

Collection Profile

Magnolia Collection at The Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College

Rhoda Marer

The Scott Arboretum is a garden of ideas and suggestions. While the Arboretum encompasses more than 300 acres of the Swarthmore College campus, our major collections, consisting of over 2,000 living woody taxa, are concentrated on 110 acres at the heart of the college campus. The Arboretum is a living memorial to Arthur Hoyt Scott (Swarthmore class of 1895), President of the Scott Paper Company and an avid gardener who believed there were too few public gardens for the amateur horticulturist. Through a bequest from Arthur Hoyt Scott's family, the Arboretum was formed in 1929 to display some of the best trees, shrubs, vines, and perennials for use in the Delaware Valley.

The Arboretum's collections and gardens are uniquely set amidst a busy college campus. Swarthmore College is a small, highly selective college of liberal arts and engineering with a student population of approximately 1,300. Founded as a coeducational institution in 1864 by members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), it is non-sectarian but still reflects many Quaker traditions and values. Swarthmore is considered by academicians to be among the best liberal arts colleges in the country.

The Scott Arboretum is located approximately 15 miles southwest of Philadelphia in USDA zone 7A/7B. On average, annual rainfall approaches 43 inches, seasonal snowfall averages just over 20 inches and the last frost date in spring is approximately April 25, although it is not uncommon for there to be a devastating frost through May 15.

The Magnolia Collection

Since the establishment of the Arboretum, the collection has acquired over 448 accessions with 1776 individual plants of the genus *Magnolia*. Currently



Magnolia BBGRC1164. Introduced by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden



Magnolia 'Betty'. One of the eight Little Girl hybrids introduced by the U. S. National Arboretum

our collection consists of 179 individuals of 103 taxa with 45 species concentrated in the Magnolia Collection and Tree Peony Garden.

North American Plant Collections Consortium (NAPCC) status was awarded to The Scott Arboretum's Magnolia Collection in September of 2003. This is the second NAPCC collection for the Arboretum; its Holly Collection was awarded NAPCC status in 1995. Within the genus *Magnolia*, the Arboretum's holdings consist of significant collections of yellow and *Magnolia xsoulangiana* hybrids in addition to original distributions of the Little Girl hybrids (*Magnolia stellata* x *M. liliflora* crosses made by William F. Kosar) introduced by the U. S. National Arboretum. A recent visit by Philippe de Spoelberch (owner of Herkenrode and a Magnolia Society member) in 2003 confirmed that many of the *M. xsoulangiana* hybrids that are often confused in the trade are correctly named in the Arboretum's collection. Dr. John C. Wister, the first director of the

Arboretum, acquired many of these first additions to the collection from B. H. Slavin, Arthur Slavin, Semmes Nursery, J. Norman Henry, Henry Hicks, Bobbink & Atkins, Tingle Nursery, and Ben Blackburn.

Many of the first yellow hybrids to be introduced to the trade are represented, including *Magnolia* 'Elizabeth', *M.* 'Yellow Bird' and *M.* 'Butterflies'. However, many newer introductions have also been consistently acquired through ongoing curation of sub-groups, including many of the American hybrids from August Kehr, David Leach, and Phil Savage. Through a friendship between Pat McCracken and Ian Simpkins (curatorial intern 1997-1998), the Arboretum acquired the following yellow hybrids: *M.* 'Hot Flash', *M.* 'Tranquility', *M.* 'Solar Flair', *M.* 'Sunburst', *M.* 'Gold Crown', *M.* 'Golden Endeavor', *M.* 'Gold Cup', and *M.* 'Stellar Acclaim'. More recent Brooklyn Botanic Garden introductions, *Magnolia* 'Lois', *M.*

'Hattie Carthan', and *M.* (BBGRC 1164), are also included in the collection.

Dr. Wister acquired many magnolias from Henry Hicks of Hicks Nursery in Westbury, New York. During the Magnolia Society's visit in 1971, one particular *Magnolia virginiana* received in 1937 caused quite a stir. This evergreen specimen was later introduced by the Scott Arboretum as *M. virginiana* var. *australis* 'Henry Hicks'; the type specimen still resides in the Magnolia Collection.

Goals for the Collection and Plans for the Future

Through institutional and staff dedication and collaborations, the Arboretum has been able to continually diversify its collection over the years. The Arboretum hopes to represent superior specimens including those with best flower color, frost tolerance, and later bloom time suited for the climate of the Delaware Valley while focusing on yellow hybrids, saucer magnolias, significant selection of species, and American natives. Ultimately, the Arboretum anticipates holding 250 taxa with final numbers only dependent upon space limitations. The Arboretum has an open policy for botanical gardens and nurseries with permission to propagate holdings in hopes its collections will serve as a

germplasm for other collections. It is also hoped that other important collections are awarded NAPCC status and that collaborations are established to ensure breadth in holdings of the genus *Magnolia* across the country.

To accomplish these goals, the Arboretum plans to curate sub-groups of the collection on a rotational basis. Currently, curation of the American natives is being implemented with a re-evaluation of the saucer magnolias due by the end of 2004. During 2004–2005, exotic species of the genus and selections of *Magnolia stellata*, *M. kobus* and *M. xloebneri* will be evaluated. During 2005–2006, a re-assessment of the yellow hybrids and other August Kehr hybrids will be completed. Digital images of each specimen in the collection will be linked to the plant records database for documentation and educational purposes. Plant records information will be posted on the web by the end of 2003, making our taxa list available to a broader range of professionals.

To reach amateur gardeners with information about the collection, the Arboretum conducts workshops on specific genera. Well-attended seasonal tours led by staff members in April and May focus on the Magnolia and Cherry Collections. A feature on our collection



Magnolia x soulangiana

appeared on *Martha Stewart Living* in May 2003, and currently, staff appearances on local television are being scheduled for spring. Free brochures provided to visitors are updated every winter and immediate goals include adding computer-generated maps. Future goals also include acquiring a visitor's computer station where plant records data, maps, and hardiness information are available.

A member since 1963, the Arboretum is dedicated to continued staff involvement with the International Magnolia Society both locally and internationally. Current Arboretum staff members have attended Magnolia Society meetings in New Zealand and South Korea and look forward to hosting the Society during its visit to Philadelphia in 2004.

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Magnolia collection behind grove of *Catalpa speciosa* (photo from Scott Arboretum archives)