



Magnolia acuminata 'Variegata' 'Variegata' Cucumbertree¹

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INTRODUCTION

One of the fastest-growing Magnolias, Cucumbertree is pyramidal when young but becomes broad, oval or rounded with age, ultimately reaching 60 to 80 feet in height with a spread of 35 to 60 feet (Fig. 1). Branches on open-grown trees eventually touch the ground if left unpruned, but when lower branches are removed the higher branches normally will not droop to touch the ground. This provides good clearance beneath the tree for pedestrian traffic. Older trees have a stately silhouette, particularly in the winter with branches bare, sporting a number of large-diameter branches growing from a dominant central trunk. The trunk can grow to be five feet thick and the wood has been used, along with Tuliptree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), for "poorman's walnut."

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Magnolia acuminata* 'Variegata'

Pronunciation: mag-NO-lee-uh
ack-yoo-mih-NAY-tuh

Common name(s): 'Variegata' Cucumbertree,
'Variegata' Cucumber Magnolia

Family: *Magnoliaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 3B through 8 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: shade tree; specimen; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

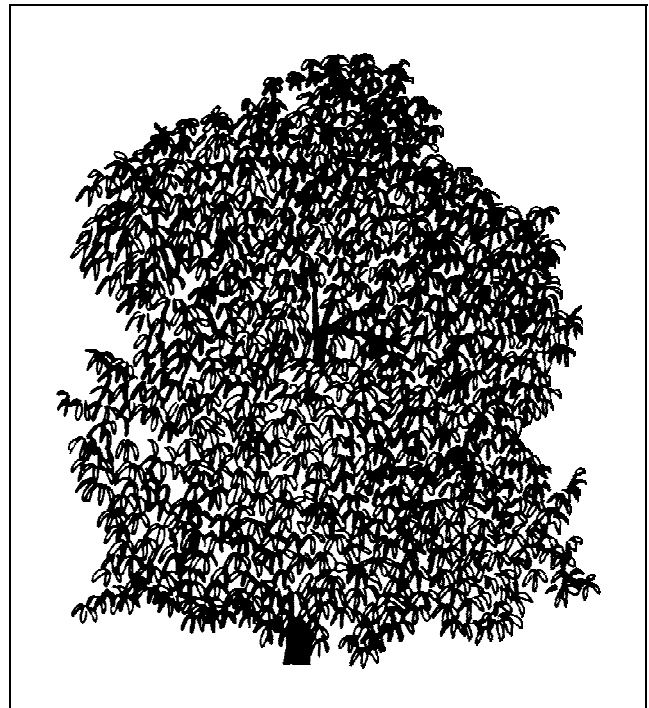


Figure 1. Middle-aged 'Variegata' Cucumbertree.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 60 to 80 feet

Spread: 35 to 60 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: pyramidal; upright

Crown density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire; undulate

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); ovate

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 8 to 12 inches; 4 to 8 inches

Leaf color: variegated

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: yellow

Flower characteristics: pleasant fragrance; inconspicuous and not showy; spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: red

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; attracts squirrels and other mammals; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; not particularly showy; should be grown with a single leader; no thorns

Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: medium

Wood specific gravity: 0.48

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; occasionally wet; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

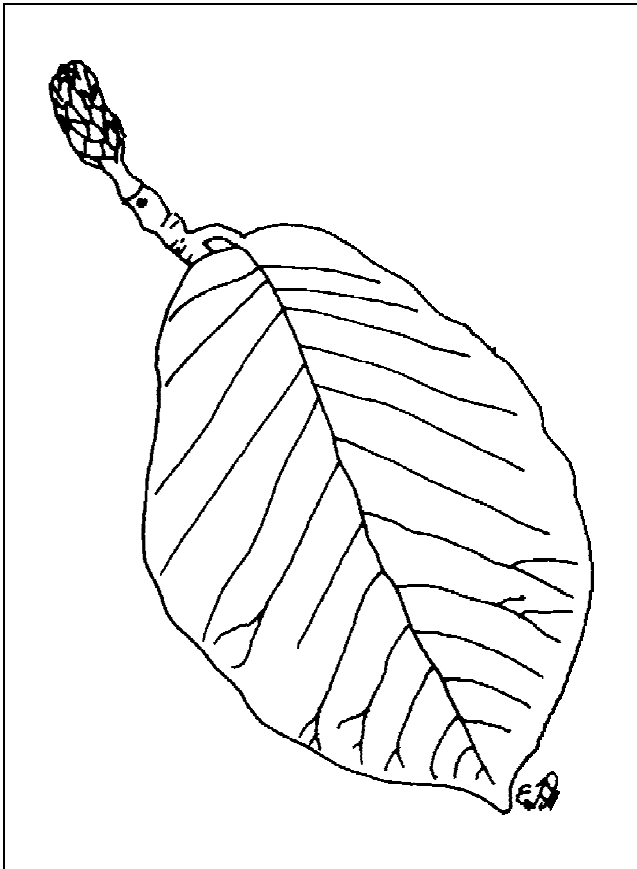


Figure 3. Foliage of 'Variegata' Cucumber tree.

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: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

The large, six to 10-inch, yellow variegated deciduous leaves are lighter and fuzzy underneath and cast very dense shade below, making Cucumber tree ideal as a shade or specimen tree. The slightly fragrant, three-inch-wide flowers appear in May or early June but their greenish-yellow to yellow coloring causes them to become lost among the foliage. These blooms are followed by the production of four-inch-long, deep red fruits which somewhat resemble a cucumber in shape. The seeds of Cucumber tree are very popular with birds and other wildlife.

Many Magnolias have a root system which spreads more than other trees. This is thought to contribute to the poor growth following transplanting Magnolia from a field nursery. There is no problem planting from containers, provided adequate irrigation is given until established.

This tree is best on large estates and open-soil areas such as parks and golf courses or along either side of an entrance road with plenty of soil space for root expansion. It does not tolerate the compacted, disturbed soils of urban areas. Be sure young trees receive adequate irrigation until the root system is well-established in loose, open soil.

A North American native, Cucumber tree grows in full sun or partial shade on well-drained soils, and should be protected from harsh, dry winds. In their native habitat, trees do best in slightly acidic soil along stream banks and on cool hillsides. Plants should not be exposed to prolonged flooding, drought, or too much pollution, but they will tolerate alkaline and wet soil quite well. Although trees should be allowed to grow and develop naturally except for occasional removal of upright branches, any pruning which might be necessary should be done only after flowering so the flower display can be enjoyed.

Cucumber tree was used as a parent plant along with *Magnolia denudata* to produce the hybrid 'Elizabeth' which has a pyramidal shape and clear yellow, fragrant blooms.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern but occasionally bothered by scale as are many other Magnolias.