

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

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### **Introduction**

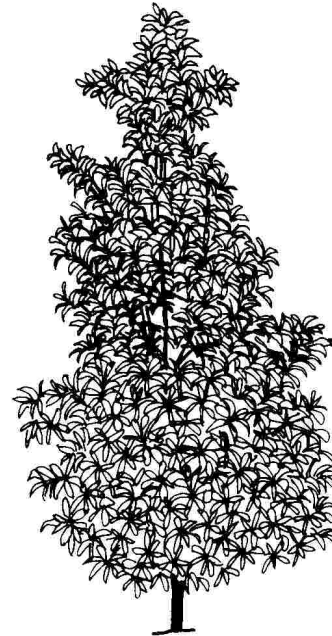
Sweetbay Magnolia is a graceful southern, evergreen to semi-evergreen, wide columnar tree, ideal for use as a patio tree or specimen. It can grow to a mature height of 40 feet in the north or to 60 feet in the south. Trees glimmer in the wind due to the whitish-green undersides of the leaves. They are 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



**Figure 1.** Middle-aged *Magnolia virginiana*: Sweetbay Magnolia

**Family:** *Magnoliaceae*

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

**Origin:** native to North America

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**Invasive potential:** little invasive potential

**Leaf type:** simple

**Uses:** deck or patio; specimen; street without sidewalk; espalier; tree lawn 4-6 feet wide; tree lawn > 6 ft wide; highway median

**Leaf margin:** entire

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

**Availability:** not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

### Description

**Height:** 40 to 50 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 25 feet

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical

**Crown shape:** columnar, vase

**Crown density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** medium

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf venation:** brachidodrome, pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous, semi-evergreen, evergreen

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

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white/cream/gray

**Flower characteristics:** very showy

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** 1 to 3 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** red, green

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves not a litter problem

## Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** branches don't droop; showy; typically multi-trunked; thorns

**Pruning requirement:** little required

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green

**Current year twig thickness:** thin

**Wood specific gravity:** unknown

## Culture

**Light requirement:** full sun, partial sun or partial shade

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

**Drought tolerance:** little

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** low

## Other

**Roots:** not a problem

**Winter interest:** no

**Outstanding tree:** yes

**Ozone sensitivity:** tolerant

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

**Pest resistance:** resistant to pests/diseases

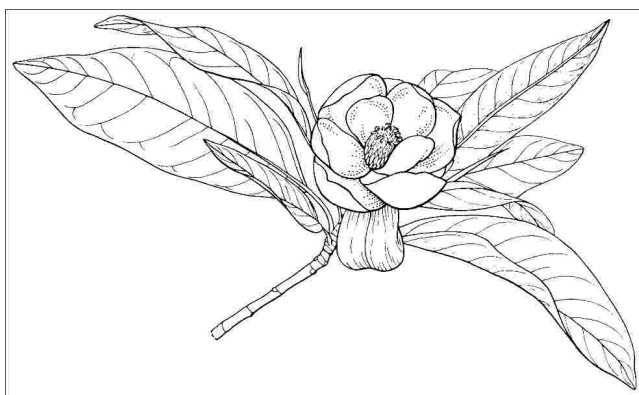


Figure 3. Flower

## 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.