

still magnolia

Timeless and venerated, the South's ubiquitous ornamental tree has a special resonance in New Orleans.

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PHOTO BY JOANNA KOSSAK



NO MATTER WHERE YOU LIVE, I imagine that you have seen or experienced the majesty of the Southern magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora*. Its stately form, glossy leaves, and elegant flowers make it a favorite, and the grand appearance creates a statement in just about any setting. This could explain the reason why *Magnolia grandiflora*, native to the southeastern United States, commonly graces cities all around the world.

Because it was such a beautiful tree, *Magnolia grandiflora* was taken to Europe in the early 1700s. It became an instant hit. With its easy adaptability to many soil types and climates, it quickly spread to other countries. Today, our Southern magnolia is one of the most widely planted ornamental evergreen trees in the world!

QUICK FACT: The magnolia family is one of the oldest trees in existence. Because magnolias are so old, their flowers do not have true petals and sepals; instead, they have petal-like tepals. Also, the flowers do not produce real nectar, but attract pollinating beetles with fragrant and sugary secretions.

The Southern magnolia, also called the American tree, has many other claims to fame as well. It's the state tree of Mississippi and the state flower of that state and Louisiana. The largest Southern magnolia found in Smith County, Mississippi, is more than 122 feet tall with a trunk diameter of more than six feet! Southern magnolias can

have creamy white flowers giving off a lemony fragrance and growing between six to 12 inches in diameter.

With so many cultivars available today, you can plant the Southern magnolia of your choice based on the mature size that you need. So whether you need a champion tree, like the Goliath in Mississippi, or one that only reaches 15 feet, you can find it today at your local garden center. 🌿

Terrific Cultivars:

'Little Gem': a dwarf variety growing to about 10 feet by 20 feet with small foliage and flowers

'Brackens Brown Beauty': a dense, mid-size magnolia and one of the hardiest magnolias for cold weather

'Margaret Davis': large, broad estate magnolia and one of the fastest growing magnolias

'Goliath': flowers up to 12 inches across, a long blooming period, and a bushy habit of growth

'Hasse': a 12-foot dwarf that can be used for a compact, dense hedge

Planting and Care:

- 1» Dig your hole twice as wide as your rootball but not quite as deep.
- 2» If you have a heavy soil that doesn't drain well, dig a 24 to 36-inch post hole in the bottom of your planting hole and fill it full of gravel.
- 3» Plant your tree a little higher than the existing grade around it.
- 4» Water it in well and make sure that it doesn't dry out in the first year. Magnolias like their roots to be moist, but not wet.
- 5» Apply mulch about one-inch deep, covering the root ball and soil to at least the drip line of the tree.
- 6» Apply a small amount of low-dose fertilizer, such as a 4-1-2, around the drip line of the tree once a month from March until July.
- 7» You can expect natural leaf drop in May and June; don't worry! Most likely, your tree is fine.

USES:

- Espalier trees on a tall garden wall, house wall, or outdoor fireplace.
- Use the glossy foliage for the foundation of a holiday arrangement.
- Its fragrant flowers are perfect for a summertime centerpiece.
- Anchor the corner of your house with a majestic magnolia.