

Magnolia* × *wieseneri

Olav Kalleberg

Magnolia × *wieseneri* (syn. *M.* × *watsonii*) is hybrid of garden origin between *M. sieboldii* and *M. obovata*. This putative hybrid occurred in Japan in the late 1800s and was named *M.* × *watsonii* by J. D. Hooker in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* (117:t. 7157 (1891)). (Hooker named this cross after Mr. William Watson, the Assistant Curator at the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew.) According to Dr. Stephen Spongberg, *M.* × *wieseneri* is the preferred named since Carrière published this plant as *M.* × *wieseneri* on 1 September 1890, which predated Hooker's publication of 1 February 1891. Thus, under the rule of priority of the International code of Botanical Nomenclature, *M.* × *wieseneri* (pronounced *vezneri*) is the proper name for this group. (Ed. note: Dorothy Callaway states in *The World of Magnolias* that this plant was found in the garden of Mr. Wiesener who purchased it as *M. sieboldii* from Mr. Tokaka of Japan.)

Unfortunately, the "trade form" of *M.* × *wieseneri* is often a short-lived tree, somewhat difficult to grow, and hard to propagate. Recently, several new clones of this hybrid have been developed and are currently being propagated in Europe and in the USA. So far, these trials look promising. These clones differ from each other and from the original cross in many ways: stamen color, plant size, color of outer tepals (sometimes pink), flower size, tendency to form single trunk vs. shrub-like, and growth rate. (See the table on the next page for a comparison of the characters for some of the clones discussed in this article.)

Although *M.* × *wieseneri* itself is usually said to be sterile, Sir Peter Smithers has collected seeds from a supposed hybrid between *M.* × *wieseneri* and *M. obovata*. [Johnstone (1955) reported on plants grown from seed of *M.* × *watsonii*]. Two clones are known from this cross: *M.* 'William Watson,' registered by Sir Peter Smithers and Seedling E. *Magnolia* 'William Watson' is a large tree with flowers similar to the flowers of *M.* × *wieseneri*, only somewhat larger. However, the fragrance is very strong and quite like the fragrance of *M.* × *wieseneri*. Also, the flowers from *M.* 'William Watson' are a bit smaller than the flowers from Seedling E.

	Trade Form	William Watson	Seedling E	Aashild Kalleberg	Clone B
outer tepals	occasionally pinkish	pink	white	white/pink	white
stamens	crimson, prominent	yellow	yellow	dark red	light red
flowers	20cm	20cm	20cm+	20-25cm	20cm+
fragrance	excellent	excellent	unknown	excellent	excellent
form	shrub	large tree	tree	large shrub	large shrub
growth habit	weak, difficult to establish	very fast	very fast	good doer	good doer
flowering attributes	medium	medium	medium	very floriferous	floriferous
leaves	smaller than other clones	large	large	very large	large
height	4-8m	10-15m	10m	6m+	6m+

Note:

Polly Hill reported on a self-fertile *M. × wieseneri* (1986, *Magnolia*, Journal of the Magnolia Society, Vol. XXII, No. 1), however that plant was later found to be *M. obovata*.

In the new clones discussed in this article, the variation in characters of these hybrids may have something to do with which species is the seed or pollen parent, *M. obovata* or *M. sieboldii*. My observations indicate that if the female parent is *M. obovata* and the male parent is *M. sieboldii*, the seedlings are more vigorous and more tree-like (with a single trunk) than if the reverse cross is made. Also, if *M. obovata* is the female parent, the flowers and the leaves are often larger and sometimes the outer tepals of *M. × wieseneri* are more or less tinged red or pink. This latter trait is picked up from the *M. obovata* parent, but apparently is not dependent on the male/female roles of the parents.

The two Scandinavian *M. × wieseneri* crosses, *M.* 'Aashild Kalleberg' (named after my wife, Åshild Kalleberg and registered in 1995) and Clone B (bred by Stefan Mattson of Sweden, not registered, but being propagated) are both seedlings from a hardy form of *M. obovata* from northern Japan. In each case, the only other magnolia in the vicinity of the *M. obovata* parents was *M. sieboldii*. Thus, it is assumed that 'Aashild Kalleberg' and Clone B are both putative hybrids with *M. sieboldii* as the male parent. Most importantly, the Scandinavian clones, 'Aashild Kalleberg' and Clone B, not only display superior flowering attributes, but they are easier to propagate and



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LENNARTH JONSSON

Top: *M.* 'Aashild Kalleberg' (named after my wife, Åshild Kalleberg).

Bottom: Clone B, which was bred by Stefan Mattson of Sweden.

Both of these seedlings are from a hardy form of *M. obovata* from northern Japan.

establish in our Northern European climate than the original trade form of *M. × wieseneri*, which has been available in Europe for over 100 years.

Though these new *M. × wieseneri* hybrids show promise for horticulture, perhaps even better clones may be possible by selecting the best possible parents. According to Dr. August E. Kehr and Lennarth Jonsson, all magnolia pollen may be somewhat fertile even if the mother plant does not set seed. Thus, crosses may be possible if the conditions are favorable (that is, high temperatures, receptive stigmas, etc.). Therefore, it may be possible to use *M. × wieseneri* as a pollen parent in a cross with *M. sieboldii* 'Colossus,' which is hexaploid, $2n = 6$, due to colchicine treatment. The resulting hybrid could be interesting: ('Colossus' is August Kehr's number R 15-3 that produces semi-double flowers of great substance. It is highly floriferous, and fertile—see front cover photo.) Breeding *M.* 'Colossus' with *M. obovata* (especially the hardier forms) might also produce interesting and desirable hybrids. From either cross, the progeny would all be tetraploid ($2n = 4$). If colchicine were used on such seedlings, they would become octoploid ($2n = 8$). However, Kehr reports that ploidy greater than $2n = 6$ would not improve the performance for *M. sieboldii*. Thus, it's probable that such treatment would produce no improvements in

the performance of *M. × wieseneri*, either.

Polyploids have proved to be more vigorous than diploids. It is still not known whether *M. sieboldii* 'Colossus' is more drought tolerant than ordinary *M. sieboldii*, but if it is, this would be another reason to involve it with future crosses. We already know that *M. 'Colossus'* transplants well and bears considerably larger flowers over a longer period than *M. sieboldii*. Thus, I am very interested in seeing *M. 'Colossus'* used in cultivation and in further breeding trials.

Other *M. sieboldii* cultivars worthy of consideration for further breeding work are:

- 'Harold Epstein,' which has as many as 36 tepals.
- 'White Flounces,' which has 16-24 tepals (selected by Harry Heineman of Scituate, MA and probably a seedling of 'Harold Epstein').
- *M. sieboldii* var. *japonica*.
- 'Michiko Renge,' which has 15 tepals, or more.
- 'Kwanso,' which has 22 tepals and is not available, as far as I can tell.

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M. 'William Watson,' registered by Sir Peter Smithers.

- 'White Ruffles,' perhaps a misspelling by Eisenhut, probably 'White Flounces.'
- 'Pink Tipped Form' (a plant growing in a habitat some distance from Chollipo Arboretum. The pink tipped tepal character is said to come true from seed).

Also, perhaps *M. tripetala* still has a role to play in breeding with *M. × wieseneri*. August Kehr has used *M. tripetala* in crosses to make *M. × wieseneri* grow more vigorously in a hot and dry climate.

Finally, I would like to recommend that all crosses be recorded with the names of both the female and male parent. This will provide valuable information for plant breeders and hobbyists as they continue to develop plants. 🌸🌿