

Fun facts about magnolias

- Magnolias are the most primitive flowering plant still in existence. Fossil record dates back nearly 100 million years.
- Magnolias bear largest individual flower of any tree or shrub in temperate climates.
- Magnolia flowers are very primitive and do not have the “modern” sepal and petal formation. Instead, they have “tepals” which combine those two structures. Tepals are very tough because the trees are pollinated by beetles (bees didn’t exist 100 million years ago).
- Fuzzy structure enclosing bud is a “perule”.
- Magnolias were named after Pierre Magnol, an 18th century French botanist who invented the concept of plant families. Linnaeus built his classification scheme on Magnol’s ideas.
- At one time the trees were everywhere in northern hemisphere, but last ice age pushed their habitats to eastern Asian and eastern US.
- Two different kinds:
 - Deciduous (mostly from Asia):
 - Bloom from early spring to early summer (early spring bloomers risk losing blossoms due to frost).
 - Some bloom first then leaf out (call “precocious”); others leaf and bloom at the same time. Some shrubby, some tree-like.
 - Leaves turn into beautiful lace in fall.
 - Evergreen (mostly from America):
 - Grandiflora needs protection from weather
 - (one specimen topped by falling pine trees in VD garden)
 - Suffers from fungus and chlorosis
 - Blooms highly fragrant and thought to be deadly.
- Medicinal value
 - Mentioned as far back as 1083 BC in China. Bark used to produce a tonic for nerve and gastrointestinal disorders and the extensive cutting of trees for this purpose has left wild populations sparse.
 - Flower buds are reputed to help female problems and muscle relaxant quality of bark relieves menstrual cramps.

