



# *Magnolia virginiana* Sweetbay Magnolia<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Sweetbay Magnolia is a graceful southern, evergreen to semi-evergreen, wide columnar tree, ideal for use as a patio tree or specimen (Fig. 1). It can grow to a mature height of 40 feet in the north or to 60 feet in the south. Trees glimmer in the wind due to the whitish-green undersides of the leaves. They are very noticeable as you drive by them on interstates along water-logged woodlands. The tree provides excellent vertical definition in a shrub border or as a free standing specimen and flourishes in moist, acid soil such as the swamps in the eastern U.S. and along stream banks. The creamy-white, lemon-scented flowers appear from June through September, and are followed by small red seeds which are used by a variety of wildlife. It can be trained into a multi-trunked, spreading specimen plant, or left with the central leader intact as a wide column.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Scientific name:** *Magnolia virginiana*

**Pronunciation:** mag-NO-lee-uh ver-jin-ee-AY-nuh

**Common name(s):** Sweetbay Magnolia, Swamp Magnolia

**Family:** *Magnoliaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 10A (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** native to North America

**Uses:** espalier; wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

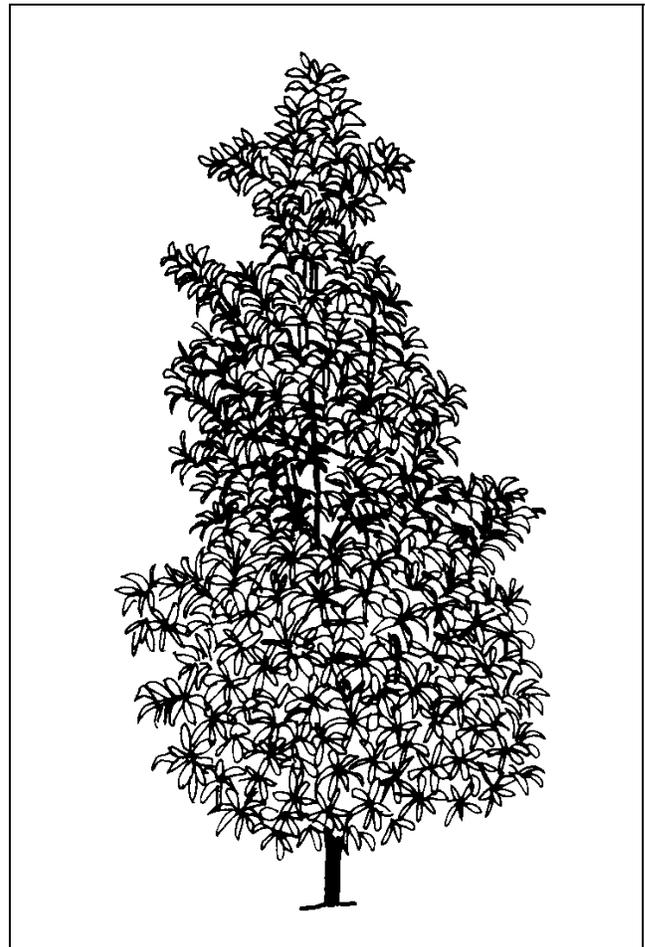


Figure 1. Middle-aged Sweetbay Magnolia.

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-384, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.
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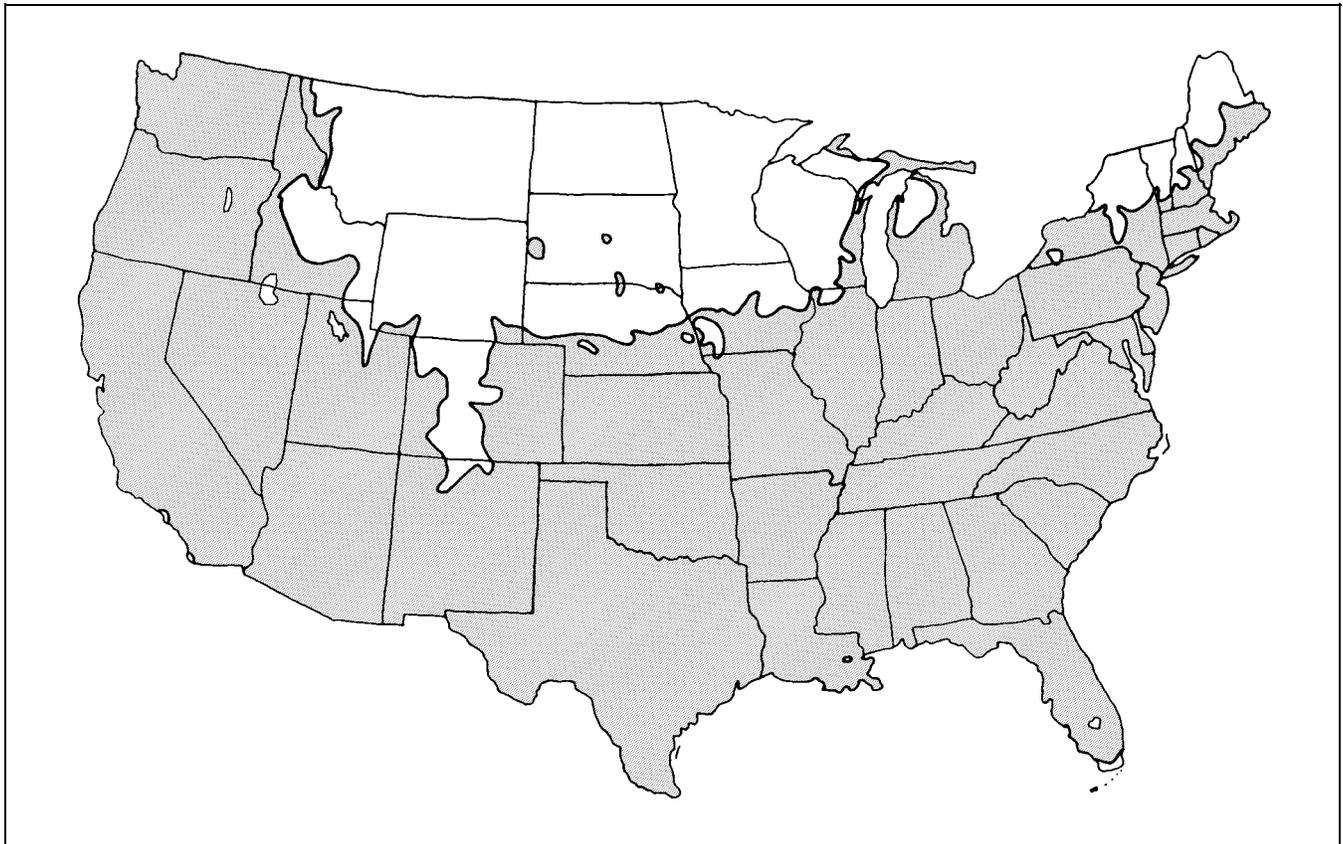


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

## DESCRIPTION

**Height:** 40 to 50 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** columnar; vase shape

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** medium

## Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval); oblong

**Leaf venation:** banchidodrome; pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous; evergreen; semievergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches; less than 2 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; summer flowering; very showy (Fig. 3)

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** green; red

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; no significant litter problem; showy

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; grow mostly upright and will not droop; showy trunk; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

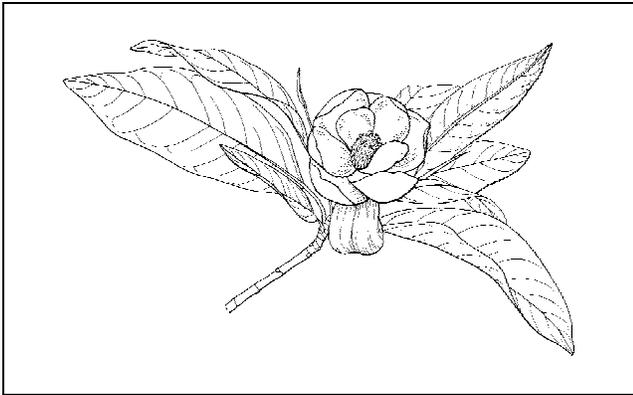


Figure 3. Flower of Sweetbay Magnolia.

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** thin

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun;  
tree grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; acidic; extended  
flooding; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** No entries found.

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** low

**Soil salt tolerance:** poor

### Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding tree:** tree has outstanding ornamental  
features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Ozone sensitivity:** tolerant

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not  
affected by pests

## USE AND MANAGEMENT

Sweetbay Magnolia makes an excellent tree for planting next to buildings, in narrow alleys or corridors, or in other urban areas with limited space for horizontal crown expansion. It has not been planted extensively in downtown urban areas, but its flood and drought tolerance and narrow crown combine to make it a good candidate. It usually maintains a good, straight central leader, although occasionally the trunk branches low to the ground forming a round multi-stemmed, spreading tree. It should be grown and planted more often.

Sweetbay Magnolia roots easily from softwood cuttings, grows freely near coastal areas, and is happiest in southern climates. It is thriving in the Auburn Shade Tree Evaluation trials in Alabama without irrigation. However, in the confined soil spaces typical of some urban areas, occasional irrigation is recommended.

The species is deciduous in USDA hardiness zones 7 and 8 (evergreen farther south) but the variety *australis* and cultivar 'Henry Hicks' are evergreen; 'Havener' has larger flower petals.

### Pests and Diseases

Scales sometimes infest foliage and twigs, particularly on dry sites where the tree is under stress.

Tulip-Poplar weevil (sassafras weevil) feeds as a leaf miner when young and chews holes in the leaves as an adult.

Leaf spots occasionally occur on the foliage but are of little concern.