UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ PROGRAM

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Magnolia macrophylla: Bigleaf Magnolia[1]

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson[2]

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Introduction

This North American native tree is deciduous in most areas but semi-evergreen in the Deep South. Bigleaf Magnolia grows slowly to 30 to 40 feet and spreads 20 to 25 feet forming a rounded, broad canopy. The leaves of Bigleaf Magnolia are truly large, 12 to 32 inches long and 7 to 12 inches wide, when found in the wild and somewhat smaller when grown in landscapes. These leaves are bright green above with a fuzzy, silver/grey underside, creating a beautiful, two-toned effect with each passing breeze. From May to July the showy, fragrant blossoms appear, each 8 to 12-inch-wide, ivory-colored bloom having a slight rose tint at its base. These blooms are followed by the production of 2.5 to 3-inch-long, hairy, red, egg-shaped fruits. Bigleaf Magnolia trees must be 12 to 15-years-of-age before they begin to bloom.



Figure 1. Young *Magnolia macrophylla*: Bigleaf Magnolia
Credit: Ed Gilman

General Information

Scientific name: *Magnolia macrophylla*

Pronunciation: mag-NO-lee-uh mack-roe-FILL-uh

Common name(s): Bigleaf Magnolia

Family: *Magnoliaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 5B through 8B (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: specimen; shade

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

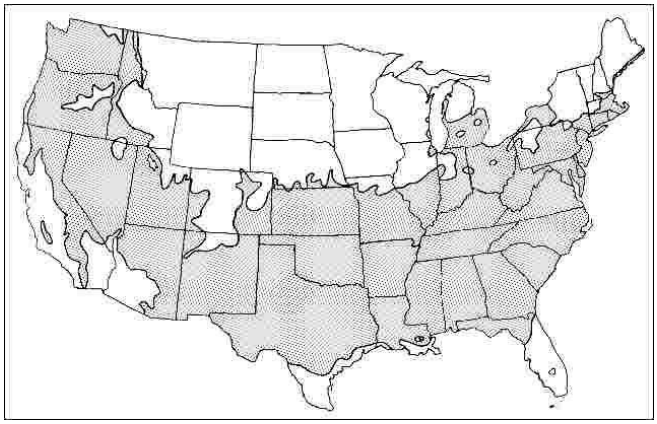

Figure 2. Range

Description

Height: 30 to 40 feet

Spread: 20 to 30 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular

Crown shape: oval

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: moderate

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: oblong, obovate

Leaf venation: pinnate, brachidodrome

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 12 to 18 inches, 18 to 36 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

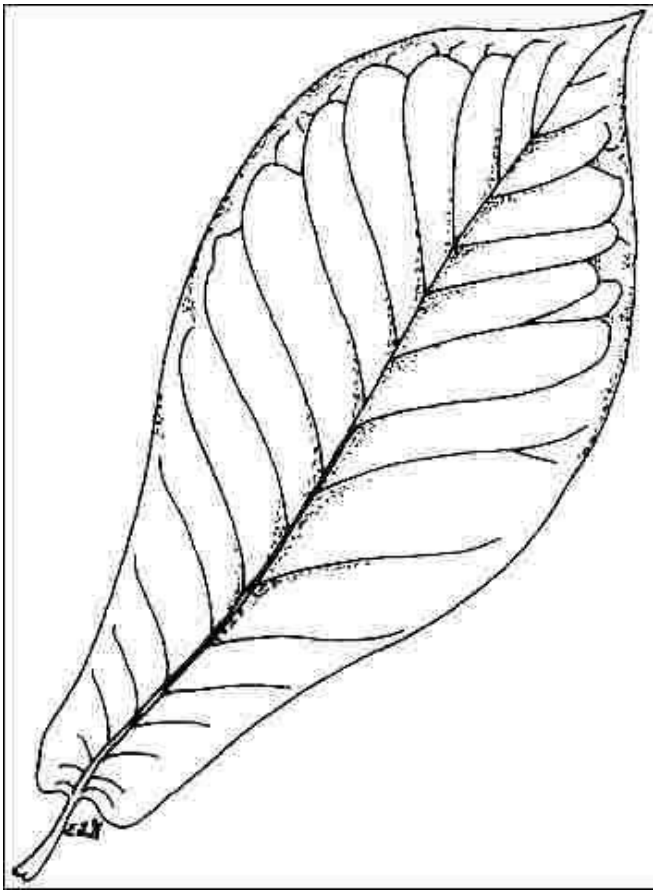

Figure 3. Foliage

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

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns

Pruning requirement: little required

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown, green

Current year twig thickness: thick

Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade

Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; acidic; slightly alkaline; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: unknown

Other

Roots: not a problem

Winter interest: no

Outstanding tree: no

Ozone sensitivity: tolerant

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

The tree may be rather short lived in many landscape sites unless its cultural requirements are met fairly closely. Branches break easily in wind storms and ice-laden branches snap off. The large leaves decompose slowly after they fall and blow around on the ground creating litter which some people will find objectionable. It may be best to locate this tree in a ground cover bed where leaves can drop and filter down beneath the low growing plants unseen.

Bigleaf Magnolia should be grown in full sun or partial shade on well-drained soil, and does not tolerate wet soil or drought. It appears to be somewhat picky in its requirements. In its native habitat it is found on rich, moist soils.

Cultivars include `Palmberg', with very large flowers, and `Purple Spotted', flowers with purple markings in the center.

Propagation is by seed or softwood cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.

[1] This document is ENH-540, one of a series of the UF/IFAS Department of Environmental Horticulture. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the Ask IFAS website at https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu for the currently supported version of this publication. © UF/IFAS. This publication is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 *To learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water and natural resources, visit ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/.*

[2] Edward F. Gilman, professor emeritus, UF/IFAS Department of Environmental Horticulture; Dennis G. Watson, former associate professor, UF/IFAS Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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