

Tree of the Month, April 2016: *Magnolia cavaleriei* var. *platypetala*

At VanDusen, *Magnolia cavaleriei* var. *platypetala*, an evergreen magnolia from southern China, is currently in full bloom. The tree is covered in fragrant, white flowers with tepals that range from 12-15 cm in length, and will repeat bloom throughout the growing season. It can grow to a height of 12 meters.

The species was named for Pierre Julein Cavalerie, a French missionary who collected plants in China in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and was part of the Académie Internationale de Géographie Botanique. He retired from the priesthood in 1919, moved to Kunming and became a rice merchant. On New Year's Eve, 1927, he was murdered by one of his servants. Cavalerie was a prolific collector and more than 200 plants were named after him.

Magnoliaceae is a very ancient family that has been scattered and isolated across the globe over millions of years by ice ages, continental drift, and the formation of new mountain ranges. Despite being separated for such a long time, magnolias are morphologically very similar, making it difficult for taxonomists to figure out how the family evolved over time. Advances in DNA analysis have helped somewhat, but the relationships between different subfamilies, genera, subgenera, species and varieties within the family are still very confusing, and there is a lot of disagreement among botanists about what names should be used for some magnolias. VanDusen is a part of the North American Plant Collections Consortium, which uses the Kew World Checklist of Selected Plant Families as a reference. Based on the Kew Checklist, we use the name *Magnolia cavaleriei* var. *platypetala* for this tree. Depending on what book or website you look at, however, you may see this tree referred to as *Magnolia platypetala*, *Magnolia maudiae* var. *platypetala*, *Michelia platypetala* or *Michelia cavaleriei* var. *platypetala*.

At VanDusen, you can find *Magnolia cavaleriei* var. *platypetala* near the Magnolias and Hydrangeas along the Rhododendron Walk (see map on reverse).

