

## **The Heineman Magnolia Collection**

Stefan Cover

Harry Heineman has been growing magnolias in Scituate, Massachusetts (U.S.A.) since 1965. His collection is now just over 40 years old and it is the most important collection of magnolias in New England. The collection's recent 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Harry's 86<sup>th</sup> birthday seem an appropriate point to describe the collection and summarize some of what Harry has accomplished while growing magnolias over such a long period.

Harry's "Damascus Road" experience that triggered his conversion from "normality" to a life spent among the magnolias was the entrancing sight of a large *Magnolia obovata* in full bloom at the Arnold Arboretum about 1962. Growing magnolias had to wait, however, until 1965 when Harry and his first wife, Judy, moved from Beacon Hill, Boston to his present 8½ acre property in Scituate, south of Boston. This was a fortunate choice for many reasons, not the least of which was that the Scituate property provided Harry ample space to plant trees in one of the best climates in New England for growing Magnolias.

Scituate [42°11.62'N, 70°47.19'W, elevation 140ft (43m)] is located on the Atlantic coast and the garden is about 3½ miles (5.6 km) from the ocean. This proximity moderates the cold continental climate that would otherwise prevail this far north in the eastern United States. Harry is located in USDA zone 6b, with winter temperatures seldom lower than 0°F (-18°C). He averages about 41in (104cm) of rain a year, usually well distributed throughout the seasons, but with occasional summer droughts. His soils are sandy, acid, generally well-drained, and of moderate fertility. These conditions favor the growth of a broad range of magnolias, as well as many other temperate woody plants. The first magnolia planted at Harry's new home was a seedling of *Magnolia grandiflora*. From this modest beginning, planting followed in earnest in the 1960s and 1970s, and has continued to this day because Harry has never lost the urge to see new magnolias flower in the garden.



Harry with *Magnolia* 'Manchu Fan'

In the Heineman collection, the magnolia year begins with the flowering of *Magnolia zenii*, a 30ft (9.1m) tall, narrow upright tree obtained from the original distribution of rooted cuttings by the Arnold Arboretum in 1984. This is a truly unique magnolia that deserves much wider planting. Harry's tree flowers as early as the last week of March, always well before other magnolias. The white, fragrant, flowers, about 4in (10cm) in diameter, have a basal pink flare and sit upright on the branchlets. The flowers are a memorable sight against the dark background of leafless trees in a still somber and wintry landscape. Recently, a *Magnolia biondii*, grown from seed purchased from the China National Tree Seed Corporation in 1996, has begun to flower at about the same time. Another supposed *M. biondii*, purchased from a nursery, looks to be a *M. salicifolia* × *M. stellata* cross of some type and flowers later.

The next burst of activity arrives in mid-April with the flowering of *M. kobus*, *stellata*, *salicifolia*, and

their hybrids. Harry has mature specimens of *stellata* 'Centennial,' × *lobneri* 'Ballerina,' and × *lobneri* 'Leonard Messel,' and a smaller plant of *M. stellata* 'Royal Star.' He also has an attractive *M. kobus* var. *borealis*, grown from seed obtained from Harold Hopkins. There are very large plants of 'Wada's Memory' and 'Merrill' growing under forest conditions that demonstrate how both plants may become canopy trees given time and the right conditions.

Other important early to mid-season bloomers include *M. 'Pegasus'* (obtained from Gossler Farms in 1976) and a stunning *M. 'Forrest's Pink,'* imported from England (Treseder's Nursery) in the 1970s.





*Magnolia* 'Manchu Fan'

Nearby the 'Forrest's Pink' is an *M.* 'Paul Cook,' whose flowers Harry rates highly for their large size and good soft pink color. Another spectacular early to mid-season bloomer is *M. sprengeri* 'Diva,' now a robust tree about 35ft (10.6m) tall. The sight of Harry's 'Diva' in full bloom provided the setting for my own "Damascus Road" experience in 1996. The occasion was an Arnold Arboretum sponsored tour of Harry's Magnolia collection. There I met Harry for the first time and stood transfixed before his 'Diva.' As friends and family will testify, I've never been quite the same since. In New England, 'Diva' is fully hardy in zone 6b, but problematic in colder areas. This contrasts with reports from Michigan that indicate that it will grow successfully in USDA zone 5b.

Other forms of *M. sprengeri* do reasonably well in Scituate. 'Burncoose' is now 20ft (6.1m) tall, but has not yet bloomed. 'Eric Savill,' a great favorite of Harry's, is about 18ft (5.5m) tall and the flowers are magnificent in good years. Unfortunately, the flower buds rot in cold, wet winters and some years there is no display. Just this year (2006), the tree has begun to fail from unknown causes. Based on foliage characteristics, Harry thinks that 'Eric Savill' may be a hybrid with *M. dawsoniana*. Speaking of which, *M. dawsoniana* 'Strybing' has thrived in Scituate. Harry's tree is now about 25ft (7.6m) tall and is the northernmost plant of this species in the eastern US as



*Magnolia* 'Manchu Fan'

far as we know. It has distinctive, leathery, dark-green foliage and an attractive rounded crown. Planted in 1986, it is now setting large numbers of flower buds. This species should be tried more widely in cool temperate climates. Harry also has a small plant of *M. dawsoniana* 'Valley Splendor,' and two somewhat larger 'Chyverton Red' that are growing well, but have not flowered yet.

Another unusual plant in the collection is *M. × veitchii* 'Peter Veitch.' Planted next to the house, it may have benefited from its protection when young, but it now is about 30ft (9.1m) tall and towers well above it. It blooms faithfully every year, but usually does not set seeds. Blooming about the same time are several *M. × soulangeana*. Harry has mature plants of 'Lennei Alba,' 'Lilliputian,' 'Grace McDade,' 'Wada's Picture,' and an ordinary trade clone—and is not much impressed by any of them. He much prefers the Gresham hybrids, which grow well in Scituate and are mid-season bloomers there. Good performers include 'Full Eclipse,' 'Royal Crown,' 'Manchu Fan,' 'David Clulow,' 'Frank Gladney,' and 'Jon Jon.' Of these, 'Full Eclipse' has become a narrow, upright tree about 35ft (10.7m) tall that puts on a fine show of attractive red-pink blooms every spring. 'Manchu Fan' remained small for many years, but recently began to grow strongly. The white blooms are not enormous but are a beautiful creamy white and sit upright on the branchlets.





*Magnolia* 'March 'til Frost'

'David Clulow' is growing vigorously and has just begun to bloom. Harry and I are entranced by the large, elegant, white flowers. Mid-season bloomers include 'Galaxy' and 'Spectrum,' both of which are making sizable upright trees. Harry and I squabble about their relative merits. Harry strongly prefers the larger, more reddish blooms of 'Spectrum,' which are indeed spectacular, especially when backlit. Nonetheless, I prefer the blooms of 'Galaxy' because the color is more natural looking under all circumstances, and because it forms a more attractive tree. Promising new mid-season plants include: 'Coral Lake' (Harry likes it; I do not), 'Åashild Kalleberg,' 'Pickard's Schmetterling,' and 'Caerhay's Belle.'

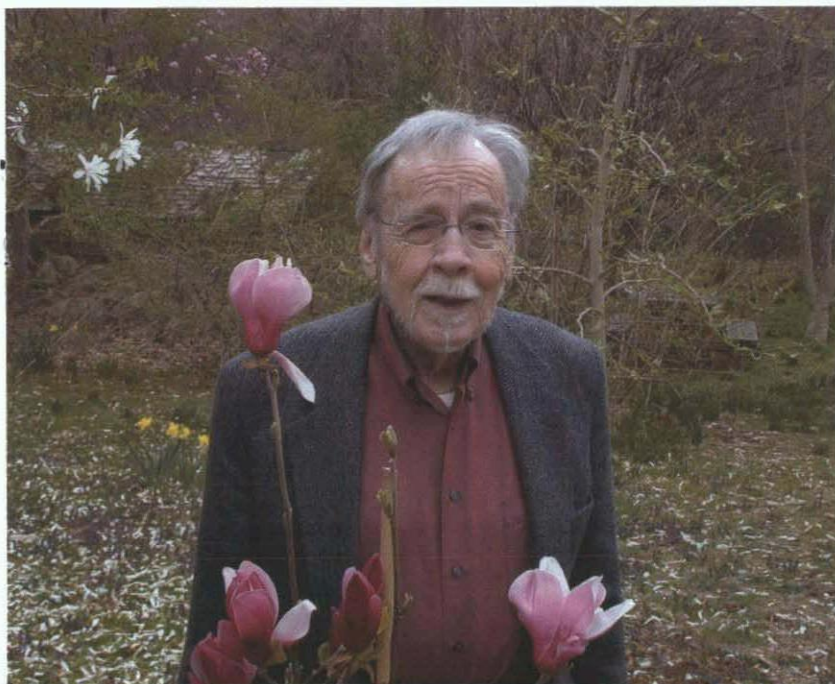
Leading the list of disappointments are the more tender Asiatics: *M. campbellii*, *M. campbellii* var. *mollicomata*, and *M. sargentiana* var. *robusta*. Harry has tried them repeatedly but the pattern is always the same. They survive mild winters and grow well enough to encourage hope, but the first really cold winter cripples the plant or kills it outright. Another heartbreak was *M.* 'Starwars,' which grew to 14ft (4.3m) tall, bloomed gloriously, and then was killed by a record low temperature of  $-8^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-22^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). The much-promoted Jury hybrids have likewise been marginal so far. 'Iolanthe' has remained modest in size but does flower every year. Harry finds the blooms to be inferior to those of *M.* 'Paul Cook,' the flowers of which are somewhat similar in size and color. 'Serene' survives but has not bloomed well.

'Vulcan' produced spectacular flowers in the greenhouse, but when planted outside lingered miserably for several years before expiring. Small plants of 'Apollo' and 'Athene' were planted last year, so the quest to grow the Jury hybrids continues. Another vexation was *M. 'Daybreak'*. Harry obtained a plant directly from the late Augie Kehr, who inadvertently sent the wrong thing. While the identity of the impostor is uncertain, its red-purple flowers and weak growth form are much inferior to those of the true 'Daybreak.' The real thing was finally planted in spring 2005, but has not bloomed yet.

The later flowering season commences with *Magnolia acuminata* and its hybrids. Harry has two typical *M. acuminata* grown from Arnold Arboretum seed. One is remarkable for its late flowering, its neat foliage, and its seed cones that are a bright white before ripening. There is also a *M. acuminata* var. *subcordata* 'Miss Honeybee,' and a cross between typical *M. acuminata* and the variety *subcordata*, grown from seed sent to Harry by Joe McDaniel. It is an impressive, 40ft (12.2m) tall, upright tree with mostly yellow flowers. Curiously, Harry has been relatively immune to the craze for yellow-flowering *Magnolia* hybrids that began with the introduction of 'Elizabeth' about 25 years ago. He has a 'Yellow Fever,' a 'Sunburst,' a 'Golden Goblet,' and a plant that may be 'Butterflies' (sold to him as *M. amoena*!). All have grown well, and Harry likes the flowers well enough, but yellow *Magnolias* plainly do not inspire him the way they inspire many others.

Bigleaf *Magnolias*, *Magnolia sieboldii*, *M. virginiana*, and *Magnolia grandiflora* conclude the flowering year. All the bigleaf *Magnolias* grow well in Scituate, but the most notable specimen is a fine *M. officinalis*, about 30ft (9.1m) tall, growing at a forest edge. The plant has particularly large, elegant flowers that have a musty floral scent that reminds one of *M. tripetala*—perhaps it is an *officinalis*  $\times$  *tripetala* hybrid. Speaking of which, two *M. tripetala* in the collection are also remarkable. One is a seedling of the old Phil Savage cultivar 'Bloomfield.' This tree has all the characteristics of the 'Bloomfield' parent: above average vigor, a single-trunk habit, larger than normal leaves, larger flowers, and enormous nodding to pendant white seed cones ripening slowly to a delicate light pink. The other *tripetala* (which I call "Petite") is smaller than normal in all its parts, and in particular has small upright seed cones that turn a vivid deep rose red when ripe. Both forms are very beautiful and come true from seed. In addition, Harry has a sizable *M. obovata* with a broad crown and enormous, lurid red, pendant seed cones that are sometimes so heavy that they break off the plant before ripening. I call it *M. obovata* "Godzilla," but no one else does.





Harry with *Magnolia* 'March 'til Frost'

The last magnolias to bloom at Harry's are *M. grandiflora* and *M. virginiana*. Harry is not much interested in *M. virginiana*, and he has only one, a seedling of the old Joe McDaniel cultivar 'Havener'—a small, single-trunk tree with nice foliage and flowers.

He is much more interested in *M. grandiflora* and has several, including arguably the hardiest clone discovered to date: 'Bracken's Brown Beauty.' While all grow and flower, they often suffer leaf scorch and minor branch death in bad winters. Sometimes it takes 2–3 years for the plants to fully recover and look normal again. Given the mildness of Harry's climate, this is a cautionary tale for those who hope to grow this plant in USDA zone 6a or colder.

Harry says that his goal was always to have a beautiful garden and that he never intended to become a *Magnolia* breeder. That said, he has done some hybridizing, and he has always kept a sharp eye out for outstanding plants arising from seed. He has registered several important cultivars. *Magnolia* 'Ultimate Yellow' [*M. acuminata* × (*M.* × *brooklynensis*)] is an excellent late-flowering yellow, somewhat reminiscent of the better-known 'Yellow Bird.' Like that plant, it forms a narrow, upright tree that flowers as the leaves emerge, but the flowers and foliage are different. In 'Ultimate Yellow,' the blooms are 6in (15cm) in diameter, have six elongate tepals, and are a good medium yellow with a bit of green on the outsides of the outer three tepals; the flowers of 'Yellow Bird' are shorter, more acuminate-like, and lack the basal green when fully open. In addition, the



*Magnolia* 'Ultimate Yellow'

foliage of 'Yellow Bird' resembles the typical northern form of *M. acuminata*, while that of 'Ultimate Yellow' looks more like a *M. × brooklynensis* hybrid. Another outstanding plant is *M. × loebneri* 'Donna,' an open-pollinated seedling of *M. stellata*. It forms a large shrub and has 6in- (15cm-) diameter white flowers of outstanding elegance. Widely recognized as a superior clone, 'Donna' was awarded a First Class Certificate from the Royal Horticultural Society in 2001. The plant thrives at Harry's, but I've had trouble with it in my garden in Stow, MA. (USDA zone 5b), where the flower buds are often killed in cold winters. Another much admired cultivar developed by Harry is *M. sieboldii* 'White Flounces'. The flowers are of good size, open flat, and have extra tepals that often take the form of shorter red-tipped "petaloids" at the center of the flower. Several other plants are in the pipeline. One is an *M. grandiflora* with flowers that retain their bowl shape that Harry intends to call 'Dionysus' Bowl' (of all

things). A more exceptional plant, in my opinion, is a marvelous *M. denudata* with large, ivory-white, globular flowers to be called 'Shining Sphere.' Harry has also hybridized *M. kobus* × *M. liliiflora* 'Nigra' to produce a plant that has white flowers with a strong basal dark red stain that look nothing like the well-known red-purple flowers of *M. 'Marilyn'*, a plant with the same parentage. This year (2006) two 'Pegasus' × [*M. × veitchii*] hybrids bred by Harry have bloomed, both producing elegant, upright white flowers on what will certainly become large trees. Harry seems unimpressed, but I like both of them a lot.



With advancing age, Harry's thoughts have turned naturally towards preserving his *Magnolia* collection after he is gone—a dilemma that will confront most of us sooner or later. Preserving private gardens is by no means an easy task in this country, where interest in horticulture is modest at best and public funds are not available for this purpose. The problem is especially acute for small, private gardens. In the U.S., existing preservation efforts are funded and managed largely by the wealthy and their efforts are directed primarily towards large estate gardens and "historically significant gardens," that is, gardens associated with rich and famous people. In large part, this reflects the interests of the patrons, but it also reflects the lack of practical means for preserving small gardens and making them economically self-sustaining. After exploring several options, Harry has decided to leave the property directly to his three children, who have expressed a strong interest in keeping it within the family.

Perhaps the most important thing I have learned from Harry as a *Magnolia* grower is to never cease obtaining and growing new plants, no matter how often so-called human reason tells you to stop and be satisfied with what you have. Yes, space may be limited (or even non-existent), one is growing older at an alarming rate, and chances are we may never live to see the *Magnolia* bloom. Nonetheless, get that plant, find a spot, and put it in the ground anyway! In case we haven't noticed yet, life isn't about making sense. It's more like a wild ride in the back seat of a bus driven by some lunatic who ignores our suggestions (and our screams). One never knows when the bus will stop (or crash!) and the ride will be over. Meanwhile, let's see as many *Magnolias* bloom as we can!

*All photographs were taken by Stefan Cover in Harry's garden, which is located in Scituate, MA.*