

With compliments + thanks H. Treseder

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Early introductions of *Magnolia grandiflora* from N. America

Magnolia - Paxton
PRO 9626

NEIL G. TRESEDER, N.D.H.

PROBABLY the oldest surviving specimen of *Magnolia grandiflora* in Europe is in the garden of the Orto Botanico of the University of Padua in Italy. A brief account of the history of this veteran tree has been supplied to me recently by the director, PROFESSOR C. CAPPELLETTI. It was planted in 1750 so that it is now about 220 years old. Its earliest recorded dimensions were measured in 1887 when its height was 17.1 m. and its trunk circumference at 1 m. above ground was 1.7 m. Now, eighty years later, and after having been pruned several times, it has a height of 18 m. and a trunk circumference of 2.38 m. at 1 m. above ground.

The earliest introduction of *M. grandiflora* into Europe was almost certainly the once-famous Maillardière Magnolia of Nantes. The romantic history of this tree is described at great length in the Nantes Journal of Horticultural Research of 1849. It is said to have been brought over to France as a small plant from the banks of the Mississippi by a marine officer and given to M. RENÉ DARQUISTADE, lord of the manor of La Maillardière, who was mayor of Nantes in 1735 and again in 1740.

The date of this original introduction was thought to be 1731 but this report sets out to prove that it was, in fact, as early as 1711, the young tree having been grown for twenty years in the orangery at La Maillardière without flowering. By this time it had grown too large for the greenhouse and the gardener would have destroyed it in his master's absence had not his wife intervened and persuaded him to let her replant it near the mansion beside the dove-cot, where it would be sheltered from the north winds.

Although the gardener was convinced, as most people were at that time, that plants from the New World could not succeed in the open in that climate, he reluctantly gave in to his wife's pleadings and let her replant it in the place which she had suggested. A few years later it commenced to flower and details of the beauty of its great blossoms and their delightful perfume spread far and wide so that it was visited each season by botanists and horticulturists from all over Europe. For a long time it was known as the Laurel-Tulip Tree before the name *Magnolia* was applied to the genus by LINNAEUS in 1753.

In 1793 the fatal civil warfare of La Vendée spread fire and devastation among the chateaux on the left bank of the Loire including La Maillardière, but the tree survived in spite of being badly burned, scarred with bullets and partly covered with rubble from a collapsed wall.

After such a narrow escape from destruction the local botanists and horticulturists decided on a plan to try to propagate it by layering. So,

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Stans' Ork Botanico Paxton

in 1795, scaffolding was placed around the top of the magnolia to support three boxes of soil, into each of which four or five shoots were layered. The trunk circumference at 1 m. above ground level was then 1 m. 14 cm. The successful rooting of these layers ensured the continued existence and future distribution of *M. grandiflora* 'La Maillardière' throughout France. By 1848 the tree had attained a height of 11 m. and had a trunk circumference of 1 m. 55 cm. at 1 m. above ground but was dying back badly through a bark infection at ground level.

One would expect the nurserymen of Nantes still to grow this plant, but it appears to have been superseded by the slightly later introduction, *M. grandiflora* 'Gallissonniensis', which dates back to around about 1745. It was named after the estate of ROLAND-MICHEL, Baron de la Gallissonnière, a lieutenant-general of marines, who travelled extensively in parts of America then possessed by France and who became Governor of Canada in 1749. One cannot help wondering if it was he who brought the original introduction to La Maillardière, for, in the course of his travels, he brought home and established in his garden near Nantes many new species of trees and shrubs from abroad.

The earliest reports of *M. grandiflora* in English gardens date back almost as far as that of La Maillardière. According to LOUDON a plant was reported to have flowered in the garden of SIR CHARLES WAGER at Parson's Green, near Fulham, in 1737. If this plant had been raised from seed, as seems most likely, and it took the normal twenty years or more to flower, the date of its introduction could well have been prior to 1717 though the date usually quoted is 1737.

PETER COLLINSON (1694-1768), Quaker, botanist and linen draper, who lived at Ridgeway House, Mill Hill near Hendon in Middlesex, recorded . . . "In 1759 there were, in the American Grove at Goodwood" (near Chichester in Sussex), "two fine great magnolias (*M. grandiflora*) about 20 feet high, that flowered annually", adding that his own tree of that species was raised from seed and first flowered in 1760 when twenty years old. Apparently the Goodwood magnolias were destroyed on the DUKE OF RICHMOND'S death, for COLLINSON wrote in 1768 that they no longer existed and that all movable articles had been sold. One wonders if the magnolias could have been among them!

In 1760, PHILIP MILLER described and illustrated this Magnolia as the Laurel-leaved Tulip-tree: *MAGNOLIA foliis lanceolatis persistentibus, caule erecto arboreo*, the name *Magnolia grandiflora*, proposed by LINNAEUS one year earlier, had not then become generally known. The plate shows details of the fruit cones and the manner in which the seeds become suspended from the carpels by threads, which must have been provided from drawings made from botanical observation in America.

MILLER reported that there were a great number of plants in England prior to 1739 when many of them were destroyed by the severe winter. "Since then", he wrote, "there have been few good seeds sent to England, so that there are very few plants left to be purchased at present. . . . Our seasons are not warm enough to bring the fruit to maturity, so that we can

never hope to see the trees adorned with them, which is a great beauty to them in their native soil."

LOUDON wrote in 1838 . . . "The first tree of *Magnolia grandiflora* to be brought to England is said to have been planted in Gray's nursery at Fulham which was founded early in the 18th century, and all old trees of the kind in the country are said to have been propagated from it. The tree died about 1810; but its trunk, which measured 4 feet 10 inches in circumference, was till very lately, preserved. The branches extended over a surface 20 feet in diameter, it was as many feet high, and in the blossoming season, which lasted generally two or three months it perfumed the whole neighbourhood. It was surrounded by stages from the ground to its summit, on which were placed pots containing layers for propagation. It was the number of these, and the exhaustion they caused, which killed the tree."

A similar fate befell another early introduction of *M. grandiflora* which was raised in the Devonshire garden of SIR JOHN COLLETON, at Exmouth, about 1737. This form became renowned for its freedom of flowering and was named 'Exoniensis' after the city of Exeter. LOUDON wrote . . . "This tree was cut down, through a mistake, about the year 1794. It had previously been much disfigured from the great number of layers that had been taken from it, and, though the trunk was 18 inches in diameter, its height was not more than 5 feet. It had been surrounded by scaffolding for many years, on which tubs were placed to receive the branches laid down for propagation. The tree seems to have been rented by different gardeners, who at first sold the layers for five guineas each; but the price gradually fell to half a guinea."

It is not surprising that some of the finest specimens of *M. grandiflora* in England are to be found in South Devon. *M. grandiflora* 'Exoniensis' is the same as 'Exmouth Variety' which remains to this day the most popular cultivar of *M. grandiflora* in the United Kingdom. Because of its stiff, erect growth it is less liable to snow damage than most forms of this

RECORDED RATES OF INCREASE IN TRUNK GIRTHS ON *Magnolia grandiflora*

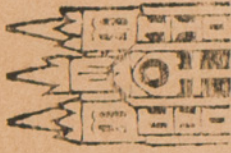
Date and location of tree	Date of measurement	At age (years)	Trunk circumference 1 m. above ground	Rate of increase in trunk girth
Nantes, France, 1711	1795	84	1 m. 14 cm.	41 cm. in 50 years
	1845	134	1 m. 55 cm.	
Padua, Italy, 1750	1887	137	1 m. 70 cm.	68 cm. in 83 years
	1957	220	2 m. 38 cm.	
		still surviving		
Fulham, England, 1710	1810	100	1 m. 47 cm.	1 m. 47 cm. in approximately, 100 years
Exeter, England, prior to 1737	1794	57	1 m. 47 cm.	1 m. 47 cm. in 57 years

magnolia. Its leaves are long and narrow with traces of rusty indumentum on their undersides which is gradually shed. It usually commences to produce its immense creamy white flowers within a few seasons of planting. These are very fragrant and are borne, on older plants, over a long period, often from July to December.

The Exmouth Coat of Arms, granted under Letters Patent dated February 12, 1947, is surmounted by a crest with a fortified tower arising from a mural coronet, on each side of which is depicted the flower and leaves of the Exmouth Magnolia. The motto is "Mare ditat flores decorant". "The sea enriches, the flowers adorn".

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Professor C. Cappelletti, Director, Orto Botanico,
University of Padua,

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Italy.

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