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Magnolia

Magnoliaceae

Magnolia commemorates a French physician and botanist, Pierre Magnol (1638-1715), who was professor of medicine at Montpellier (the first French university to have a botanic garden) which he also became Director. Protestant persecution was common in France during his lifetime and his Calvinist upbringing proved to be a hurdle in his career. He was rejected for a post at Montpellier Botanic Garden as Demonstrator of Plants, as well as Professor of medicine at Montpellier, in the 1660s despite the high regard in which he was held by his peers and this no doubt influenced his decision to become a Roman Catholic in 1685. In 1687 he became that Demonstrator of Plants, followed by an appointment as physician to the King's Court in 1693 and then Professor of medicine, already referred to, in 1694. From 1696-1693 he was Director of the Botanic Garden and then, until his death, he answered to Inspector of the Garden. He corresponded with many of the leading botanists and was especially acclaimed by Carolus Linnaeus, the Swedish naturalist and physician, and his ideas were influential in the ultimate development by Linnaeus of the method of nomenclature of plants and animals in familiar use today. In 1709 he became a member of the French Academy of Sciences. Included in his published works are *Prodromus historiae generalis plantarum, in quo familiae plantarum per tabulas disponuntur*, *Hortus regius Monspeliense, sive Catalogus plantarum quae in Horto Regio Monspeliensi demonstrantur*, and *Novus character plantarum, in duo tractatus divisus: primus, de herbis & subfructibus, secundus, de fructibus & arboribus*. One fascinating fact about the natural habitat of this genus is that its species are found growing in the wild on the North American Continent to the east of the Rocky Mountains (and in the Far East) – but not in the coastal strip west of them. The mountain range has acted as a natural barrier.