

Magnolia virginiana

Sweetbay or Swamp Magnolia

Tried and True
Native Plant Selections
for the Mid-Atlantic

Lovely, lemon-scented, cup-shaped flowers appear mid-spring and bloom intermittently throughout summer, followed by showy, cone-like fruit. This elegant tree appears in two forms: often multi-trunked and deciduous north of North Carolina and single-trunked and evergreen southward. It is [native](#) to lowlands and freshwater swamps along the Mid-Atlantic* and Gulf coasts.



Tree	Flower, Fruit with Seeds, Early Fall Tree
Height: 12–30 feet	
Spread: 12–30 feet	
Bloom Color: White to cream	
Characteristics	
Deciduous to evergreen w/ spreading, rounded crown	
Alternate , pinnate , lanceolate , smooth-margined leaves glabrous , green above and silvery below	
Very fragrant, solitary, 2–3” flowers w/ 9–12 petals and up to 102 stamens & 50 pistils May–June	
Styles persist as short beaks on pinkish cone-like fruits (etaerios of follicles) that dehisce in summer to reveal bright red aril -covered seeds	
Bark smooth, gray, and lightly scented	
Attributes	
Tolerates clay soil , boggy soil, shade, occasional flooding, air pollution, and some salt	
No serious pests or diseases	
Deer severely damage seldom in northern part of range, more frequently in south and west	
Attracts birds and other wildlife species; larval host for the Eastern Tiger and Spicebush Swallowtail butterflies and for the Promethea and Sweetbay silkmoths	
Growing and Maintenance Tips	Excellent Replacement for
Soil Requirements : Rich, acidic	Acer palmatum - Japanese Maple
Light Requirements : Sun, Partial Shade	Koelreuteria paniculata - Golden Raintree
Water Requirements : Moist, Wet	Paulownia tomentosa - Princess Tree
Use as specimen, patio plant or in shrub borders, rain gardens (larger than 150 sq ft), or wet areas	Pyrus calleryana - Callery (‘Bradford’) Pear
Hardiness : USDA Zones 5–10	*It is native to DC. It is common in the Coastal Plains of DE and VA. It is infrequent to rare in the VA Piedmont but is native to NoVA except to Loudoun County. It is rare in PA.

developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria

Images by Christa Watters, Simpson Gardens and by Elaine Mills (fruit), private garden, Arlington, Virginia