

Sweet bay magnolia

Magnolia virginiana



A Magnolia Native to Massachusetts

Most people are familiar with the showy Asian magnolias that bloom in April before their leaves appear, but are surprised to learn about native North American magnolias. The North American species bloom later, after the leaves emerge. The magnolia native to Massachusetts is *Magnolia virginiana* (**sweet bay magnolia**). Its creamy white flowers are considered by many people to be the most fragrant of all magnolias. Unlike the short bloom time of the Asian magnolias, sweet bay magnolias usually bloom throughout the month of June.

We have several different forms of the sweet bay magnolia at the Arboretum: some are multi-stemmed and some have single trunks; some keep their leaves all winter and others are deciduous; some were collected from the wild in Massachusetts and others come from farther south. This small tree grows well in in wet or even swampy soils near the coast and along streams.

Other American magnolias you might find blooming in June at the Arboretum:

Cucumber tree (*Magnolia acuminata*) is the largest of all magnolia trees. Over the summer, its greenish-yellow flowers turn into cylindrical fruits that look like tiny cucumbers. The fruits develop a pinkish tint when they ripen in the fall, and split open to expose red seeds.

Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) is barely hardy in Boston. It is much better suited to warmer areas south of New York and in the western US.

Big-leaf magnolia (*Magnolia macrophylla*), as the name implies, has the largest undivided leaves of any native American plant.

Letterboxing!

Letterboxing is a fun way to explore native magnolias at the Arboretum. For more information on letterboxing, go to www.letterboxing.org. Check out a new letterbox every month—stop by the Hunnewell Visitor Center or download a guide online.

To find the letterbox, follow these directions:

- Start at the Bussey Street Gate map table.
- Find yourself on the map. Follow the path to Walter Street Gate for 64 steps. On your right is the beginning of Conifer Path. Go to the bridge and look west.
- Look on the left bank of Bussey Brook to see a *Ginkgo bilboa*.
- Look on the right side to see *Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*. This is the June tree-of-the-month; is it blooming?
- Walk to the trunk of the tree and search under the large leaves for the letterbox. Follow the directions inside and leave everything just as you found it.



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