

# Southern Magnolia

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**T**he Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora* L.) is a magnificent tree of Southern legends. Under its protective sprawling bows promises have been made, hearts have been broken, and artists and songwriters have been inspired. There is nothing like a sultry summer evening in the South splashed with the lemony fragrance of the Southern magnolia.

The magnolia is an emblem of the South. They are as Southern as wide front porches, hunting dogs, and pecan pies. We think so much of them we even at times refer to our women folk with the term "steel magnolias." This term describes women that have a will as strong as the rugged trunk while at the same time possessing the gentleness and grace of the fragrant flower.

In the Deep South, magnolias can be found on many old plantations and farms, gracing lawns in both the county and the city, and in old cemeteries. Today, the Southern magnolia has become extremely popular as a landscaping ornamental.

The magnolia tree grows 60 to 100 feet in height and has a crown spread of 30 to 50 feet. It can have a diameter of up to 4 feet. The tree needs plenty of



room to grow and is pyramidal in shape. It grows at a medium rate and its branches drape to the ground, which makes it virtually impossible to plant anything under it.

*Magnolia grandiflora* testifies to the fact that it bears large flowers, 6 to 8 and sometimes 12 inches across. The creamy white flower has a lemony fragrance. Many a Southern bride has planned her wedding around the peak of the magnolia blossom. Flowering begins in late May-early June and continues sporadi-

cally all summer. Trees usually begin flowering within 10 years of being grown from a seed.

Its leaves are shiny bright green on the upper surfaces with rusty-colored fuzz on the underside. Leaves are oblong, bluntly pointed, 5-8 inches long and 2-3 inches wide. The fruit is an aggregate made up of numerous pod-like structures that each contains 2-3 crimson seeds. The fruit is reddish as it forms, turning brown and fuzzy as it matures. Seeds hang from the pods on slender stalks when ripe. The leaves drop the second year after the tree has bloomed in June. In the South, the bright green waxy leaves of the magnolia are used for decorations at weddings and during holidays.

The bark varies from gray to brown and becomes scaly with age. Twigs are stout and have conspicuous rings at the node. As in all of the magnolias, a single scale covers the bud.

The magnolia grows throughout the South on rich moist soil. The wood is hard and heavy. It is utilized for crates, boxes and some rough flooring. Squirrels and wild turkeys eat the fruit in the fall months. 🌳



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