



# ***Magnolia grandiflora* 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' Southern Magnolia<sup>1</sup>**

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson<sup>2</sup>

## **INTRODUCTION**

This cultivar of the native North American evergreen tree with its large, beautiful, saucer-shaped, fragrant flowers was selected for its dense, uniform growth habit and beautiful brown-backed leaves (Fig. 1). Many horticulturists consider this one of the best Southern Magnolia cultivars. The species has been selected as the state tree of Mississippi. The trunk grows straight up through the center of the tree creating an erect, narrow oval crown. Branches are shortened compared to the species and are typically numerous and small in diameter.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** *Magnolia grandiflora* 'Bracken's Brown Beauty'

**Pronunciation:** mag-NO-lee-uh gran-dih-FLOR-uh

**Common name(s):** 'Bracken's Brown Beauty'  
Southern Magnolia

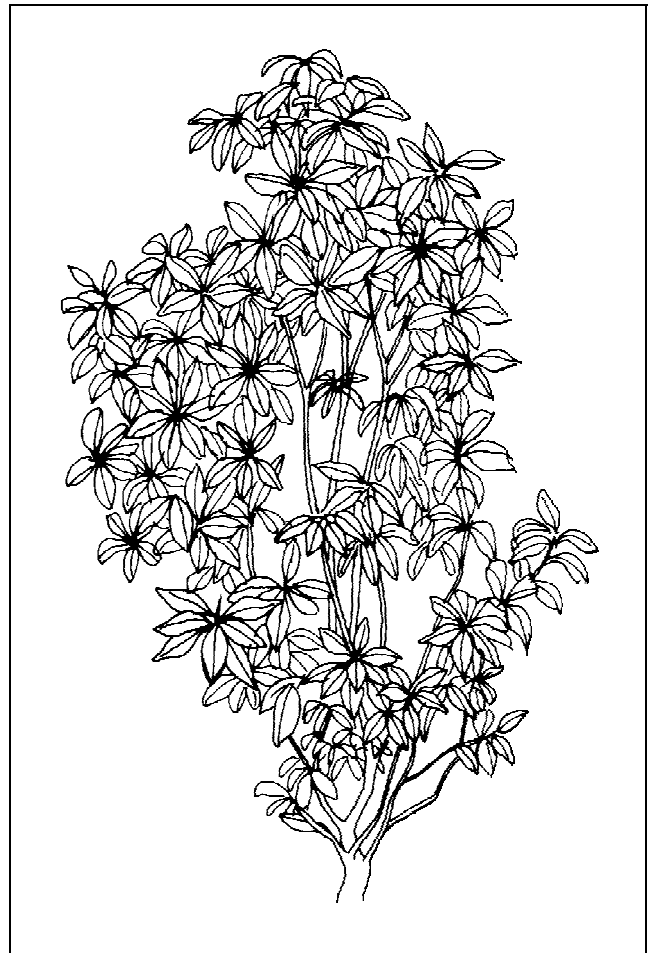
**Family:** *Magnoliaceae*

**USDA hardiness zones:** 7 through 10A (Fig. 2)

**Origin:** native to North America

**Uses:** espalier; wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; screen; specimen; residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree



**Figure 1.** Middle-aged 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' Southern Magnolia.

## **DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 30 to 50 feet

**Spread:** 15 to 20 feet

1. This document is adapted from Fact Sheet ST-372, 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.

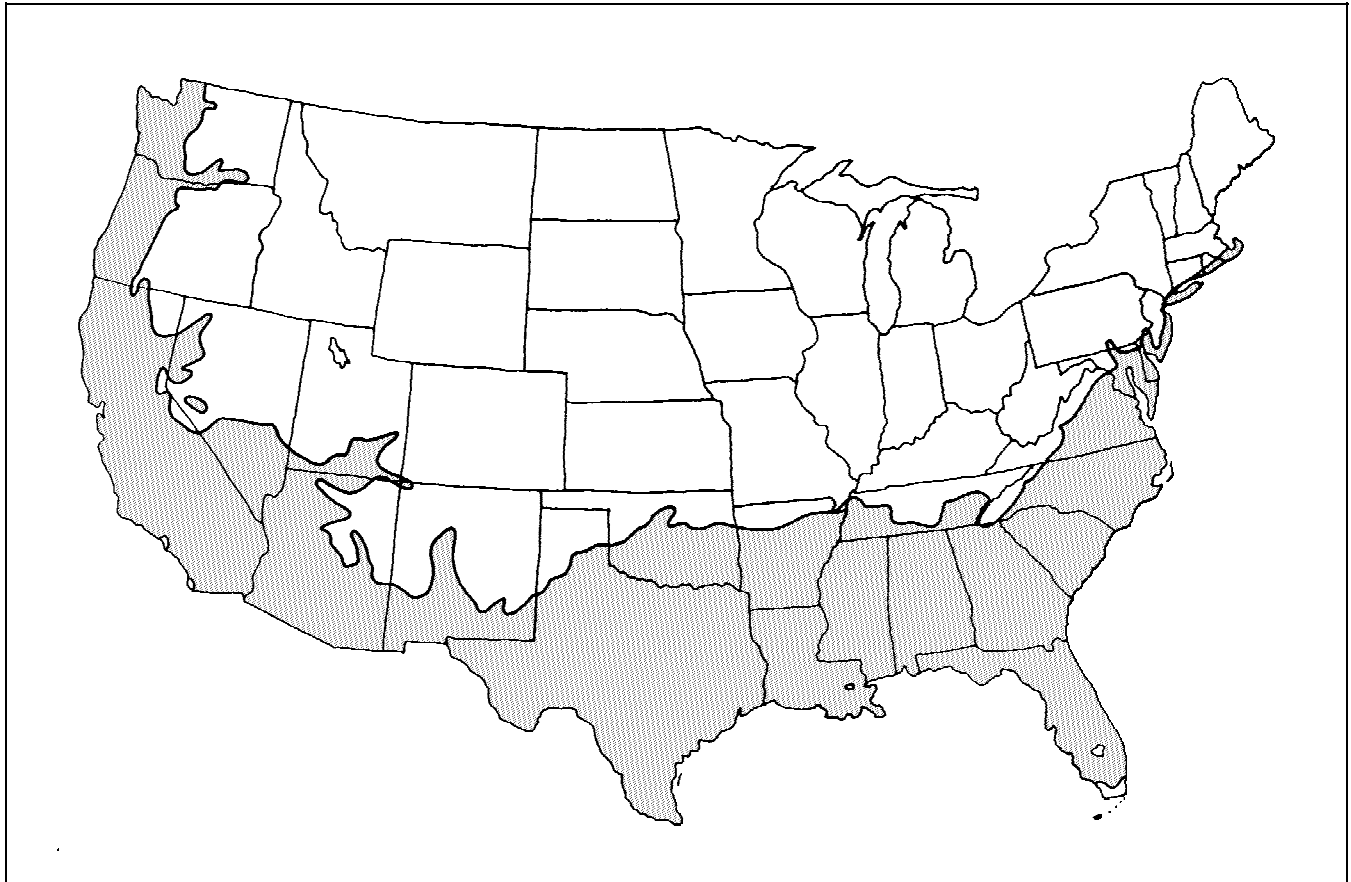


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Crown uniformity:** symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

**Crown shape:** oval; upright

**Crown density:** dense

**Growth rate:** medium

**Texture:** coarse

### Foliage

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** elliptic (oval); ovate

**Leaf venation:** banchidodrome; pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** broadleaf evergreen; evergreen

**Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** no fall color change

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

### Flower

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristics:** pleasant fragrance; spring flowering; summer flowering; very showy

### Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches; 1 to 3 inches

**Fruit covering:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown; red

**Fruit characteristics:** attracts birds; fruit, twigs, or foliage cause significant litter; showy

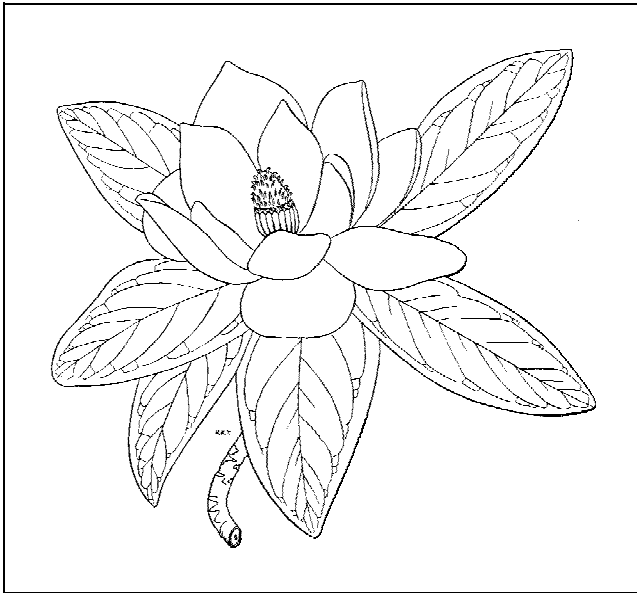
### Trunk and Branches

**Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; grow mostly upright and will not droop; 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:** green



**Figure 3.** Foliage of 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' Southern Magnolia.

**Current year twig thickness:** thick

**Wood specific gravity:** 0.50

### Culture

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

**Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; extended flooding; well-drained

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

### Other

**Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding tree:** tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

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

**Verticillium wilt susceptibility:** susceptible

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## USE AND MANAGEMENT

The five to 8-inch-long, leathery, oblong, shiny leaves are shed as new foliage emerges but the debris is well-hidden by the dense foliage of the lower limbs, if they are left on the tree. But some people consider this a litter nuisance when the large, slowly-decomposing leaves drop on the sidewalk, lawn, or patio. The underside of the leaves is covered with a fine, red-brown fuzz which is very prominent on this

cultivar. In late spring and sporadically throughout the summer, huge, 8-inch-diameter, waxy, fragrant, white blossoms open to perfume the entire garden. Fuzzy brown cones follow these blooms, ripening in fall and winter to reveal bright red seeds which are used by a variety of wildlife.

Making a striking garden specimen, 'Bracken's Brown Beauty' Southern Magnolia can also serve as a dense screen or windbreak. Its ease of growth and carefree nature make Southern Magnolia ideal for the low-maintenance landscape. With proper pruning, Southern Magnolia trees can also be used as an interesting espalier.

If moist, peaty soils are available, Southern Magnolia will thrive in full sun and hot conditions once established. If irrigation cannot be provided periodically, plants located in partial shade for several years after planting seem to grow better. Very drought tolerant when grown in areas with plenty of soil for root expansion. Only moderately drought tolerant in restricted-soil areas or in areas with poor, dry soil. Southern Magnolia prefers acid soil but will tolerate a slightly basic, even wet or clay soil. It is generally too hot and dry in central and western Texas and Oklahoma, and the soil pH is often too alkaline for this tree. The root system is wider spreading than most other trees, extending from the trunk a distance equal to about four times the canopy width. This makes it very difficult to save existing Magnolia trees on construction sites.

Be sure that there are no roots circling close to the trunk, as Magnolia is prone to girdling roots. Cut any circling roots prior to planting. Field-grown trees recover slowly from transplanting due to the wide-spreading root system in the nursery, and trees often transplant best in winter and spring, not in the fall.

The species germinated from seed is quite variable in growth rate and form with some trees dense and compact, others loose and open. A number of other cultivars are available: 'Cairo' has an early and long flowering period; 'Charles Dickens' has broad, nearly blunt leaves, large flowers and large red fruit; 'Edith Bogue' is the hardiest of the cultivars and will bloom when only two to three-years-old; 'Glen St. Mary' has a compact form, will bloom when young, is slow-growing, and the leaves have a bronze underside; 'Gloriosa' has large flowers and leaves; 'Goliath' has flowers up to 12 inches across, a long blooming period, and a bushy habit of growth; 'Hasse' can be used for a compact, dense hedge; 'Lanceolata' has a

narrow pyramidal form, narrower leaves with rusty undersides; 'Little Gem' has a dwarf upright form, probably to 30 feet tall, small leaves and flowers, is very slow-growing, flowers heavily at an early age and for a long time during the summer (5-months), and has bronze leaf-undersides. It will bloom when only three to four feet tall and is excellent as a pruned evergreen hedge, for use as a small street tree or for use as an espalier. 'Majestic Beauty' (patented) has large, dark green leaves, a pyramidal shape, and profuse flowering; 'Praecox Fastigiata' has upright, narrow growth habit; 'Samuel Sommer' has an upright, rapid growth habit and flowers up to 14 inches across; 'Victoria' is very hardy, has small flowers, and rust-red leaf-undersides. There are others, often difficult to see real differences among a number of cultivars.

Propagation is by cuttings (for the cultivars), grafting, or seed.

## **Pests**

Scales of various types will infest twigs and leaves. Magnolia scale is the most common scale and can be one half-inch-across. Overwintering scales can be controlled with horticultural oil. Trees appear to grow fine even with heavy infestations, although they can be unsightly.

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

Magnolia borer is a problem on young nursery stock. It girdles the trunk usually just below the soil surface. Control is difficult but attainable with the proper material.

## **Diseases**

Magnolia may be subject to leaf spots, blights, scabs and black mildews caused by a large number of fungi, or a bacterium but they rarely require chemical controls. Raking up and disposing infected leaves may reduce leaf spots next year. Algae can also cause leaf spots.

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, rarely, may kill the tree. Prune out dead branches and fertilize.