

A Note About Mr. Seiju Yamaguchi and *Magnolia stellata* 'Hirai Beni'

Barry Yinger

In the most recent Journal, Dr. Paul Capiello wrote about his meeting with Mr. Seiju Yamaguchi, the man who single-handedly organized a movement to preserve important native stands of *Magnolia stellata* in Gifu Prefecture, Japan. Most remarkably, he forced the Toyota Motor Company to abandon its plan to develop the area into a vacation resort for its employees. In those days it was unheard of that an industrial giant in Japan would bow to public pressure to change its plans to preserve nature. I am proud to say that the letter-writing campaign I set in motion with our society was probably the most important factor in this example of grass-roots conservation action.

The native stands of *Magnolia stellata* that I saw in Gifu were an extraordinary sight. Thickets of small trees were arranged around a swampy area populated by other rarely-seen woody plants, such as large colonies of *Ilex geniculata*. One of the surprising features of this wild population of magnolias is that the population is a mix of both white-flowered and pink-flowered trees. It is a splendid sight in bloom. I can't think of any other species of magnolia that grows in colonies with mixed flower color in the wild.

Several years ago Mr. Yamaguchi gave me a grafted plant from a pink-flowered plant that he had selected from a group of seedlings grown from wild-collected seed. I kept it here in Pennsylvania in a container until the summer of 2008 when I planted it in the garden. This year it flowered for the first time.

The flowers of the pink form of *Magnolia stellata* in the wild are pale pink. I was surprised to see that the flowers of *M. stellata* 'Hirai Beni' (Hirai red) are deep pink with a touch of red at the base of each tepal. Otherwise the flowers are typical of the species.

This note is not intended to serve as registration of this variety. If Mr. Yamaguchi wishes to register the variety, I will help him submit the necessary documentation. Please do not contact me or Mr. Yamaguchi for propagating material of this variety. Mr. Yamaguchi will decide when and how he wants to distribute this plant.