Bartley Garden Foster Home For Numerous Rare Wildlings

By MRS. ELIZABETH JONES

It was an event of real importance that took me to Floyd Bartley's garden Tuesday of last week. Bartley's magnolia, macrophylla, now 8-year-old, had put forth its first blossom.

And what a blossom! It was at least 15 inches in diameter. It looked like a giant water lily and was a creamy white in color.

The Bartley garden is a tranquil place. Big, old pear and maple trees provide shade for the wildlings that Pickaway County's most revered naturalist adopts. The Bartley garden is a "home away from home" for many curious interesting and rare plants.

AN AMAZING characteristic of this botanist seems to have is complete impartiality. After showing me the magnificent blossom on the magnolia tree he escorted me around the garden to see other things.

He came to a tiny plant with a flower less than a quarter of an inch in diameter. It was some rare relative of the checkweed. But Bartley was interested in showing this little fellow off, too.

Bartley, who lives east on Route 50, has spent a lifetime collecting plants. He roams over all Ohio with his plastic bag gathering plants for Ohio State University, the University of West Virginia, Smithsonian Institute and Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

His entire life has been one of dedication to natural science. From early boyhood he has roamed the woods, hills, prairies and meadows of the state. His is actually a collector's garden. And his collections are scientific. He has, for instance, 15 species of violets, seven species of ferns, a large collection of mosses, he has many different species of asters and many of goldenrods.

The mark of a good scientist is his passion for minute detail. And nothing escapes the eagle eye of this botanist. We asked Bartley what he thought about gardeners fetching home wildlings for their own gardens.

"IT'S ALL right provided they take care of the plants once they get them home. But it's mighty easy to neglect things. Most everybody in the county at one time or another has had the privilege of going on a nature tour with Floyd Bartley. It makes no difference the season - Bartley can point out hundreds of plants to interest you.

So if you think the wildflower season is over, and it's too late to go on a tour with Floyd Bartley, you are mistaken. It's not just bright flowers that are beautiful to him. Every living plant seems to be equally important.

We think of Floyd Bartley as a sort of modern St. Francis, His beloved garden includes the rare, the insignificant, the odd, as well as the beautiful and flamboyant.

Plants grow well in Bartley's garden. He tucks them in here and there where they will be comfortable and "leaves 'em be."

Bartley likes cultivated plants too. Right along with all the wild plants are roses, weigela, deutzia, lilacs, flowering quince, mock orange and wisteria.

A FEW of the better known plants we saw were the true and false Solomon seal, Jac-in-the-pulpit, penstemon, Lenten rose and spiderwort.

Bartley says one of his rare plants is spigelia which is orange yellow with a red throat.

Among his native shrubs is the fringe tree which blooms in May. He also has halesia or silver bell tree, cotoneera, (sweet pepper bush) red bud and four species of wild magnolia.

Bartley has more than 100 firsts on his list of discoveries in Ohio. His most fantastic is a grass "not new to the area or to the hemisphere, but to the planet. I'll have you know. It is now at Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

It, of course had to be named. It is now listed as calamagrostis, insperata.

His latest find is a member of the carrot family. He has this growing in his garden.

The wild azalea bed is surrounded by a low fence of chicken wire and the plants have a heavy leaf mulch. Once a year Bartley digs sulphur into mulch and the azaleas live and thrive in their foster home.

HE HAS an interesting little plant named mountain lover. It is an evergreen discovered growing at Fort Hill. There is almost a quarter of an acre of mountain lover there.

It was in the early 1920s that Floyd Bartley and the late Leslie Pontious discovered the grove of large leaved magnolias in Jackson County. They ran across it on one of their rambles. The trees were in bloom and they knew by the size of the blossoms that here was a rare and unfamiliar magnolia for Ohio.

This magnolia is native to Mississippi and Tennessee. It is found occasionally in Kentucky. But there is no record of it in West Virginia. In Jackson County it is found three places: Bowles Hollow, Rock Run and White's Gulch.

If you have never been on a nature hike with Floyd Bartley plan for yourself by visiting his garden. But it must be a guided tour or you will pass by some treasure just because it looks insignificant.

One word of advice! Don't tell Floyd Bartley you are interested in Latin names. He has the Latin name for everything on the tip of his tongue. He'll have your head twirling like a merry-go-round.
BARTLEY AND MAGNOLIA BLOSSOM — The 8-year-old magnolia macrophylla tree in Floyd Bartley's garden bloomed for the first time this May. The blossom measured 15 inches in diameter. The magnolia is also known as the large leafed magnolia.

(Staff Photo)