

# MAGNOLIA CULTIVARS FLOWER FROM APRIL THROUGH SUMMER

By Douglas J. Chapman, Horticulturist, Dow Gardens, Midland, Michigan

If one large shrub or small tree represents a herald of spring, it certainly is magnolia. Magnolias commence blooming in mid-April and continue through June. They are useful as specimens, foundation planting, or for large area landscapes. The outstanding magnolias include Lily, Saucer, Star, 'Dr. Merrill,' and Sweetbay.

Lily Magnolia (*Magnolia quinquepeta* — formerly *M. liliflora*) is a multiple-stemmed, large shrub or small tree, with a round habit, reaching 10 to 14 feet in height. The 3- to 4-inch leaves are dark green on the upper surface with a light green beneath, giving a shimmering effect on a windy day. Fall color is non-existent. This native of China is perfectly hardy as far north as Detroit. It flowers during mid-May, just after *X M. soulangiana*. The delicate flowers are the prominent characteristic. The fine texture, pointed petals are unique, having dark purple exterior and white interior. It grows best in semi-sun and integrates well as a specimen, in beds, or with ground cover. The soil should have a pH of 5.5 to 6.5, be moist yet well-drained, and high in organic matter, since magnolia is rather shallow rooted.

**Dr. Merrill Magnolia** flowers in late April and grows rapidly to 30 feet high. It makes an excellent specimen in single or multi-stem forms.

**Sweetbay Magnolia** flowers in mid-June through much of the summer and is native from Florida to Massachusetts.



Saucer Magnolia (*X Magnolia soulangiana*) can be a single stem or multiple stem tree, 20 to 30 feet in height, with a round habit, holding branches clear to the ground. The coarse leaves are 4 to 6 inches in length, being a flat green during summer and a shiny brown late in the fall. This fall color is extremely effective. The smooth gray bark, almost beech-like, is an outstanding winter characteristic. Saucer Magnolia flowers in central Michigan during early May. The purple buds are outstanding, but when the plant comes into full flower, the petals fall rapidly. The most effective time for the flowers is during bud — not when fully open. Saucer Magnolia prefers soil which is well drained, fertile, and high in organic matter with a pH ranging from 5.5 to 7. It should be moved early spring, before flowering, for most successful transplanting. Saucer Magnolia is an outstanding specimen tree for use in the home landscape or on commercial grounds. It should be noted that if planted in a lawn, the branches should be left clear to the ground as grass can be too competitive for this fleshy root system. Further, the grass will not thrive well in

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the dense shade produced by the magnolia. The cultivars of Saucer Magnolia are most spectacular as they flower one to two weeks later and usually have fruit which, as it turns red, can be quite effective during the fall months. X M. soulangiana 'Alba' ('Superba') is a compact tree form with white flowers. These white flowers have a light purplish tinge in bud but are almost pure white in full flower. X M. soulangiana 'Lennei' is the outstanding purple variety. It not only holds its petals over a long period of time but has purple to magenta flowers on the interior and exterior of the petal, making it unique among the magnolias.

'Dr. Merrill' Magnolia (X Magnolia loebneri 'Dr. Merrill'), a hybrid between M. stellata x M. kobus, is intermediate in flowering between Star and Saucer Magnolia. In Central Michigan, it is usually in full flower during the last week of April. It is a rapid growing small tree that can reach 30 to 35 feet in height. It is an outstanding specimen plant in large area landscapes or for the home grounds. Although it can be in multiple-stem forms, it is most spectacular as a single stem tree since it holds a good central leader. The fragrant white flowers are truly spectacular with white petals (pink outer surface).

The semi-upright habit gives one an opportunity of planting ground cover beneath or simply mulching heavily.

Star Magnolia (*Magnolia stellata*) is the earliest herald of spring. Michigan can dependably expect Star Magnolia to be in full flower during the second or third weeks of April. It is a small shrub, usually multiple-stemmed, reaching 10 to 15 feet in height with a similar spread. It is a slow growing, dense plant, making it outstanding as a specimen, shrub, or in mass plantings. The foliage is dark green in summer, becoming yellowish to bronze in the fall. This fall color is not nearly as effective though as is X M. soulangiana. Flowers are a double white, 3 inches in diameter, with at least 12 to 15 petals. The species flowers are a good clear white, being equally effective in full flower and bud. The most outstanding cultivar is the 'Rosea' form of Star Magnolia which is quite pink in bud, fading to a light pink at full flower. Star Magnolia, as with many magnolias, transplants best before flowering. This shrub is perfectly hardy as far north as central Michigan.

Sweetbay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) is a 10- to 20-foot tree in the north and can reach in excess of 60 feet in the south. Although often found as a multiple-stemmed tree or shrub in the north, its upright spreading habit is quite tree-like in the south. The upper side of the foliage is a lustrous dark green throughout the summer and a grayish glaucous on the under surface. This gives a shimmering aspen-like effect on a windy day. The 3- to 5-inch long, somewhat pointed, oval leaves give this magnolia a rather fine texture. It is outstanding as a specimen tree in small area or commercial landscapes. Its gracefully spreading habit is outstanding during the winter. The bark of the twig is green. Sweetbay Magnolia flowers during the summer. It usually starts flowering during mid-June. It is not uncommon to see flower buds, partially opened, in full bloom, and fruit formed on the same plant at the same time. This not only extends the period of bloom, it makes this plant truly a unique addition to the summer landscape. The flowers are creamy-white, lemon-scented, 2 to 3 inches in diameter, with 9 to 12 petals. It is native from Massachusetts to Florida and is perfectly hardy in protected sites as far north as central Michigan.

Magnolia, a herald of spring, is susceptible to many insects and diseases but rarely is damaged by any. It can be pruned early spring. It is effective as a flowering shrub (Star Magnolia) or tree (Saucer or Sweetbay Magnolia). The flowering periods are as follows: Star Magnolia — mid-April; 'Dr. Merrill' Magnolia — third week of April; Saucer Magnolia — mid-May; Lily Magnolia — third week of May; and Sweetbay Magnolia — throughout June. **WTT**



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