**Magnolia kobus var. stellata ‘Waterlily’ ‘Waterlily’ Star Magnolia**
Edward F. Gilman

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**Introduction**

Star magnolia is one of the hardiest of the magnolias (Fig. 1). It is a small tree or large shrub, 15 feet tall with a 10- to 15-foot spread. Typically branching close to the ground, the multi-stemmed form develops with a dense head of foliage. Star magnolia makes a wonderful patio, lawn specimen or accent tree. Lower foliage can be removed to show off the trunk and to create more of a tree-form. Otherwise, the persistent lower branches and oval to round form lend a “large bush” look to the plant. When planted against a dark background, the branching pattern and light gray trunk will show off nicely, particularly when lit up at night. The leafless winter silhouette looks great shadowed on a wall by a spotlight at night. The white flowers have a slight touch of pink coloration, and are produced in spring before the leaves appear, even on young plants. Flowers are usually not as sensitive to cold as saucer magnolia, but they can still be injured if cold weather arrives during flowering.

**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** Magnolia kobus var. stellata ‘Waterlily’
- **Pronunciation:** mag-NO-lee-uh KOE-bus variety stell-AY-tuh
- **Common name(s):** ‘Waterlily’ star magnolia
- **Family:** Magnoliaceae
- **Plant type:** shrub
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 8 (Fig. 2)
- **Planting month for zone 7:** year round
- **Planting month for zone 8:** year round
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Uses:** near a deck or patio
- **Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

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**Description**
Height: 12 to 20 feet  
Spread: 12 to 18 feet  
Plant habit: round  
Plant density: moderate  
Growth rate: slow  
Texture: medium

**Foliage**
Leaf arrangement: alternate  
Leaf type: simple  
Leaf margin: entire  
Leaf shape: obovate  
Leaf venation: pinnate  
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous  
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches  
Leaf color: green  
Fall color: yellow  
Fall characteristic: not showy

**Flower**
Flower color: white; pink  
Flower characteristic: spring flowering; pleasant fragrance

**Fruit**
Fruit shape: irregular  
Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches  
Fruit cover: dry or hard  
Fruit color: brown  
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**
Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; no thorns; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems  
Current year stem/twig color: brown  
Current year stem/twig thickness: medium

**Culture**
Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun  
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; slightly alkaline  
Drought tolerance: moderate  
Soil salt tolerances: poor  
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

**Other**
Roots: usually not a problem  
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers  
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding  
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive  
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

**Use and Management**
Star magnolia is intolerant of root competition or dryness, and plants grow slowly, perhaps one foot per year. Plant in the full sun in a rich, porous, and slightly acid soil. It is hard to transplant successfully and in the north should be moved, balled and burlapped, when actively growing. In USDA hardiness zones 7 and 8, transplant in late winter while the plants are still dormant or plant from containers at any time.

**Pests and Diseases**
Basically trouble free although scales of various types may infest twigs and leaves. Magnolia scale is the most common scale and can be one half inch across. Overwintering scales can usually be controlled with horticultural oil.

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

None particularly troublesome. Magnolia may be subject to leaf spots, blights, scabs, and black mildews caused by a
large number of fungi or bacteria. Leaf spots rarely require chemical controls. Rake up and dispose of infected leaves.

Canker diseases will kill branches. Cankers on branches can be pruned out. Keep trees healthy with regular fertilization and by watering in dry weather.

Verticillium wilt may cause death of a few branches or may kill the tree. Prune out dead branches and fertilize regularly.