

It

It's the Season for Flowering Magnolias!

Dr. Gary Knox *

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Have you noticed the magnolias blooming in North Florida in recent weeks? You may not have recognized the plants as magnolias but if you see one in bloom, you can't help but notice it.

Some people think of the Southern Magnolia, *Magnolia grandiflora*, when they think of magnolias. But there are a large number of different species to consider for use in our North Florida landscapes. In addition to the evergreen types, there are deciduous types as well. And a number of the deciduous magnolias bloom during the winter months in our area.

One of the first magnolias to bloom is the "Saucer Magnolia" or "Japanese Magnolia", *Magnolia x soulangiana*. Saucer magnolia is the small to medium tree that we see covered with rose pink flowers now. If you look closely at the flowers, you'll note the outside of each tepal, or petal-like flower part, is rosy-purple while the inside is white, giving the overall effect of a rose pink flower color. Saucer magnolias are renown for their heavy flowering, but they are also infamous for flowering so early in the year that frosts often damage flowers, turning them into brown mush.

Another magnolia coming into bloom now is the "Yulan Magnolia", *Magnolia denudata*. This beautiful tree is greatly appreciated by gardeners for its' fragrant, alabaster-white flowers and graceful tree form. Yulan magnolia is not grown as widely as Saucer magnolia because it is difficult to propagate by cuttings. This makes it harder to locate a nursery selling them, but a worthwhile purchase if you find one! Unfortunately, Yulan magnolia flowers also sometimes succumb to frost damage.

Try one of the newer, later-blooming magnolias to avoid the problem of frost damage to flowers. The "Gresham Hybrid Magnolias" were developed by the late D. Todd Gresham who combined the beautiful flower character, color and size of *Magnolia campbellii*, a beautiful Asian magnolia, with hardiness and young flowering age of Saucer magnolia. The resulting hybrids are noted for producing large numbers of flowers up to 12 inches in diameter on vigorous, small to medium trees. Flowers range in color from deep purple-red to alabaster white and typically occur later than those of Saucer Magnolia. Although they are still being evaluated, outstanding cultivars include Pink Goblet, Jon Jon, Sayonara, Winelight, Full Eclipse and Darrell Dean.

Pink Goblet is a small to medium tree producing pink flowers with tepals that are rose pink outside and white inside. As its name implies, flowers initially are goblet shaped but open wider on subsequent days.

Jon Jon is an outstanding magnolia due to its 12-inch diameter flowers (some as large as dinner plates!) and a late blooming period that avoids frost damage. Jon Jon's flowers appear one to three weeks after those of Saucer Magnolia and are creamy white with a reddish-purple blush at the base. Growth habit is that of a rounded small tree.

Look for these and other outstanding magnolias at your local nursery or garden center. Although they are not yet grown as widely as Saucer magnolia, they are increasing in popularity and are becoming more available.

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[\[Back\]](#)