

Growing magnolias in southwestern Sweden

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Skällinge, Sweden (latitude 57.2N)

Two years ago the genus of *Magnolia* caught my attention for the first time. I was planning a remake of the entire yard and I was looking for some unusual woody plants to try. Magnolias are rather rare in this part of the world and previously I actually didn't even know what they were. Hence, I was captivated when I started to study them on the home pages of Dutch and Swiss nurseries. I got hooked permanently.

Today much of my spare time evolves around these plants in different aspects—the original objective to just make the yard “a pretty place” has long since developed into a variety of ideas, experiments, plans and simply feelings for these fantastic trees.

The climate

My climate is obviously something of a limiting factor but, on the other hand, it is not at all as harsh as many foreign people think. The only thing I could wish for would be a little more summer heat.

The annual precipitation is about 31 inches (790mm) with 5.5in (140mm) falling March through May, 8.7in (220mm) falling June through August, and 9.5in (240mm) falling September through November.

Skällinge's average annual temperature is 44°F (6.9°C). The coldest month is usually January with a 24-hour daily min/average/max of 25/29/33°F (-4/-1.5/0.5°C). February averages are nearly the same. Hence, the winters are not excessively cold and the temperature difference between day and night is small. The average extreme low per season ought to be about +5°F (-15°C) and the lowest during the last 30 years was around -13°F (-25°C). The warmest month is July. Then the averages are 54/61/68°F (12/16/20°C) with the extreme warmest reaching 90°F (32°C). August has essentially the same temperatures. The only place in North America I have found with comparable climate is Nova Scotia, but their winters are a bit colder and their summers are hotter than ours.

The magnolias

I planted the first magnolias in the spring of 2004, so none has spent more than one full winter here. Last year I planted several more and the upcoming season will be another planting orgy. And, for the first time, I am also germinating magnolia seeds. From what I can see, so far, I will have plenty of seedlings in a few months. Most of them will have to go to other places, so the interested reader should not hesitate to ask me about their availability.

My current personal opinion is that, except for some species, hybrids including *M. acuminata* or *M. cylindrica* have the best chances in Scandinavia, along with *M. × loebneri* and also *M. sieboldii* and *M. tripetala* hybrids.

The good ones so far

The following magnolias have performed well.

Magnolia 'Eskimo' (*M. × soulangeana* 'Lennei' × *M. kobus* 'Norman Gould'). The plant, grafted on *M. kobus*, started to grow well right away. During the summer of 2005, a rather warm one, 'Eskimo' was pretty vigorous and now it awaits spring with a couple of nice, furry flower buds. I see no signs of the "slow growth" that is so often mentioned at other locales. It seems perfectly hardy and the only damage it has ever sustained was when a side-branch on the northern side of the plant continued growing into October and got nipped by frost.

Magnolia sieboldii (ex Hammarö, seedling). My two plants grow moderately fast and are very hardy. They are planted in full sun and do sustain some minor scorching on the leaves, especially if there is any drought. This is only visible on close inspection though, and I think they tolerate full sun well. Both *M. sieboldii* plants have developed many shoots from ground level and will probably be quite bushy in time. Last August one had its first flower, which was large and had a wonderful, sweet, fruity, and rather strong scent. The growth matures well and only the root shoots receive tip damage from cold, since they show up in late July and grow into autumn.

Magnolia 'Peachy' (*M. acuminata* 'Fertile Myrtle' × *M. sprengeri* 'Diva'). It was planted in May 2004 and is probably grafted on *M. kobus*. Though planted in full sun, the first season the tree grew very little. In summer 2005 it became a rocket and gained more than two sturdy

feet and developed a multitude of side-branches and also additional leaders (which I will cut away). Its wonderful leaves were much bigger than they were the first summer. They are also tough and very wind-resistant and the deep purple color on the fresh leaves late in season is ornamental as well. Another reason for cultivating this plant is the bark, which is first on younger growth striped in an absolutely lovely purplish brown, then a light scaly chocolate beige, and finally aging to a smooth gray (see photo). It has not flowered but I know that it might take some time with this cultivar. 'Peachy' has never had a hint of winter damage and if it continues to cope so well here, then I would recommend it as one of the most beautiful plants I know as a tree—if it will ever flower, I do not know.

Magnolia 'Porcelain Dove' (*M. globosa* × *M. virginiana*). (See photo.) I received this little jewel as a year-old graft on *M. kobus* from Eisenhut in spring 2004. It leafs out very late and grows rather slowly. Last summer it got severely injured in a bad storm. The leader got half separated from the trunk by a deep wound but even so, it produced a flower-bud, which in July, opened into a superb little bloom. Since the outer tepals hang down below it, the flower reminded me of a dove, or at least a white goose. The scent was great; strong, tropical with a hint of pepper. A bit like *Oenothera biennis*, but more intense. Even though its parents would never thrive here, 'Porcelain Dove' is hardy and hasn't sustained any cold-injuries at all. I think it



Maturing bark on *M. 'Peachy'*.



Magnolia 'Porcelain Dove.'
June 28, 2005.

is a good example of lucky hybridization and believe it has inherited cold-hardiness from *M. virginiana* and tolerance towards cool summers from *M. globosa*.

Other magnolias without cold injury

The following magnolias did not receive any cold-injury but grew poorly for various other reasons.

Magnolia 'Daybreak' (*M. × brooklynensis* 'Woodsman' × 'Tina Durio'). 'Daybreak' has been severely damaged by some large animal and is now very weak, though it did not sustain any cold damage.

Magnolia obovata (seedling from one of the Gothenburg Botanic Garden clones). This plant was very tall and gangly when I got it in 2004 and the whole plant got pressed flat to the ground by things falling on it in the storm. Still, last summer it was, miraculously, fully alive and had no cold injury either. It hasn't gained any height though.

Magnolia tripetala × (*M. × wieseneri*). The tree was planted as a three-year old graft on *M. kobus*. The plant had very poor roots and in addition, the big leaves got torn apart by wind. I moved it and now it is recovering at a calmer spot. No winter injury though. This might be a good one.

Magnolia virginiana 'Havener.' This seedling does not get damaged but it grows extremely slowly. It also has fungus.

Magnolias receiving winter injury

The cultivars listed below received various degrees of injury last winter.

Magnolia 'Daphne' (*M. acuminata* var. *subcordata* 'Miss Honeybee' × 'Gold Crown'). The graft (on *M. kobus*) was injured on arrival and grows weakly. Still, the injury is very minor and the plant may be fine soon.

Magnolia grandiflora 'Bracken's Brown Beauty.' It grew well in August-September, after an extremely cool, rainy and windy summer. I protected it in a cage of white cloth over the winter-months. When I removed the cage in April, 'BBB' looked fine for two weeks, then everything died and fell off. All that remains of it now is a stump with one small shoot, which is getting through the winter in the basement with artificial light.

Magnolia R20-1 (*M. sieboldii* × *M. macrophylla* var. *ashei*). (See photo.) I've had two. The first one got minor tip-damage in winter and was later killed by some animal. The fate of plant number two remains to be seen.



Magnolia R20-1 (*M. sieboldii* × *macrophylla* var. *ashei*) some weeks after planting. The flower had a wonderful sweet smell of shampoo.

Magnolia × *wieseneri*. I am not sure what clone this plant is. Although it had few roots to start with, it grows ½-1 foot each year. However, it seems reluctant to maintain any terminal buds on the branch tips for the next year, since during the winter all tips are nipped off by cold. This causes the new growth to start below the tips, making the thing grow in a somewhat zig-zag manner. Maybe the plant will improve with age; otherwise it seems perfectly winter hardy. This year, I will try several different *M. × wieseneri* from other sources.

Magnolia 'Yellow River' (*M. denudata* × unknown). This one formed new growth extraordinary fast, 2-3 feet all over, 90% of which was frozen away the following winter. Last summer it hardly grew at all. It is planted in a dry location.



Magnolia x brooklynensis 'Eva Maria.' Pink, gold and green contradicting the unrestful skies. New flower buds this spring.

Magnolias currently out there

The following cultivars were planted in the summer of 2005. If anyone is interested to know how these cultivars made it through their first winter, contact me directly. The last four of these plants I will not keep, however.

Magnolia x brooklynensis 'Eva Maria', *M.* R10-24 (*M. sieboldii* 'Genesis' \times *M. virginiana*), *M. sprengeri* ('Burncoose' seedling), *M.* 'Yellow Fever' (*M. acuminata* \times *M. denudata*), *Magnolia* 'Big Dude' (*M. x soulangeana* 'Wada's Picture' \times *M. sprengeri* 'Diva'), *M.* 'Flamingo' (*M. acuminata* 'Fertile Myrtle' \times *M. sprengeri* 'Diva'), *M. sieboldii* 'Colossus' (6N), *M. (tripetala x (tripetala x obovata)) x (M. tripetala x officinalis)*.

Also, common *M. x soulangeana* is perfectly hardy

and there are some old and nicely flowering small trees in the village.

Plans for the future

Since I have recently developed a special passion for the summer-flowering magnolias (subgenus *Magnolia*) I will mainly be growing hybrids of these summer-blooming species. If I am lucky, I will have some interesting seedlings of those by this summer, and plans for future hybridization will focus on these kinds of crosses. There

are so many crosses that seem to have been tried far too little. For instance, *M. sieboldii* should be crossed with a vast variety of things, like *M. fraseri*, *M. globosa*, *M. × gotoburgensis*, *M. macrophylla*, *M. × thompsoniana*, *M. × wieseneri* and *M. wilsonii*, as well as with other hybrids involving these plants. Chances ought to be good for obtaining hardy variations on the *M. sieboldii* theme, with bigger, different looking or very differently scented flowers. Also, the hardy *M. obovata*-provenance from Kamikawa (Hokkaido, Japan) introduced in Gothenburg from an expedition 1952, should be used in many ways, both for new crosses and for repetitions of well-known ones.

If readers would happen to share this interest and/or want to discuss further or exchange seeds, plants, experiences or ideas, feel free to contact me through e-mail or letter. I might also have seedlings of *M. acuminata*, *M. cylindrica* and *M. sprengeri* hybrids looking for a home. It is in our hands.

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