

Magnolias for the Heart
Part Three

By Kim Smith

Perhaps you recall last week's article, part two of this series on magnolias, about *Magnolia virginiana* and *M. stellata*. I ran out of space and would be remiss by not providing a few more details regarding *M. virginiana*. The first photo is of *M. virginiana* 'Jim Wilson's Moonglow.' Developed by Earl Cully at the grounds of his arboretum, located in Illinois, where it has withstood temperatures of minus 35 degrees, 'Moonglow' is a hardier cultivar than the species. As you can see from the photograph, which was taken in mid-January, our 'Moonglow' has yet to drop its leaves. With its ability to adapt to a wide variety of soils, capacity to grow several feet annually, cold-hardiness, semi-evergreen foliage, and long-lasting fragrant floral display, I highly recommend 'Moonglow.' This small- to medium-sized tree is ideal for city streets and parks, for creating an intimate garden room, and especially for the wild garden designed to attract pollinators—the leaves are a larval host plant for the Easter Tiger Swallowtail!

The second photo accompanying this article is of a blossom from my most prized magnolia. I won't reveal which species just yet and if you are an experienced plants person you probably will guess immediately. I say prized because you cannot imagine the extremes I went to procure this fabulous tree. Regular readers know that our lot is nothing more than a postage stamp of a garden, albeit lavishly planted. I simply cannot cram one more plant, especially a tree or shrub, without seriously jeopardizing the health of its neighbor, and have had to do some hard editing recently. If a plant is truly one that I cannot live without then another must be carefully removed (so as not to damage its very close companions) and passed along. While scouting plants for a client last spring I was perusing my favorite wholesale nursery, with its acres of gorgeous, healthy and highly tempting stock of trees, shrubs, vines, and perennials. The fragrance emanating from a large bank of shrubs stopped me dead in my pursuit and beckoned I draw near. What was creating this riot of scent? Tipped askew on their enormous rootballs, and haphazardly thrown in with a row of ordinary viburnums, were two unusual looking, although quite attractive, multi-stemmed small trees. The lily-white nodding cupped-shaped flowers emitted all at once a penetratingly sweet honeysuckle and fresh citrus fragrance—really one of the most beautiful scents imaginable.

Much to my disappointment, both were unmistakably tagged—McCormick. Hmmm, I took a closer look at the flowers. They looked almost exactly like photographs I had seen of the Japanese Oyama magnolia, only the stamens were pale rose pink, shading to light green, not the striking ruby red. I liked the plant even more. I plucked a blossom (very bad) and then after taking care of business, circled back around to have another look and smell, and to convince myself that, of course, the massive six-foot-in-diameter rootball was too unwieldy to transport and why waste my time as it was already sold. That exercise proved unsuccessful. Back at the sales office, they told me yes, it was indeed spoken for, very unusual for them to be in possession of, no more were available, and that was that.

Over the next month I thought of all sorts of reasons why I needed to return to the nursery (it is not close by). One tree departed; McCormick would surely return for the other. After my third visit and third inquiry—I was truly smitten—although now the foliage was looking a bit tattered and there were no more blossoms. Could fortune be looking my way? Unless you truly knew what a treasure to possess, you might decide against. I wrote a long letter to the president of the company and begged to be next in line. Meanwhile, I found a description of the tree. The *Magnolia sieboldii* subsp. *japonica* bear the very fragrant flowers with paler pink stamens, as opposed to the *M. sieboldii* subsp. *sieboldii* with the magenta stamens. The Oyama magnolia is often planted in Japanese tea gardens to afford the viewer a look up into the pendulous flowers while seated during the tea ceremony. Several days later came the response from my letter. The two trees had been mistakenly shipped to their nursery, someone from their suppliers had thought they were digging viburnums, and the remaining one was mine if I liked.

The very next day I borrowed my husband's Scion, with what I thought had adequate room in the rear cargo area. Arriving at the growers bright and early, I was immediately informed, "Lady, this tree has a 500-pound rootball. Your husband's truck is going to be literally dragging on the ground." I am accustomed to purchasing whips and small trees and shrubs up to six feet or so; anything larger is delivered by truck and I was beyond their delivery range. To make a long story short, I rented a truck, took orders from friends and clients for additional trees and shrubs, delivered all, and had to hire three men to drop the tree into the center of the crater we all took turns digging. In early July *M. sieboldii* gave us several more blossoms and the embarrassment at my extravagance began to dissipate. Coupled with the gorgeous perfume from its long season of flowering, *M. sieboldii* sets brilliant cherry-red fruits, which are eaten by the songbirds almost immediately upon ripening. I will let you know how well our fragrant beauty fares.

Magnolia virginiana 'Moonglow'



Magnolia sieboldii x *japonica*

