



Magnolia Magic

July and August sees the deciduous Magnolias burst into bloom after that long wait for the fat, furry buds to open. Once they do, the suburbs light up with stunning displays of exotic, sumptuous blooms ranging in color from the purest white to dark velvety purple. It's worth the wait!

Deciduous Magnolias, along with the evergreens, are a very ancient genus in the plant world. It is thought that they are so old that the plants evolved before bees came on the scene and so they had to rely on beetles for pollination! Magnolias originate from parts of South America, eastern and central states of the USA and large parts of Asia. Plant hunters and botanists were tramping all over parts of China and Japan in the 18th century looking for new plant species, rarities and the unknown. So many of the garden plants that we take for granted originated from Asia. Many of the deciduous Magnolias that we are familiar with today have been hybridised from stock originating in the Far East.

Perhaps the most common and well loved deciduous Magnolia is the *M. soulangeana*. This is probably the one that you will see in most gardens. Just because it is widely grown, don't ignore it. This small tree is so popular because it is so totally beautiful when in full bloom. The tree grows to about 5 metres high and wide and at this time of the year is a showstopper bearing lightly fragrant, gorgeous large cupped pink blooms. It's tough, it's easy to grow and it's a reliable bloomer! You can't ask for much more than that.

Here are a few tips for deciduous Magnolia care. Plant in an open, sunny, well drained position. Ensure there is plenty of space for the plant to develop its natural shape. Don't plant where possums can get to the succulent buds from a roof or power lines. You can deter them climbing up the trunk with grease or with metal guards. Do not prune if at all possible. What will occur are tall, fast-growing, upright stems from the pruned spot. The tree will form an awkward shape, whereas one of the main features of all deciduous magnolias is their unpredictable and very appealing free form that usually ends up cup shaped.

Feed the trees in late spring, after flowering and ensure that they get adequate deep watering during dry spells.

There are plenty of varieties to choose from. Your local garden centre will be able to give you good advice as to the best suited for your garden. The Water Lilly Magnolia – *Magnolia stellata*, is a much more compact growing deciduous variety ideally suited to courtyard gardens, large pots etc. The petals do not form into a cup; instead they tend to almost be reflex. You could plant the pure white *Magnolia denudata* or go for one of the stunning larger flowered hybrids. There will be a variety to suit your garden – that's for sure!

Life's a garden – *dig it!*