

Magnolia macrophylla - Bigleaf Magnolia (*Magnoliaceae*)

Magnolia tripetala - Umbrella Magnolia (*Magnoliaceae*)

Magnolia tripetala derives its common name from the large leaves that are arranged in clusters at the ends of branches, like an umbrella. As with Umbrella Magnolia, *Magnolia macrophylla*, Bigleaf Magnolia is valued for its large leaves that lend a tropical appearance in temperate climates.

FEATURES

Form

- deciduous tree, 20-30' tall x 20-30' wide (*M. t.*) or about 40-60' x 30' (*M. m.*)
- upright-rounded, often multi-stemmed (*M. t.*)
- rounded, straight, single trunk (*M. m.*)
- rapid growth for both

Culture

Magnolia tripetala:

- In its native habitat, the species is found growing in rich, moist soils of sheltered woods and ravines
- grows best with partial shade and well-drained, slightly acid soil.
- it is shade tolerant, but very sensitive to drought and fire.
- the most cold hardy of the large leaf magnolias
- propagated by seed
- very rare in the trade

Magnolia macrophylla:

- partial shade in rich, uniformly moist, slightly acidic soils with good drainage

Foliage

- bright green and smooth on the upper surface, light gray downy beneath, particularly along the large midrib and principal veins (Took this info. From M.m. – FOR BOTH?)
- leaves simple, oblong-ovate, very large (10-24" long x 6-10" wide), coarse, tend to cluster at end of branches (*M. t.*)
- oblong or pear-shaped, 12-32" long x 7-12" wide (*M. m.*)

Such large leaves give the tree a coarse texture and present an interesting litter problem in the autumn.

- M. tripetala* distinguished from *M. macrophylla* in being smaller and with a narrow base, tapered
- M. macrophylla* has leaves that are lobed at the base



Flowers

- creamy-white, solitary, flowers, up to 8" in diameter open in late spring after the foliage, unpleasantly fragrant (*M. t.*)
- fragrant, 14" wide, 9 creamy-white petals, each marked with a purplish spot near the base (*M. m.*)
- trees begin flowering when as young as 7 yrs. from seed.

Fruits

- generally rounded, hairy, bright rose color when ripe.
- each of the parts of the fruit contains a red flattened seed suspended by a thin thread or filament
- the 4" long fruits are the brightest red of the American Magnolias (*M. t.*)
- 3" long red/pinkish fruit (*M. m.*)

Twigs

M. tripetala:

- stout, smooth, green
- wood has a disagreeable smell when cut

M. macrophylla:

- stout, noticeably wide-spreading branches, forming a broad, rounded top
- branchlets brittle, yellow-green the first season, and plainly marked with leaf scars

Trunk

- smooth, gray (*M. t.*)
- smooth silvery-gray, straight trunk up to 12-16" in diameter (*M. m.*)
- wood is hard but rather weak and light, close-grained, limited commercial use (*M. m.*)

USAGE

Function

- specimen, shade, may work as a patio tree
- not suitable in most landscapes except as a specimen tree where there is plenty of room and no soil compaction.

Texture

- coarse when bare and in leaf

Assets

- provides a "tropical look" in a temperate climate

Liabilities

- not particularly tolerant of adverse conditions
- relatively short-lived: most individuals live no more than 40 yrs.

Habitat

- Zones 5 to 8
- Southern Pennsylvania to Northern Georgia and Alabama to Kentucky and Arkansas
- Ecology: Umbrella Magnolia is a scattered tree usually in the understory of rich mesic woods, but occasionally as a tall overstory tree; an indicator species of rich mesic sites.

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- none

Cultivars - Variants - Related species

- the species is the most common form available.

Magnolia tripetala is the parent of a number of hybrids more common in the Southern U.S.

Note: A state champion tree with trunk of 44" circumference, 28' in height, and 28' spread is found in Kenyon College, Gambier OH.

Magnolia macrophylla national champion was 108' x 42' in Tight Hollow, KY.