

Saucer Magnolia - *Magnolia x soulangiana*

A beautiful sign that spring has sprung is the Saucer Magnolia, or sometimes called the Tulip Tree. This deciduous magnolia blooms just before its leaves emerge in the spring. An old-fashioned tree, it is often encountered as a medium to large shrub, and is a most dramatic deciduous flowering tree when in bloom. Its flowers are large, goblet shaped, and fuzzy about one inch long. Depending on the variety, the fragrant flowers vary in color from deepest purple to lightest pink to pure white. Some have pure white interiors with exteriors of purple to pink blending with white in various patterns. Each bloom is composed of six waxy petals in a chalice arrangement that ranges in diameter from three to six inches when fully opened into "saucer position".

The tree has a coarse texture due in part to its big and broad dark green leaves that are five to eight inches long. Saucer magnolia usually has multiple trunks that are covered in smooth, gray bark. Mature trees can reach as high as 30 feet with a spread only somewhat less which develops an open canopy as it grows. Shape and form is dependent on variety.

This medium to slow growing tree makes a wonderful shade tree. Use as a free standing specimen or in a small group with plenty of space for them to stretch their branches and grow. The saucer magnolia's coarseness adds texture and interest to a mixed shrubbery border. One landscape idea is to plant with hardy evergreen shrubs in the background so they provide a nice backdrop when the saucer magnolia blooms in the spring.

Plant this tree in full sun to partial shade-- morning sun with filtered shade in the heat of day is ideal. They will take full sun if well mulched and moist, but such conditions often promote earlier flowering in the winter, which is subject to cold damage. For best results, plant in a protected area to delay blooming as long as possible. Late freezes sometimes burn the very early flowers.

They prefer moist, well-drained, rich soil with plenty of organic matter. Feed with general fertilizer before new growth begins in the spring. Prune as needed after flowering but before setting buds for next season. Pay attention to watering needs in times of drought.

Some pests or diseases occasionally infest this tree. Scales may infest twigs and foliage and leaves are subject to leaf spot. Canker diseases will kill entire branches.

Propagation:

Root cuttings with terminal buds in early summer.

The parents of this hybrid are *M. heptapeta* and *M. liliiflora* which are native to Japan.

