

Magnolia virginiana 'Henry Hicks': 'Henry Hicks' Sweetbay Magnolia¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

Introduction

Magnolia virginiana 'Henry Hicks' is a graceful southern evergreen with a wide columnar habit, ideal for use as a patio, tree, or specimen. It remains evergreen well into USDA hardiness zone 6, maybe 5b. 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.

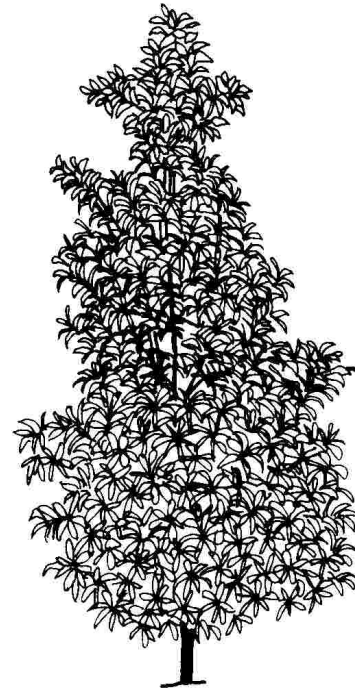


Figure 1. Middle-aged *Magnolia virginiana* 'Henry Hicks': 'Henry Hicks' Sweetbay Magnolia

General Information

Scientific name: *Magnolia virginiana*

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

Common name(s): 'Henry Hicks' Sweetbay Magnolia, 'Henry Hicks' Swamp Magnolia

Family: *Magnoliaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 5A through 9B (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

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

Availability: not native to North America

1. This document is ENH-544, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed May 2011. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.



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 type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval), oblong

Leaf venation: brachidodrome, pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: broadleaf 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: clay; sand; loam; acidic; well-drained; extended flooding

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: unknown

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

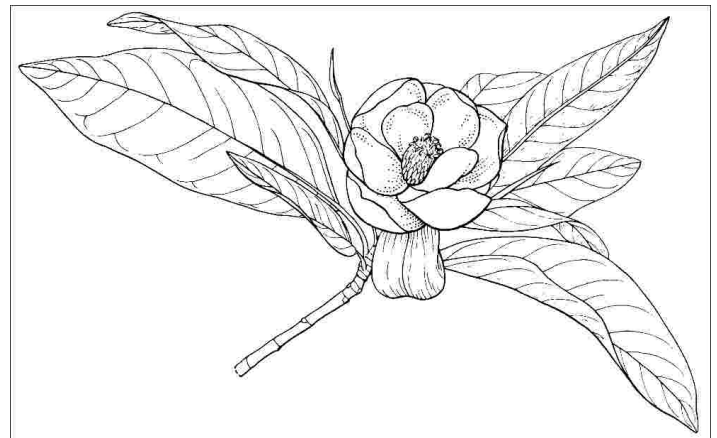


Figure 3. Flower

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. 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.