

Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*)

Alex X. Niemiera, Associate Professor, Department of Horticulture

Summary:

Foliage: Evergreen broadleaf

Height: 80 feet

Spread: 50 feet

Shape: Upright, pyramidal to narrow pyramidal

This is a magnificent large evergreen tree with very large, wonderfully fragrant white flowers in late spring and early summer. There are many cultivars with variations in tree shape and size, flower, and foliage characteristics.

Plant Needs:

Zone: species hardy 7 (6b) to 9; some cultivars hardy in zone 6 (5b)

Light: Partial shade to full sun

Moisture: Wet to moist to average

Soil Type: Sandy, loam, clay

pH Range: 3.5 to 7.0

Functions:

Suggested uses for this plant include shade and specimen plant.

Planting Notes:

Select site with wind protection to protect large leaves from wind damage.

Requires good soil drainage, and prefers acid soil.

Leave a lot of space for the plant to develop.

Care:

Leaf litter is very messy due to great quantities of dead leaves (leaves are large; up to 10 inches long) are shed over an extended period of time. Fallen leaves are very tough and take a long time to deteriorate.

Problems:

No insect or disease pests.

Alternatives:

Consult local garden centers, historic or public gardens and arboreta regarding cultivars and related species that grow well in your area.

Cultivars of *Magnolia grandiflora* (There is large amount of variation in the species which has resulted in numerous cultivars based on tree size and form, foliage and flower characteristics, and hardiness.)

'Bracken's Brown Beauty' is hardy in zone 6.

'Edith Bogue' is hardy in zone 6.

'Gloriosa' has large flowers, broad leaves; one of the best varieties.

'Goliath' has flowers up to 12 inches across.

'Little Gem' is a dwarf compact form (to 20 feet tall) with small leaves. Hardy in zone 7; will be significantly winter damaged in zone 6.

'Majestic Beauty' has large, glossy, thick, dark green leaves and a pyramidal shape.

Related species:

Magnolia virginiana (sweetbay magnolia) has attractive foliage, gray bark, and fragrant lemon-

scented white flowers in early summer. This species is evergreen in the southern part of its natural range (zones 7 – 9) and deciduous in the northern part of its natural range (zones 5 – 6). Evergreen cultivars are 'Henry Hicks' and 'Northern Belle'.

Comments:

This large magnificent tree is the quintessential southern tree. The large, lustrous, evergreen foliage makes the southern magnolia a desirable ornamental plant for properties that have the space to accommodate this large tree. Flowers are large, fragrant, and no less than spectacular. Hardiness is an issue in zone 6, and hardy cultivars, 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' and 'Edith Bogue', are recommended. Leaf drop and resulting maintenance may be an issue for homeowners.

This material was developed by Carol Ness as part of the Interactive Design and Development Project funded by the Kellogg Foundation.