

## ***Magnolia grandiflora* 'Little Gem' 'Little Gem' Southern Magnolia<sup>1</sup>**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This cultivar of Southern Magnolia has a compact, upright growth habit more typical of a multistemmed shrub than a single-trunked tree (Fig. 1). It grows at a slow rate to a height of perhaps 30 to 35 feet with an 8 to 12-foot spread and flowers at two or three years old. It is surprising to see a Magnolia flower when it is only three or four feet tall. 'Little Gem' Southern Magnolia forms a dense, dark green oval or pyramidal shape, making it suited for screen or hedge planting.

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** *Magnolia grandiflora* 'Little Gem'

**Pronunciation:** mag-NO-lee-uh gran-dih-FLOR-uh

**Common name(s):** 'Little Gem' Southern Magnolia

**Family:** *Magnoliaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7 through 10A (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** native to North America

**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; espalier; wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; screen; narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

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

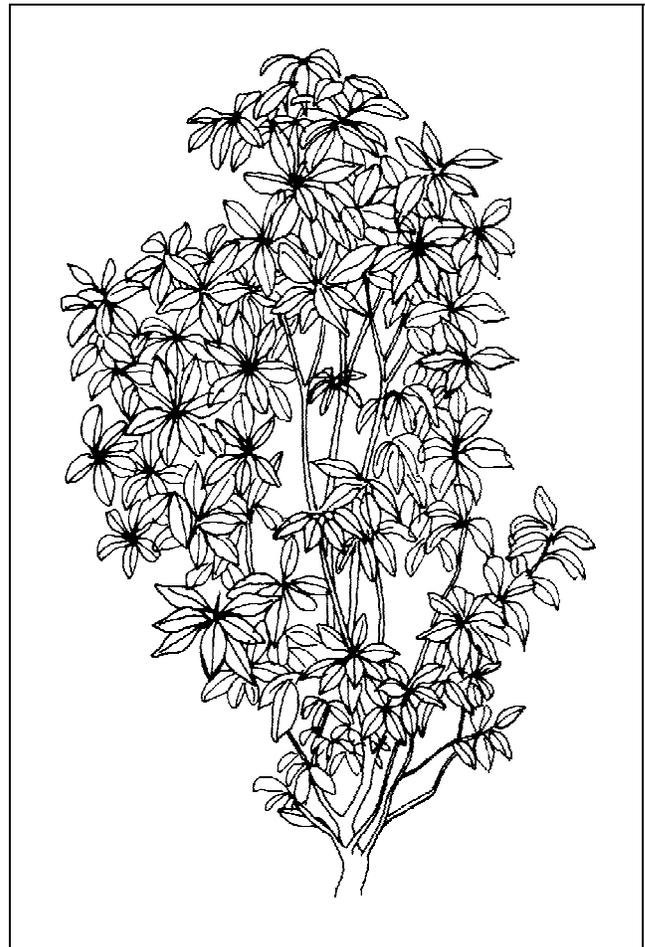


Figure 1. Young 'Little Gem' Southern Magnolia.

### **DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 20 to 40 feet

**Spread:** 8 to 12 feet

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** pyramidal; upright

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval); ovate

**Leaf venation:** banchidodrome; pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches; 1 to 3 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown; red

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

**Pruning requirement:** needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage:** resistant

**Current year twig color:** green

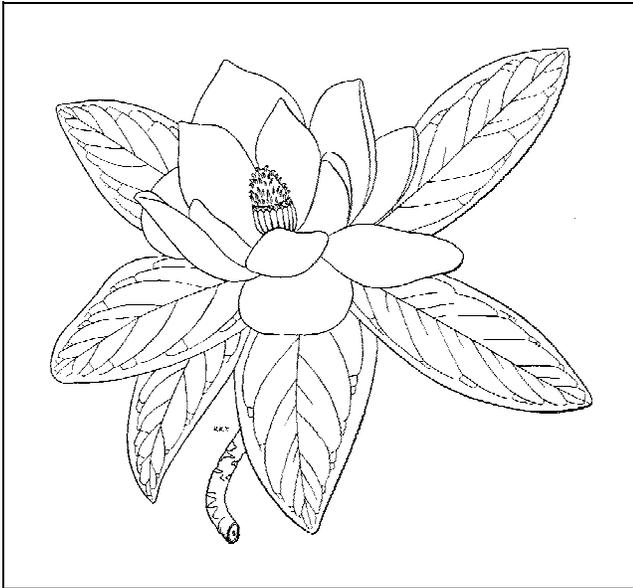


Figure 3. Foliage of 'Little Gem' Southern Magnolia.

**Current year twig thickness:** thick  
**Wood specific gravity:** 0.50

### Culture

**Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun;  
 tree grows in full sun

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

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

### Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding tree:** tree has outstanding ornamental  
 features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not  
 affected by pests

## USE AND MANAGEMENT

The five to 8-inch-long, leathery, oblong, shiny leaves are shed as new foliage emerges in the spring. The large, slowly-decomposing leaves drop on the sidewalk or patio and are considered by some people to be messy or a nuisance to clean up. The underside of the leaves is covered with a fine, red-brown fuzz which is more prominent on some selections than others. In late spring and sporadically throughout the summer, huge, 8-inch-diameter, waxy, fragrant, white

blossoms open to perfume the entire garden. Fuzzy brown cones follow these blooms, ripening in fall and winter to reveal bright red seeds which are used by a variety of wildlife.

Long-used as a striking garden specimen, Southern Magnolia can also serve as a dense screen or windbreak or street tree where there is plenty of soil space for root expansion. Its ease of growth and carefree nature make Southern Magnolia ideal for the low-maintenance landscape. With proper pruning, Southern Magnolia trees can also be used as an interesting espalier. They are tolerant of pruning and can be shaped into a screen or hedge of almost any form. This is a nice Southern Magnolia for residential properties since it stays small, has small leaves and flowers early.

If moist, peaty soils are available, Southern Magnolia will thrive in full sun and hot conditions once established. If irrigation cannot be provided periodically, plants located in partial shade for several years after planting seem to grow better. Very drought tolerant when grown in areas with plenty of soil for root expansion. Only moderately drought tolerant in restricted-soil areas or in areas with poor, dry soil. Southern Magnolia prefers acid soil but will tolerate a slightly basic, even wet or clay soil. It is generally too hot and dry in central and western Texas and Oklahoma, and the soil pH is often too alkaline for this tree.

The root system is wider spreading than most other trees, extending from the trunk a distance equal to about four times the canopy width. This makes it very difficult to save existing Magnolia trees on construction sites.

Be sure that there are no roots circling close to the trunk, as Magnolia is prone to girdling roots. Cut any circling roots prior to planting. Field-grown trees recover slowly from transplanting due to the wide-spreading root system in the nursery, and trees often transplant best in winter and spring, not in the fall.

The species germinated from seed is quite variable in growth rate and form with some trees dense and compact, others loose and open. A number of cultivars are available: 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' has an unusually dark brown lower leaf surface; 'Cairo' has an early and long flowering period; 'Charles Dickens' has broad, nearly blunt leaves, large flowers and large red fruit; 'Edith Bogue' is the hardiest of the cultivars and will bloom when only two to three-years-

old; 'Glen St. Mary' has a compact form, will bloom when young, is slow-growing, and the leaves have a bronze underside; 'Gloriosa' has large flowers and leaves; 'Goliath' has flowers up to 12 inches across, a long blooming period, and a bushy habit of growth; 'Hasse' can be used for a compact, dense hedge; 'Lanceolata' has a narrow pyramidal form, narrower leaves with rusty undersides; 'Majestic Beauty' (patented) has large, dark green leaves, a pyramidal shape, and profuse flowering; 'Praecox Fastigiata' has upright, narrow growth habit; 'Samuel Sommer' has an upright, rapid growth habit and flowers up to 14 inches across; 'Victoria' is very hardy, has small flowers, and rust-red leaf-undersides. There are others, often difficult to see real differences among a number of cultivars.

Propagation is by cuttings (for the cultivars), grafting, or seed.

## **Pests**

Scales of various types will infest twigs and leaves. Magnolia scale is the most common scale and can be one half-inch-across. Overwintering scales can be controlled with horticultural oil. Trees appear to grow fine even with heavy infestations, although they can be unsightly.

Tulip-poplar weevil (sassafras weevil) feeds as a leaf miner when young and chews holes in the leaves as an adult.

Magnolia borer is a problem on young nursery stock. It girdles the trunk usually just below the soil surface. Control is difficult but attainable with the proper material.

## **Diseases**

Magnolia may be subject to leaf spots, blights, scabs and black mildews caused by a large number of fungi, or a bacterium but they rarely require chemical controls. Raking up and disposing infected leaves may reduce leaf spots next year. Algae can also cause leaf spots.

Canker diseases will kill branches. Cankers on branches can be pruned out. Keep trees healthy with regular fertilization and by watering in dry weather.

Verticillium wilt may cause death of a few branches or, rarely, may kill the tree. Prune out dead branches and fertilize.