

Magnolias

FOR CENTRAL FLORIDA

By Eric Schmidt

The Magnolia Family, Magnoliaceae, is a family of flowering trees and shrubs native mainly to eastern North America, tropical South America, and eastern Asia. They are found growing in both temperate and tropical climates. There are two different genus found in the Magnoliaceae. *Liriodendron*, which consists of 2 species and *Magnolia* which contains around 210 different species. Recent taxonomy changes have lumped previously separate genera such as *Manglietia*, *Michelia*, *Parakmeria*, and *Talauma* into *Magnolia*.

The Magnolia Family is one of the most primitive of the angiosperms (flowering plants). Fossils of Magnoliaceae date back 80 million years, into the late Cretaceous, when dinosaurs still ruled the land. Members of the Magnolia Family bear primitive flowers with pistils and stamens arranged spirally on a cone-like structure. They also lack true petals or sepals, instead bearing similar structures called tepals.

In Central Florida several species of Magnolia are popular landscape trees. There are many others not widely grown but are suitable for use in our climate. Many of the more northern, temperate-type of deciduous Magnolias do not grow well here or are short lived. Of the trees that are suited, most are easy to grow and have just a few basic needs. Magnolias prefer acidic soils and do not grow well in alkaline locations or areas with high pH. Most also prefer fairly moist soils. Some are even tolerant of wet locations.

Magnolia grandiflora, Southern Magnolia, is a native of Florida and the southeastern U.S. It is one of the most widely grown trees in Florida and also one of the most widely cultivated Magnolias in the world. It is a large, stately, evergreen tree that can grow 30 to 80 feet tall. It has large, leathery leaves that are dark green with undersides often covered in a rusty pubescence. In late spring and early summer it bears large white flowers that are very fragrant. In recent years quite a few cultivars with varying heights, growth habits and foliage have been introduced to the nursery



Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis

trade. 'Alta' is a dense grower with a narrower, upright form. It can grow 20-30 feet tall. 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' is a dense grower with smaller leaves that are rusty brown on the undersides. 'Coco' has a nice pyramidal form and very dark green leaves. 'D.D. Blanchard' also has a pyramidal form. The foliage is very lustrous and dark green and very distinct brownish orange undersides. It is also a much faster growing form. This one is very commonly planted in Central Florida. 'Greenback' ('MgTig') is also dense grower with smaller, cupped, dark green leaves. 'Little Gem' is another common cultivar. It is a dwarf form only growing 10 to 20 feet tall. The leaves and flowers are also smaller, about half the normal size. This cultivar has a much longer bloom period, often flowering into December. 'Miss Chloe' is a faster growing cultivar with large leaves and flowers. 'Teddy Bear' is a newer form with a dense, upright pyramidal form. The dark green leaves are fuzzy and orange on the undersides. Southern Magnolia is fairly drought tolerant once it is established but grows and looks better with watering during very dry times.



***Magnolia grandiflora* 'DD Blanchard'**

Magnolia virginiana var. *australis*, Southern Sweetbay Magnolia, is another native tree, growing wild in the southeastern U.S. This is a fast growing, evergreen tree with a narrow growth form. It can reach 30 to 60 feet tall. The shiny, dark green leaves are silvery underneath. It bears white, lemon scented flowers during late spring and summer. Southern Sweetbay Magnolia prefers moist soils. It can also grow in wet or swampy locations.

Liriodendron tulipifera, American Tulip Tree, is native to the eastern U.S. In Central Florida, its range extends south into the Wekiva basin. Trees of this east central Florida ecotype are the specimens that should be grown in this area as they are adapted to our subtropical climate. They differ in that the leaves have rounded lobes and the tree only remains deciduous for a short period of time. It is a fast growing tree that can reach over 50 feet tall, often 70 to 90 feet. In early spring it bears greenish-yellow flowers. American Tulip Tree also prefers a moist soil and can also grow in wet locations. *Liriodendron chinense*, the Chinese Tulip Tree, is similar but has much larger flowers and leaves. Also the leaves are more deeply lobed. It can grow 40 to 60 feet tall and is also deciduous. It is native from central China to northern Vietnam.

Magnolia champaca (formerly *Michelia champaca*), Champaca Tree, is native to southeastern Asia. It is an evergreen tree growing 30 to 40 feet tall. During the warmer months it bears small, orange flowers that are extremely fragrant. Oils derived from these flowers are used to make perfume including Joy. *Magnolia x alba* is similar but it bears pure white flowers. 'Golden' is a cultivar of *M. x alba* that bears white flowers that turn a golden color. Champaca Trees are tender and better suited to the warmer locations of Central Florida.

Magnolia coco is a dwarf tree only growing 6 to 8 feet tall. It is evergreen and bears small, white flowers during the warmer months. They are very fragrant. *Magnolia coco* prefers a shaded location. It is also somewhat tender to cold so grows best in the warmer areas of Central Florida. Because of its small size, it can be grown in a container in colder areas. *Magnolia coco* is native to southern China, northern Vietnam and Taiwan.

Magnolia ernestii (*Michelia wilsonii*) is an evergreen tree with very dark green leaves. It bears fragrant yellow flowers during the warmer months. It can grow 30 to 40 feet tall and is native to southern China.

Magnolia figo (formerly *Michelia figo*), is known as the Banana Shrub. It is a dense, evergreen shrub growing 6-10 feet tall. In spring and early summer it bears small greenish yellow flowers that are very fragrant with a banana scent. In Central Florida it grows better with afternoon shade or in bright, filtered light. It is native to southeastern China. *Magnolia figo* var. *skinneriana* is a superior form that seems better suited to our area. It also has a longer bloom period.

Magnolia lilifera var. *lilifera* (*Talauma candollei*), Egg Magnolia, is native to southeastern Asia. It bears white flowers that are very fragrant during the summer. The unopened flower buds are egg shaped.

Magnolia lilifera var. *ovata* (*Talauma hodgsonii*), Himalayan Magnolia, is an evergreen tree with extremely large leaves. It bears very fragrant white flowers in summer. It can grow 10-20 feet tall and is native to southeastern Asia.

Magnolia macclurei (*Michelia macclurei*) grows wild in southern China and northern Vietnam. It is evergreen and grows 30-50 feet tall. It bears large white flowers that are extremely fragrant.

Magnolia maudiae (*Michelia maudiae*) is an evergreen tree growing 20-30 feet tall. It bears large, fragrant white flowers in spring. It is also native to southern China.

Magnolia sirindhorniae (*Michelia sirindhorniae*), Thai Magnolia, is an evergreen tree growing 15-20 feet tall. It bears small creamy white flowers during the warmer months which are sweetly scented.

Magnolia tamaulipana, Mexican Magnolia, has a narrow growth form and grows 20-30 feet tall. It is evergreen and bears flowers similar to *M. grandiflora* but they are smaller in size. It is native to northeastern Mexico.



Magnolia champaca



Magnolia grandiflora



Magnolia grandiflora 'Little Gem'