THE BIG TREES AND SHRUBS OF MICHIGAN
43. Magnolia ×soulangeana Soulange-Bodin
Saucer Magnolia

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The largest known Saucer Magnolia in Michigan is located in the village of Berrien Springs, in Berrien County, in the southwestern corner of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula.

Description of the species: The Saucer Magnolia was created by a cross between *M. denudata* (the female; originally from China) and *M. liliiflora* (the male pollen producer; native to eastern China) by Etienne Soulange-Bodin, a former French diplomat and army officer, who later became director of the Royal Institute of Horticulture outside Paris in 1820 (Calloway, 1994). The plant was introduced into England in 1827 or 1828. It is intermediate in its features between the two parents. It is a large shrub or small tree (see Fig. 1) with alternate, simple, obovate to obovate-oblong leaves with narrowly acute to acuminate apices. The leaves are dark green and glabrous above, lighter in color and hairy below. The flower buds are very pubescent and silky to the touch. The bark is smooth and gray. The flowers are large, 3–6 inches (7–15 cm) across, white to red-purple on the outside and often fragrant. There are many variations and forms that run the gradient of flower color from almost white (cv ‘alba’) to deep red-purple (cv ‘Alexandrina’). Both the parental species and their hybrid flower precociously—that is, they flower before the leaves emerge.

Spontaneous hybrids and backcrosses have occurred when different parents are grown in proximity. Over 40 registered cultivars have been named, making *M. ×soulangeana* one of the most varied and popular magnolias in the world. An excellent discussion of variation in the Saucer Magnolia is found in Treseder (1978).

There is much variation in the range of chromosome numbers found in the hybrids. *Magnolia liliiflora* is a tetraploid (2n = 4x = 76) and *M. denudata* is a hexaploid (2n = 6x = 114). The resulting hybrid would possibly be an intermediate pentaploid (2n = 5x = 95). Incomplete pairing of the chromosomes in the hybrid might produce lower or higher numbers and many variations in between. Even though *M. ×soulangeana* hybrids are mostly seed sterile, a few seeds will occasionally develop in the aggregate of follicles.

Saucer Magnolia is one of the most cold-hardy of all magnolias—zones of plant hardiness, 4–9 (Dirr 1990)—and ideal for temperate climates, especially in Michigan. The tree never escapes from cultivation, at least in Michigan; it is mentioned in passing in Barnes and Wagner (1981; 2004). The specific epithet is
sometimes rendered as *soulangiana*, but the standard references, including Index Kewensis, have it as *soulangeana*.

**Location of Michigan’s Big Tree.** The champion Saucer Magnolia is located one block NW of downtown in the village of Berrien Springs, Berrien County, behind 114 N. Kimmel Street and adjacent to nearby Mars Street at Lat. 41° 56′ 48″ N and Long. 86° 20′ 24″ W. The tree is out in the open on the northeast side of the home owned by Anna Stover and was planted in the 1920s by the grandmother of Mr. Stover. The specimen can be observed closely without going onto private property.

**Description of Michigan’s Big Tree:** The tree has three healthy trunks arising...
just above the ground at angles and with little dead wood. The circumferences of the tree’s trunks at breast height were measured on 22 April 2002 at 41″, 50″, and 51″ (104, 127, and 130 cm), respectively. The diameter of each branch was 13.2″, 15.8″, and 16.2″ (34, 40, and 41 cm), respectively. The crown spread was 66′ (20.1 m). The height was measured at 38′ (11.6 m). This newly found champion replaces the previous one (41″, 1995) recorded from Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County. It is a spectacular, well-maintained specimen and worth a visit when in bloom in mid- to late April.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

If you would like to join in extending this series of articles by visiting and describing one or more of Michigan’s Big Trees, please contact Elwood B. Ehrle (woodyehrle@aol.com) for help with the locations, specifications for taking measurements, and assistance with the manuscript. The Michigan Botanical Club encourages your involvement in this activity. Please remember to ask permission before entering private property.

LITERATURE CITED