

Magnolia virginiana

[Synonyms : *Magnolia australis*, *Magnolia australis* var. *parva*, *Magnolia fragrans*, *Magnolia glauca*, *Magnolia glauca* var. *longifolia*, *Magnolia glauca* var. *pumila*, *Magnolia longifolia*, *Magnolia tripetata*, *Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*, *Magnolia virginiana* var. *glauca*, *Magnolia virginiana* var. *parva*]

SWEET-BAY is a deciduous or semi-evergreen shrub or tree. Native to south-eastern North America (Atlantic and Gulf coasts) it has large fragrant creamy-white flowers that mature to an apricot colour.

It is also known as Bat-tree, Bay, Bay-tree, Beaver tree, Big laurel, Black lin, Bog beaver tree, Bullbay, Castor wood, Cucumberwood, Elk bark, Holly bay, Indian bark, Laurel, Laurel magnolia, Magnolia, Magnolia laurel, Mountain magnolia, Red bay, Red laurel, Small magnolia, Southern sweetbay, Swamp bay, Swamp laurel, Swamp magnolia, Swamp sassafras, Sweetbay magnolia, Sweet magnolia, Umbrella magnolia, Virginia magnolia, White bay, and White laurel; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of perseverance.

Warning – some authorities note that bark and leaves may cause skin irritation and the wood may induce bronchitis.

Virginiana means 'of or from Virginia (United States)' which itself was named after the English 'Virgin Queen' Elizabeth I (1533-1603).

Some authorities have noted that the leaves or bark were inhaled by the North American Rappahannock Indians as a mild hallucinatory drug, whereas the Houma tribe turned to sweet-bay as a remedy for fever, blood problems and colds.

Beavers are particularly fond of this species as the soft roots not only provide them with food but also building material for their lodges.

The sweet-bay is said to have been the first species in the genus to be introduced to Europe. Apparently Henry Compton (1632-1713) when Bishop of London sent several chaplains to the West Indies, and then on to Virginia. It was from one of these men, the Reverend John Banister (1650-1692), that he received sweet-bay plants in 1688. (Banister was destined to an early demise as he fell to his death on one of his subsequent plant collecting expeditions.)

Some American authorities have indicated that the leaves have been used to flavour sauces and a perfume has been extracted from the flowers.)

The lightweight wood is sometimes used today for the manufacture of broom handles and other small objects.

Medicinally, herbalists have used it to treat fevers, dysentery, malaria, indigestion, gout and rheumatism