Oriental Magnolias seem too good to be true.

They are among the South's most beautiful, most popular and most enduring ornamental trees. They are excellent urban trees. They are easy to grow. They're also pollution-resistant and fairly drought-resistant when mature.

Some Oriental Magnolias have such huge fragrant flowers they seem too big to be real. They are prolific bloomers, becoming a mass of white, pink, lavender or purple to wine-red flowers. They flower before the leaves unfurl, so the trees look like giant flower arrangements.

They are such a surprise, usually beginning to flower in early February, in the middle of winter. They began even earlier this year, blooming before Christmas. They slowed down during the cold weather, but many are still flowering.

Tour any South Georgia or North Florida area and you will likely find some huge specimens of older varieties of *Magnolia soulangeana*. *Magnolia soulangeana* (saucer magnolias or Japanese tulip trees) is the most popular magnolias in American gardens.

Alexandrina is the most common cultivar in our area. It has large flowers (5 to 10 inches across) that may be pinkish to purplish outside with white inside. Alexandrina grows in a rounded form to 20 or 30 feet.

The cultivar Alba is similar, with large flowers that are almost pure white. It grows in a dense, erect form to 20 to 30 feet.

Other cultivars of *soulangeana* have flowers in various shades of white, pink, purple and burgundy. There are many other new cultivars of Oriental Magnolias. Galaxy forms a pyramidal tree of excellent branching habit growing to 30 feet tall. It blooms prolifically and is widely adaptable, tolerating a wide range of soils. It flowers later in the season, with 6-inch flowers with 11 or 12 petals. The petals are elongated, slimmer than the soulangeanas, with red-purple at the outside base, shading to magenta toward the tip.

Ann and Jane are from a group of "Eight Little Girls," smaller hybrids forming shrubby trees. These also flower later than soulangeanas. Their flowers are smaller and elongated like the star or lily-flowered magnolias. Ann grows 8 to 10 feet tall. Flowers are a deep purple-red, with seven to nine petals. Jane grows 10 to 12 feet tall, with fragrant flowers in a deep reddish-purple with white inside.

Generally, these magnolias are remarkably easy to grow. They do well in full to partial sun.
Magnolias are beloved beauties

They like a deep, rich soil; they prefer acid soils but will also grow in neutral soils. Excellent drainage is a must - they do not like wet feet.

To plant, set the root ball slightly above grade in the hole, so that the top half-inch is exposed after you have filled in around it. Water thoroughly, then mulch with a 3-inch layer of pine straw or shredded bark. Prune just after flowering, but only if necessary for shaping.

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