

## Look for new Southern magnolia cultivars

Southern Magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora*, is a popular Florida native tree. This statuesque broadleaf tree is valued for its glossy, evergreen leaves and large, fragrant white flowers. Growing up to 100 feet tall, Southern magnolia is native to moist woods from North Carolina to central Florida and west to Texas. In landscapes, Southern magnolia grows best in north and central Florida in moist, well-drained, slightly acid soil in sunny locations receiving afternoon shade.

Dr. Gary Knox, University of Florida Professor and Extension Horticulture Specialist, provides information on a few of the many Southern magnolia cultivars in today's article.

More than 42 cultivars of Southern magnolia have been selected for ornamental characteristics including compactness, brown-backed leaves, green-backed leaves, large or numerous flowers, fast growth and for ease of rooting from cuttings. The three most popular and widely grown cultivars are 'Bracken's Brown Beauty', 'D.D. Blanchard' and 'Little Gem'.

'Bracken's Brown Beauty' is dense and compact when young and eventually grows 30 to 50 feet tall and 15 to 30 feet wide with a pyramidal habit. Leaves have wavy margins and are dark green with rusty brown undersides. 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' flowers heavily but flowers are smaller than typical. It roots and transplants well.

'D. D. Blanchard' grows as a large tree with a compact, pyramidal growth habit. The dark green leaves have a bright copper-colored backing. Unfortunately, this tree flowers poorly when young. 'D. D. Blanchard' roots relatively easy from cuttings but borers can be a problem in nursery production. 'D. D. Blanchard' is sometimes listed as Blanchard™ or 'Brown Velvet'.

'Little Gem' is widely grown because it flowers freely and its mature height is 20 to 40 feet, much smaller than most selections. 'Little Gem' has a long flowering season that can extend from May through November. It has attractive small, dark green leaves with copper- to bronze-brown undersides. 'Little Gem' tends to grow with a multi-stemmed, shrub-like form, sometimes making it more difficult for growers and landscapers to maintain a central trunk. This cultivar tends to have fewer borer problems than many others.

Other cultivars often found in the nursery industry are Alta®, 'Claudia Wannamaker', Greenback™, 'Kay Parris', Miss Chloe™, 'Saint Mary' (sometimes listed as Glen Saint Mary, Glen St. Mary and St. Mary), 'Samuel Sommer' and Teddy Bear® ('Southern Charm').

Most cultivars of Southern magnolia are readily found in wholesale and retail nurseries. Newer cultivars are likely to have limited availability. Southern magnolia is very popular and new, improved forms will continue to be selected and introduced. Watch for a new Extension publication on Southern magnolia by Gary Knox and Juanita Popenoe.

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