



Book Review by Margaret Hodgson

Magnolias, Classic Garden Plants, by J.M. Gardiner, Photographs by Vincent Page
The Globe Pequot Press, Chester, Connecticut, 1989.

144 pages, approx. 81 colour photos, 6 black and white diagrams and illustrations,
Recommended species and varieties chart,
Awards the Magnolias chart, list of place to see magnolias around the world, list of suppliers, Societies and the Bibliography, followed by a comprehensive index. \$19.95US ISBN 0-87106-644-0

James M. Gardiner is curator of the Royal Horticultural Society's Garden at Wisley, England. He was previously the curator of the Hillier Gardens and Arboretum, one of the major international collections of hardy woody plants in the British Isles. A member of the Institute of Horticulture, he lectures regularly and has contributed to various horticultural publications, including *The Garden*.

Series Editor **Vincent Page** is picture editor of the London *Sunday Times*. A trained photographer, he has had a lifelong interest in plant subjects and has developed a close working relationship with the author.

Magnolias, Classic Garden Plants is a detailed but practical classic text that comes from an expert who felt that these sleeping beauties are just awakening. These remarkable trees and shrubs, the Magnoliaceae, which are closely related to rhododendrons, are considered by paleobotanists to be the oldest angiosperms or flowering plants. Dr. John Fogg, founder of the American Magnolia Society maintained that the *M. grandiflora* is the most widely cultivated tree in the world.

Magnolias range from small shrubs to large trees, flowers differ in size and scent, and in colour from a pure white to a rich royal purple. Plants can be seen in flower over a nine month period from February onwards. Leaves are either deciduous or evergreen, sometimes with a rich russet-brown indumentum on the underside.

The book is very well-organized, starting with the story of the magnolia which was undoubtedly introduced into Britain before 1731 from the Americas as it appears in the first edition of *The Gardener's Dictionary* in 1731 when Phillip Miller wrote that "There is also another species (apart from the *Magnolia virginiana*) which has lately been brought to England". Henry Compton, Bishop of London, 1632-1713, had sent missionaries to America and charged them with the mission of sending back plants to England, as well as spreading the gospel.

The magnolia was named after Pierre Magnol, a physician and botanist of Montpellier in southern France and an inspired teacher. He had been nominated for the Chair of Botany and the Directorship of the Botanic Garden in 1667, but, because of religious differences, he was not appointed until 1694.

The book then divides into separate chapters to discuss the cultivation of magnolias, propagation, pests and diseases, magnolias in the garden, magnolia species, magnolia hybrids, magnolia cousins.

A useful section at the end of the book gives information on recommended species and varieties. The chart gives sizes as well as descriptions of the shrubs/trees. In juxtaposition is the awards chart for the magnolias. The photographs in the centre section of the book are splendid.