**Magnolia kobus var. stellata**

**Star Magnolia**¹

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson²

**INTRODUCTION**

Star Magnolia is the hardiest of the Magnolias (Fig. 1). It is a small tree or large shrub, 15 to 20 feet tall with a 10 to 15-foot spread. Typically branching close to the ground, the multi-stemmed form develops with a dense head of foliage. Star Magnolia makes a wonderful patio, lawn specimen or accent tree. Lower foliage can be removed to show off the trunk and to create more of a tree-form. Otherwise, the persistent lower branches and oval to round form lend a "large bush" look to the plant. When planted against a dark background, the branching pattern and light gray trunk will show off nicely, particularly when lit up at night. The leafless winter silhouette looks great shadowed on a wall by a spotlight at night. The white flowers are produced in spring before the leaves appear, even on young plants. Flowers are usually not as sensitive to cold as Saucer Magnolia, but they can still be injured if cold weather arrives during flowering.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- **Scientific name:** Magnolia kobus var. stellata
- **Pronunciation:** mag-NO-lee-uh KOE-bus variety stell-AY-tuh
- **Common name(s):** Star Magnolia
- **Family:** Magnoliaceae
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 8 (Fig. 2)
- **Origin:** not native to North America
- **Uses:** container or above-ground planter; near a deck or patio; specimen
- **Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

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¹ This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-382, a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1994.

² Edward F. Gilman, associate professor, Environmental Horticulture Department; Dennis G. Watson, associate professor, Agricultural Engineering Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.
Foliage

**Leaf arrangement**: alternate (Fig. 3)
**Leaf type**: simple
**Leaf margin**: entire
**Leaf shape**: oblong; obovate
**Leaf venation**: banchidodrome; pinnate
**Leaf type and persistence**: deciduous
**Leaf blade length**: 2 to 4 inches
**Leaf color**: green
**Fall color**: copper; yellow
**Fall characteristic**: not showy

Flower

**Flower color**: white
**Flower characteristics**: spring flowering; very showy

Fruit

**Fruit shape**: elongated; irregular
**Fruit length**: 1 to 3 inches
**Fruit covering**: dry or hard
**Fruit color**: brown

**Fruit characteristics**: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem

Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches**: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns

**Pruning requirement**: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

**Breakage**: resistant
**Current year twig color**: brown
**Current year twig thickness**: medium; thin

Culture

**Light requirement**: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
**Soil tolerances**: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
**Drought tolerance**: moderate
**Aerosol salt tolerance**: none
**Soil salt tolerance**: poor
Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Ozone sensitivity: tolerant
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Star Magnolia is intolerant of root competition or dryness, and plants grow slowly, perhaps one foot per year. Plant in the full sun in a rich, porous and slightly acid soil. It is hard to transplant successfully and in the north should be moved balled and burlapped when actively growing. In USDA hardiness zones 7 and 8, transplant in late winter while the plants are still dormant or plant from containers at any time.

There are a few cultivars: ‘Centennial’ - some pink in petals; ‘Jane Platt’ - new, superior type with many pink petals when opening; ‘Keiskei’ - flowers purplish on the outside; ‘Rosea’ (Pink Star Magnolia) - pale pink flowers; ‘Rubra’ (Red Star Magnolia) - purplish flowers, darker than ‘Rosea’; ‘Waterlily’ - pink flower buds, white flowers, flowers larger with narrower petals. The "Little Girl Hybrids" have an upright habit and flower later than the species, thus avoiding frost injury in most years. They include ‘Ann’, ‘Betty’, ‘Jane’, ‘Judy’ ‘Randy’, ‘Ricki’ and ‘Susan’.

Pests

Basically trouble free although scales of various types may infest twigs and leaves. Magnolia scale is the most common scale and can be one half-inch-across. Overwintering scales can usually be controlled with horticultural oil.

Tulip-Poplar weevil (sassafras weevil) feeds as a leaf miner when young and chews holes in the leaves as an adult.

Diseases

None particularly troublesome. Magnolia may be subject to leaf spots, blights, scabs, and black Mildews caused by a large number of fungi or bacterium. Leaf spots rarely require chemical controls. Rake up and dispose of infected leaves.

Canker diseases will kill branches. Cankers on branches can be pruned out. Keep trees healthy with regular fertilization and by watering in dry weather.

Verticillium wilt may cause death of a few branches or may kill the tree. Prune out dead branches and fertilize regularly.