

Saucer Magnolia, *Magnolia ×soulangeana*

Alex X. Niemiera, Associate Professor, Department of Horticulture

Summary

Foliage: About 5 inches long; alternate; deciduous

Height: About 25 feet

Spread: About 20 feet

Shape: Oval to somewhat rounded

Main Features

Saucer magnolia is generally a small (occasionally medium) multi-stem tree that is known for its outstanding flower display in March (February in southern U.S. and April in northern U.S.). Flowers are about 8 inches in diameter; outer sides of petals (actually called tepals; about 9 tepals) are various shades of pink-purple while inner sides of tepals are white. There are numerous cultivars (more than 50) that vary in flower characteristics (color, size, date of emergence, fragrance, and flower bud hardiness), plant form, hardiness, and growth rate. Because this species flowers in late winter and early spring, flowers are vulnerable to low temperatures. In most years flowers (or flower buds) are damaged to some degree, ranging from slightly damaged to total destruction, by sub-freezing temperatures. To avoid this damage, one should select a late-flowering cultivar such as 'Brozzonii', 'Lennei', 'Speciosa', or 'Verbanica'. When flowers are undamaged, the flower show is magnificent.

Plant Needs

Zone: 4 to 9

Light: Full sun to part shade

Moisture: Average

Soil type: Average

pH range: Acid

Functions

Saucer magnolia cultivars are suitable wherever a small tree is appropriate in a landscape. However, one should realize that the primary showy feature, the superb flower display, will only be realized about one in every four years since low temperatures damage flowers. As mentioned in the Main Features section, select a late blooming cultivar to minimize the potential for low temperature damage.

Care

Saucer magnolia is relatively carefree but will require irrigation during periods of drought.

Additional Information

There are other hybrid magnolia species that also have very showy flowers. The Gresham hybrid series and the Little Girl hybrid series contain many cultivars, but these have not been highly regarded as the saucer magnolia cultivars. Star magnolia (*M. stellata*) and loebner magnolia (*M. ×loebneri*) cultivars are highly regarded, but they are also damaged by low temperatures.