



Southern Magnolia

Magnolia grandiflora L.

(synonym: *M. foetida* Sarg.)

Common names: southern magnolia, mikinolia, bull bay

Native habitat

Southeastern United States and Texas (The southern magnolia blossom is a popular symbol of the deep South and is common in literature of plantation life.)

Size

Southern magnolia is a handsome ever-green tree growing to 100 feet high and 40–50 ft wide in its native habitat but to only 25 ft high in cool locations in Hawaii. Train young trees to promote desired growth habit and then prune only lightly to maintain desired shape. Its growth rate is moderate to fast with proper soil preparation and fertilization.

Characteristics

Southern magnolia has an upright growth habit, often with a central leader, and a compact to somewhat irregular head. The bark is grayish brown, breaking into small, thin scales. The twigs are green to olive with prominent, comatose buds. The decorative, thick, leathery, alternate leaves are entire, more or less oval, 4–8 inches long, and shiny green above and smooth or hairy brown below. The large, very fragrant, pure-white flowers are 7–8 inches in diameter and develop at branch tips throughout the summer and fall. The 4-inch long, cone-like fruit splits to reveal showy, scarlet seeds.

Location

This tree grows best in cooler locations of tropical areas such as Hawaii, such as valleys away from coasts or at higher elevations. Plant it in full sun (it will tolerate



some shade), in soil that is fertile, acidic, well drained, and high in organic matter. Apply a 3-inch layer of mulch to help hold moisture and reduce soil temperature. Avoid cultivating around the trunk, which may harm the shallow roots. Large plants are difficult to transplant. It is tolerant of some salt spray and cold-hardy to about 10°F.

Insects and diseases

Southern magnolia seldom suffers serious damage from insects and diseases, but it may have some problems from scales, aphids, spider mites, and leaf spots.

Landscape uses

This is an excellent specimen, garden, or lawn tree. It may also be used as a street tree, a large-container plant, in informal groupings, and as a screen or espalier plant.

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Propagation

Southern magnolia is usually started from seeds collected from pods when the red seeds are visible. The seeds can be sown immediately after cleaning, or they can be stratified for 2–3 months at 40°F for later planting. If prolonged storage is necessary, the seeds can be held in sealed containers at 32–40°F.

Selections are increased by rooted cuttings or grafting. Leafy terminal cuttings taken from late spring to summer can be rooted under mist and bottom heat (75°F) when wounded and treated with 5000 to 20,000 ppm IBA. *Magnolia grandiflora* seedlings or rooted cuttings are used as rootstocks for grafting *M. grandiflora* cultivars.

Cultivars (varieties)

Cairo—very glossy, flexible leaves; blooms early over a long period.

Charles Dickens—very broad, nearly blunt leaves; large flowers with large, red fruits.

Exmouth—smaller, narrow, more upright than species with a narrow leaf.

Gloriosa—large flowers to 12 inches across.

Goliath—large flowers to 12 inches across, blooming over a long period.

Majestic Beauty—vigorous, dense branching with exceptionally long, broad, and heavy leaves.

Samuel Sommer—very large and full specimen with large, glossy leaves with a heavy rusty-red felting on the underside and large flowers (to 14 inches).

St. Mary—slow growing to 20 ft high with heavy production of full-sized flowers; leaves to 10 inches long, lustrous above and rusty-red beneath.

Victoria—hardy tree with small flowers; leaves rusty-red beneath.

Several other cultivars are available from Mainland sources. Other species of magnolia may be worth trying in Hawaii.

Fred D. Rauch and Paul K. Murakami
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