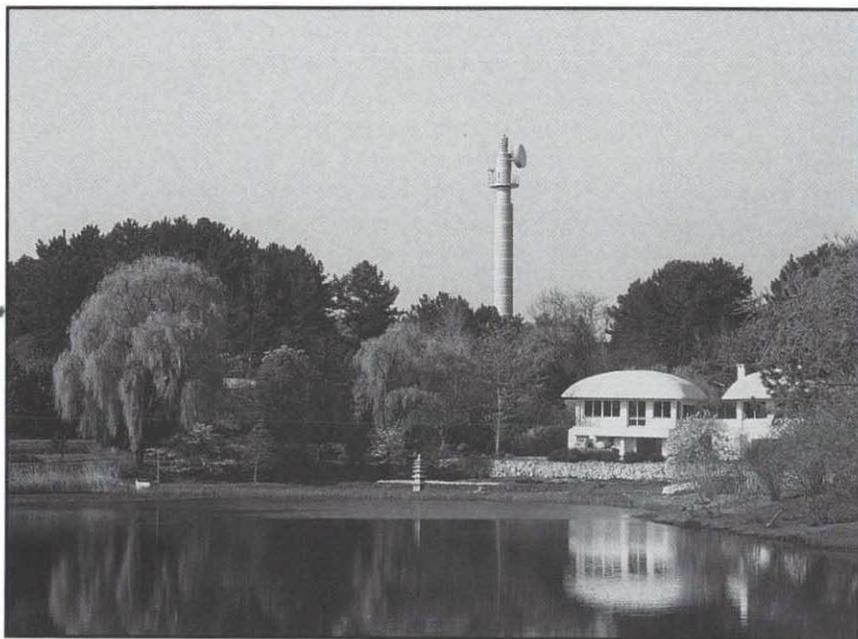


*One of the many buildings within the Changgyong Palace grounds.*

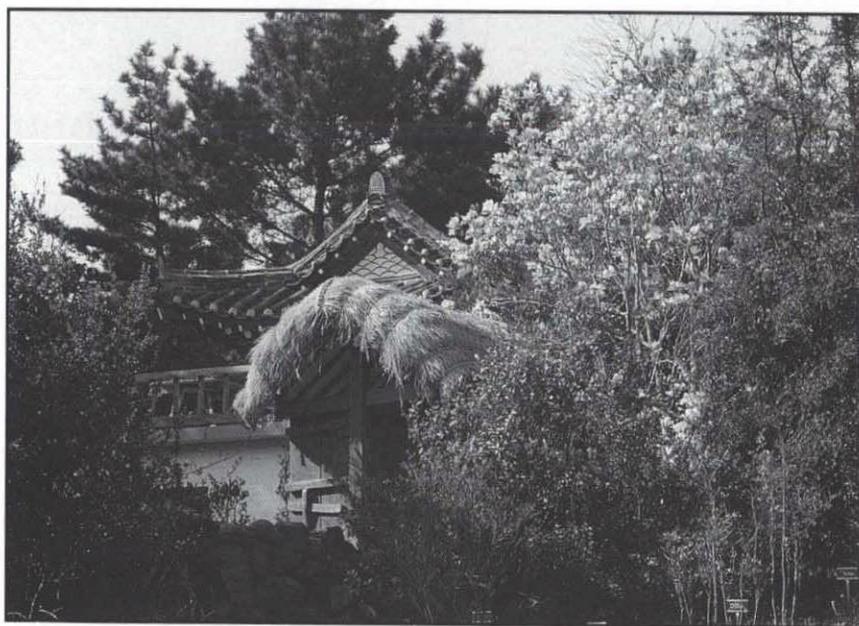
frost, wind, or other climate induced damage is an event that gardeners in most of the north temperate zone will experience maybe once every decade; apparently here it is the norm.

On this day we began another day of discovery, first traveling to the Hongnung Arboretum, a private arboretum north of Seoul. This beautiful hillside garden featured carefully labeled trees and shrubs of interest to everyone. Noteworthy plants included the bright yellow-orange, single flowering *Kerria japonica*, the graceful white flowering *Deutzia koreana* and the related *D. koreana* var. *angustifolia*, a silver foliaged form in full white bloom. In addition, spectacular flowering *Prunus japonica* var. *nakaii* shaded our walk as did *Acanthopanax senticosus*, *Carpinus laxiflora* and *Picrasma quassiodes*, a medicinal plant used to wean children from their mothers. The winding foot trails were punctuated with "fox-holes," army bunkers that remind us that we are about 30 miles from the DMZ. We continued on the forested path planted with luxurious beds of Korean azalea, *Rhododendron mucronulatum*, before arriving into a dreamlike setting in which a hillside of cherries in full flower cast a multitude of drifting petals. This visually intoxicating image beckoned several of the more adventuresome members to continue their trek through more of the garden, no doubt stopping at the topmost portion to admire a *Magnolia liliiflora* in flower, its dark raiment of outer tepals held vertically as though never to reflex.

We left the arboretum with minds fresh with the experience of seeing new plants, many of which were in peak flowering. The next arboretum would take us into the mountains that have up till now been viewed as backdrops for gardens, temples and palaces. There along the road to Kwangnung Arboretum we saw the ubiquitous flowering cherries, particularly *Prunus serrulata* and the purple flowers of the Korean azaleas (*Rhododendron mucronulatum*). When arriving through the gates of the Kwangnung Arboretum one is particularly struck by the stately forestry plots of various trees. These created a tapestry on the mountainsides in hues predominantly in the green, yellow, and pink range. The darkest green was that of *Abies holophylla*. We had an enjoyable lunch beneath a forest of these giants and enjoyed the rarified air sweetened by a pungent balsam. The natural areas resembled the deciduous broad-leaved forests of eastern North America with their canopies of *Quercus acutissima* and vernal ground cover of yellow and green *Hylomocon vernale*, *Iris minutiaurea*, *Cypripedium japonica*, *Viola hirtipes*, *Adonis amurensis*, *Corydalis ambigua*, *C. speciosa*, *Astilbe chinensis* and *Cimicifuga racemosa*. The



*Chollipo Arboretum, the main area with administration building at right.*



*Carpinus House, one of the Korean style houses at Chollipo, with spectacular views of the Yellow Sea and Blue Rock Thrush Island.*

biogeographic connection is one that combines evolution, continental drift and floristics. Important shared genera such as *Magnolia*, common to both Asia and North America have been found to share closely related taxa in two distant continents. We would see an example of this in *Magnolia hypoleuca*, a Korean native, related to *Magnolia tripetala*, an eastern North American species.

This arboretum also had many other botanical treasures. An aquatic and wetland plant collection of "hydrophytic plants," edible and medicinal plant collections planted in raised beds and labeled in Korean and Latin, a garden for the blind with Braille in pressed aluminum, a conifer collection with stone temples and rock sculpture, a rock garden, greenhouses, a flowering shrub collection with an excellent collection of Asian *Prunus* cultivars and other members of the Rosaceae. For the magnoliophile there were beds of seedling *Magnolia kobus*, an excellent place to see seedling variation. Aside from the collections of cultivars, the natural biodiversity of this site can simply be enjoyed by walking the many paths through forestry plots and adjacent forest. There is an excellent publication on this forest with large color photographs of the plants and animals called *The Beautiful Forest of Kwangnung* published in 1996 by the South Korean Forestry Administration, Forestry Research Institute and Chungbu Forest Experiment Station.

22 April

We first visited the upcoming flower festival, at Koynag City, an international affair that involved massive plantings in a rather short period of time. The large trees moved onto the site were one the most fascinating displays; the methodology of mud and burlap wrapped trunks was not the usual methodology employed by western gardeners. We were informed that this helps prevent insect damage to the stressed trees. Judging from the success rate it seems to have worked on the conifers at least.

Following lunch we visited Changgyong-won, site of the Changgyong Palace—the Palace of Glorious Blessings—just to the east of Kyongbokkung Palace. Changgyong Palace was begun in 1405 and later rebuilt in 1611. It was used as the official residence of the Yi kings until 1926. This palace with its high walls and Pison or secret garden was truly a place of wonder and beauty. Large *Zelkova serrata* lined the walks and a lacy canopy of *Acer palmatum* in various shades of green and maroon provided a backdrop for the high walls that partitioned the many "garden rooms" of the palace grounds. Pink, purple and white rhododendrons, yellow weigela (*W.*

*subsessilis*) and *Prunus padus* were flowering in the leafy shade of maples, bamboos and pines. The large koi pond with its ornately carved dragon head fountain reflected the exquisitely set buildings, some of which were cantilevered over the water. After this visual treat we boarded the train for Kyongju, a six hour ride through forest, rice paddies (with rice seedlings in characteristic miniature plastic greenhouses), ginseng fields with long rows of dark shade cloth, and pear orchards in full white flower on mountains slopes.

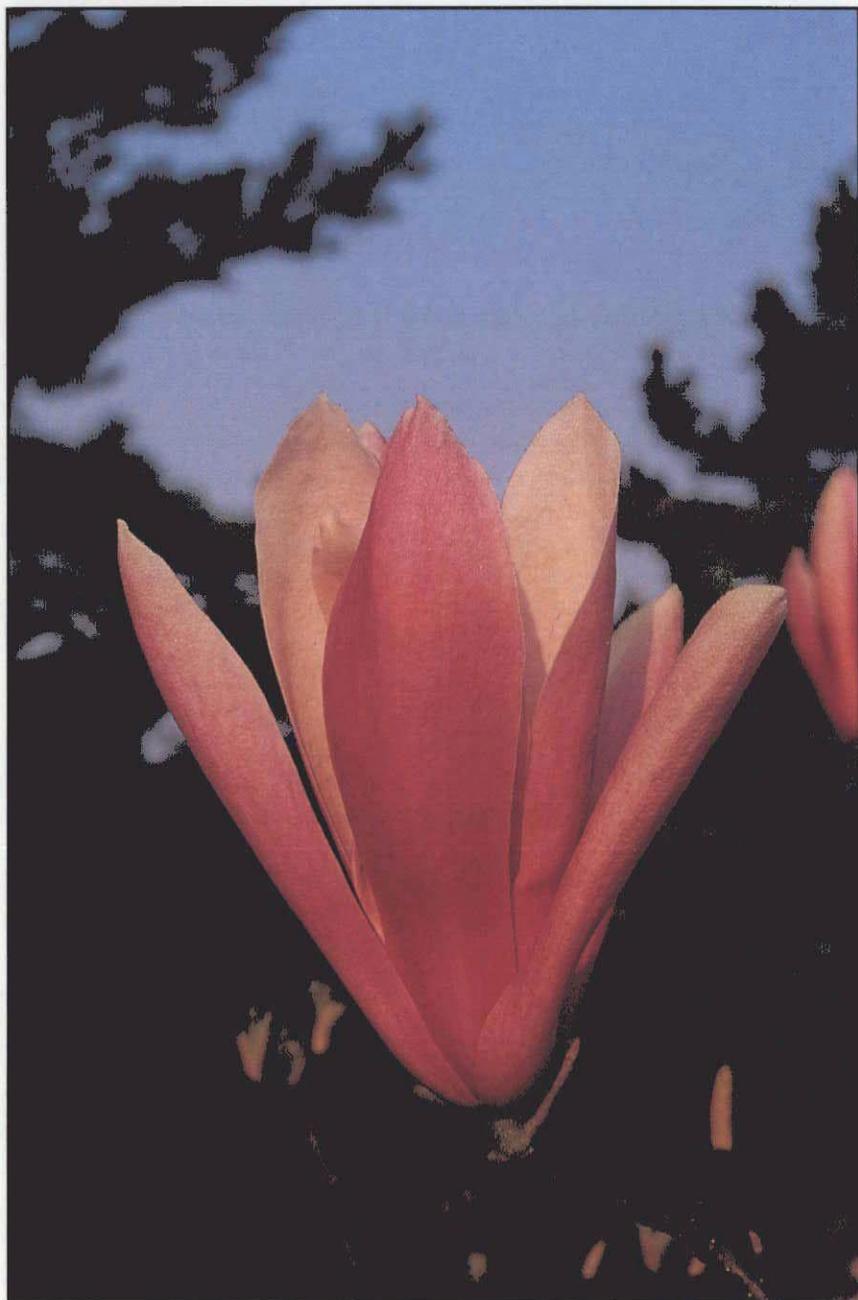
Kyongju is known for its mysterious mound tombs and as a resort town not too far from the Sea of Japan (hence its mild climate). Here we found the cherry trees had already finished flowering and were beginning to leaf out, and later flowering trees such as *Malus* spp. were in peak flower. Our hotel was connected to a nice brick path around lake Pomunho, actually a reservoir, with margins shaded with many beautiful trees. There was however, in contrast to the natural scenic beauty of lake, mountains and sky, an almost Las Vegas effect at night when the neon from nearby resorts was illuminated, and a gaudy view replaced that of the stars.

23 April

After a pleasant morning stroll around Lake Pomunho we drove to the large carved Buddha on the side of the mountain. The drive through the mountains afforded us scenic views of forest slopes full of pink and white cherries—*P. subhirtella* and *P. padus*—and the rocky ravines below. We arrived at the base of a granitic mountain with a Buddhist shrine and large carved Buddha at the summit. As we ascended the mountain, we placed a small pebble on the conical piles of rocks that marked the shrine path. Not for the faint of heart, the walk was somewhat strenuous and the path on the mountain nearest the grotto was precarious. Once near the summit we enjoyed lunch in a lawn dotted with white dandelion (*Taraxacum koraiensis*). Our view encompassed the surrounding oak dominated forest, and our South Korean botanists pointed out some of the common forest trees and shrubs such as *Quercus serrata*, *Q. variabilis*, *Q. dentata*, *Fraxinus sieboldii*, *Castanea crenata*, *Platycarya strobilacea*, *Neolitsea sericea*, and *Lindera obtusiloba*.

Next we headed for Mt Tohamsan and the path to enlightenment. Getting there was a testament to our experienced driver as the road is steep, narrow and winding. Our goal was to hike the mountain path to visit Sokkuram Grotto. During our ascent we saw *M. hypoleuca* growing in the mostly pine forest on the slopes.

The trees were planted along the roads, but they are also native



*'Royal Crown,' one of Gresham's early and early blooming hybrids.  
Magnolia Skyline, Chollipo Arboretum.*



*Magnolia 'Spring Rite,' an early Gresham hybrid of  
M. x soulangiana 'Lennei Alba' x M. x veitchii.*

in this area. After many hairpin turns and close encounters with buses coming down the mountain, Ferris told us that in his youth he hiked to the top to see the sun rise over the Sea of Japan, which could be seen from the top of the trail at the temple. After the bus ride to the parking area Ferris' previous endeavor was to be admired. We would only have to walk less than a mile on a well worn footpath through the *Pinus densiflora* and *Zelkova* that is punctuated with vistas of pine cloaked peaks and the Sea of Japan toward the west. This is a beautiful landscape with continuous forest cover for many miles. The temple is reached after a pleasant walk through pine scented forest. Bamboo and rocks along well worn stairs led to a grotto. There at the foot of Mt. Tohamsan is a small cave and within an exquisite carved seated figure of Buddha. The mystery is further enhanced by the sound of water and scent of incense. The rest must be experienced firsthand.

On the way back to the hotel we visited Tumuli Park and its mounded tombs and the adjacent Chomsongdae observatory. The soft light of late afternoon outlined the mounds in such a way as to make them appear as natural as the row of low hills that framed the western horizon. Of course we found a few magnolias in flower near the observatory. *Magnolia* cf. *liliiflora* is in cultivation on the grounds and these plants are unique in having a nice bushy growth and vertically held tepals with a whitish interior.

24 April

We traveled next to Taejon via Mt. Chirisan National Park and stopped over in the mountains of Chirisan to visit one of the mountain summits where, according to legend, the gods live. We traveled through a variety of landscapes from valleys to mountain peaks, taking in the images of forest, rocks, rice paddies, vegetable fields, villages, waterfalls, rivers and temples. Several plants could be identified as we traveled, several *Quercus* spp., *Rhododendron schlippenbachii*, *Fraxinus sieboldiana*, *Viburnum bitchuense*, *Rubus trifidus*, glades of *Rhododendron mucronulatum* and *Weigela subsessilis*. The forest in the mountains was primarily dominated by oaks and pines. The oak forest was leafless and this allowed for a spring time illumination of the forest floor that was sometimes dominated by *Sasa borealis*, a dwarf bamboo with wide leaves. This was very much like the north American *Arundinaria gigantea* or "canebroke," a native bamboo growing beneath the deciduous trees of floodplains and mesic slopes in southeastern North America.

Certainly some of the most spectacular scenery is found in Mt. Chirisan National Park where we ate lunch and stopped to hike into

the mountains. Another perfect day with full sun and mild temperatures. The river water was clear, cold and turquoise, the largest river rocks thrusting up into the forest, a protruding backbone of undulating granite. This is the archetype for the scroll paintings with all the scenic elements. The water was alive with fish and water ouzles (small brown birds that "swim" underwater with their wings) bobbed through cataracts searching for insect larvae. After enjoying the sound of the mountain torrent we followed a trail of bright lotus flowers to see a Buddhist temple set amid a forest of ancient *Zelkova*. We were shaded along our path by the newly emerging canopy from the dark brown twisting trunks of the *Zelkova* and *Carpinus*. Upon reaching the temple grounds our worldly thoughts were erased, taken from us by the beautiful and mysterious temples being decorated for the day of Buddha's coming. A spectacle of multicolor lotus lamps set amid a ceiling of thousands of lights. If only we could have stayed to see the celebration.

Before leaving the National Park we stopped to hike the summit of Mount Chirisan. Here the trail to the summit was happily punctuated by the purple and pink of flowering rhododendrons. Although cold and windswept, rocky crags and pines protected the flowering of the Korean azalea. Dark clouds rolled around us and showered us in an icy rain mixed with sleet.

On the way down the mountain we stopped by a ravine and saw *Magnolia sieboldii* growing in the wild. Here the plants grew along a forest stream under a canopy of carpinus, birch and pines. There were some beautiful herbaceous spring wildflowers growing between the large boulders where just enough soil formed to allow growth. The remarkable aspect of this forest was the sometimes very dense growth of groundcover bamboo. Sometimes the *Sasa borealis* would create thickets that could be persuaded to yield only when parted by a dedicated human bulldozer. Within this forest the smooth, multicolored trunks and stems of the highly ornate *Stewartia koreana* were not missed. We continued a short hike upstream amongst boulders where the scent of candles and silent prayers were carried up through the ravine, interrupted only by the sound of falling water.

We left the crisp mountain air and resumed our course to Taejon, a stopover on the way to Chollipo Arboretum and our final destination.

April 25

Ferris informed us that the luxury portion of the trip ends and



*Magnolia 'Elizabeth' at Magnolia Hill, Chollipo Arboretum.*

the adventure begins. His beloved Chollipo Arboretum awaits and we are filled with anticipation at seeing one of the garden wonders of the world.

Chollipo is a small fishing and farming village located on the Taeon peninsula (latitude 36 °N) on the west coast of South Korea about 80 miles (130 km) across the Yellow Sea from China. The Chollipo Arboretum is located nearby and consists of several parcels ranging from sand dunes near the sea to pine clad mountains up to 120 m. The arboretum also includes the scenic Nangsae-som or Blue Rock Thrush Island which can only be reached by foot during low tide, and portions of which can be viewed from many parts of the garden.

The location of the arboretum with the moderating effects of the sea and the varied topography afford a variety of life zones and consequently many planting opportunities. Plants hardy in USDA hardiness zones 4-8 do well in the garden as well as those of zone 9 in protected areas. The garden is a fascinating mixture of temperate genera such as *Pinus*, *Betula*, *Quercus*, *Acer*, *Magnolia*, *Tilia* and *Prunus*.

Woody flowering plants are the main emphasis at Chollipo. The arboretum has large collections of magnolias and hollies. The woody plants are labeled and records are kept electronically. It is estimated that there are about 6,000 taxa (including cultivars) in cultivation at the arboretum.

Collection worldwide began in 1973 with emphasis on *Magnolia*, *Ilex*, *Berberis*, *Mahonia*, *Camellia*, *Stewartia*, *Tilia*, Lauraceae, and conifers. Collections of native Korean plants began in 1976. These trips and collections of seeds and plants inspired the Index Seminum, the first of which was presented in 1978 and is still published annually.

TMS came to see the world renown magnolia collections that range from the native *M. sieboldii* to extensive collections of hybrids in the following groups; x *soulangiana*, x *loebneri*, x *veitchii* and Gresham hybrids. The magnolia collections are found in several large garden settings. The main garden has perhaps the oldest plantings with large trees of *M. denudata* and *M. x soulangiana*. The second and largest planting is called *Magnolia Hill*. This is on a slope facing the sea. Fine views of this garden can be made from the Magnolia House, a traditional Korean style house nestled amongst flowering cherries, daffodils and magnolias to the north of the main garden.

The main area of the garden includes the office and garden work buildings. A short climb along the flowering paths leads you to a

beautiful specimen of *Magnolia* 'Spring Rite.' Other notable magnolias in the main area include a fine, tall specimen of *M. dawsoniana*; *M. cylindrica*; and an alleé of *soulangiana* cultivars.

The terrace of Magnolia House affords excellent views of the magnolia collections. Here the magnolia reigns supreme with early flowering types that range from the white of 'Sayonara' to the pink of 'Galaxy,' the salmon of 'Star Wars,' and the yellow of 'Elizabeth.' It must be said that the order of flowering is different at Chollipo from the eastern U.S. and elsewhere. We find unexpected co-flowering of both early and mid-season magnolia cultivars. The effect is magnificent.

The "youngest" of the magnolia gardens is found in a portion of the garden appropriately named "Skyline Magnolias." A steep hike up the low mountain behind the Magnolia House takes one through a forest of *Pinus thunbergii*, *P. densiflora*, *P. parviflora* and *Rhododendron mucronulatum*. One "discovers" the magnolia plantings—in the early morning their flowers seem to float in the sea of pines. Mist fills the valley below while the ridge enjoys the first warmth of the sun. Here, the colors of the yellow and pink flowering cultivars are most vivid, 'Yellow Fever' and 'Royal Crown' live up to their names.

Chollipo is an inspiration to anyone with a love of plants. With the continual addition of new plants, careful documentation and collecting trips, the arboretum is a living library of the horticultural possibilities in South Korea and the temperate garden. It is both scientific and aesthetically pleasing. There are so many beautiful views of plants, mountains and sea, that no justice can be made in this writing to accurately portray the overall sense of floral abundance. The photos included here are only a small part of what TMS experienced during our three days living at Chollipo. It is hoped that this small note and photos will engender a portion of the sense of wonder and delight we experienced during our stay at the arboretum and our trip through South Korea.

Clearly Ferris Miller, Min Pyong-gal, is an extraordinary person, selfless and visionary. His contribution to South Korea is more than the sum of his arboretum which he describes as, "a contribution to my adopted country. I think of it in terms of two hundred years, not twenty-five or thirty years, that the plants be carried on after I die."

Sincere thanks to Ferris for inviting the Magnolia Society to his adopted home and for sharing his world class arboretum with us. ❧