

Magnolia macrophylla (Bigleaf magnolia) Magnolia Family (Magnoliaceae)

Introduction:

Bigleaf magnolia has huge leaves that are 12 to 36 inches long, and ivory-colored flowers that average 8 to 10 inches across. The tree's coarse appearance makes it difficult to use in residential areas. It can be used as a specimen tree or shade tree in parks or other large areas.

Culture:

Bigleaf magnolia can be grown in full sun or part shade. It prefers well-drained sand or loam and slightly alkaline to acidic soil. The tree is moderately tolerant of drought. It is susceptible to ice and wind damage, and its large leaves damage easily and decompose slowly, creating a litter problem. It tends to be short-lived in landscape settings unless care is taken to meet its cultural requirements. Bigleaf magnolia has suffered tip damage in zone 4.

Additional information:

Bigleaf magnolia is a deciduous tree but is semi-evergreen in the deep South. Bigleaf magnolia occurs over a large area but individual trees are scarce. It is found in Kentucky, which is home to the national champion - a tree in Tight Hollow, Ky. measured 108 feet tall with a 42-foot spread.

French naturalist Andre Michaux discovered bigleaf magnolia in June of 1795 near Charlotte, N.C. Michaux wrote the following year of being near Charlotte and pulling "shoots of a new Magnolia with very large leaves; the buds very silky; Flowers white, Petals with a base of a purple color. Stamens yellow, etc." Michaux also wrote of seeing the tree in the Cumberland Mountains.

Bigleaf magnolia was introduced into the landscape in 1800.



Botanical Characteristics:

Native habitat: Ohio to Florida, Arkansas to Louisiana.

Growth habit: Oval, pyramidal, irregular silhouette.

Tree size: Reaches an average height of 30 to 40 feet. Growth rate is moderate

Flower and fruit: Flowers are creamy white and up to a foot across. Flowers are borne in summer and have a pleasant fragrance. The inner three petals have purple stains near their base. Fruit is round to egg-shaped, rose-colored and about 3 inches long. Fruit is persistent and attracts birds.

Leaf: Leaves are alternate, simple, 12 to 36 inches long and 7 to 12 inches wide. They are bright green above and silvery gray below. Petioles are 2 to 4 inches long. Fall color is yellow.

Hardiness: Winter hardy to USDA Zone 5. Downy serviceberry often has a reddish cast. It becomes ridged and furrowed as the tree ages.