

**July 2014 Tree of the month**  
**Cucumbertree Magnolia *Magnolia acuminata***  
**by: Gilbert A Smith**

It's a funny sounding name that doesn't really capture this tree unless, of course, you're just looking at the flowers and fruit, which must have been what the botanist that named it was looking at. The hardiest of all the Magnolias the flower isn't showy, white or pink the way you'd expect. Flowers born on the upper parts of the tree, which grows 60 to 80 feet, you generally don't know that you are looking at a magnolia at all. If you look real hard the fruit does look a little like a cucumber. **I recommend it as a replacement for Ash trees and it's among the best.**

An ancient species that grew up with the dinosaurs, it has simple insect pollinated flowers. It's believed that the magnolia species evolved even before the honey bee, so a beetle likely spread its pollen. The vast majority of street trees in the Chicago area evolved later and are wind pollinated. Don't miss the significance of this, because it means the magnolia is **non allergenic**. Most tree allergy sufferers don't react to this tree.

Because it is not a familiar tree like a Maple or a Linden it doesn't get over planted and so there are very few insects or diseases to mar those large, clean, dark green leaves. This Magnolia likes room for its roots to grow, sunlight to feed itself and that's all it takes to grow a 60 foot tall specimen tree in no time at all. A native throughout the midwest it is endangered in Canada where it is protected. **The Shining Tree woods** in Norfolk County, Ontario is one of the few places left where a high concentration of Cucumbertree Magnolia exists. The average age is 120 years. The

Cucumbertree Magnolia at the Chicago Botanic Gardens



Sort of looking like cucumber fruit



it has not been overbred and therefore has resistance to common problems associated with overbreeding. Also you have the privilege of preserving an endangered species and being a collector of rare treasures.

years old, 96 feet high and its trunk is almost 8 feet wide.

You can see lovely specimens at the Chicago Botanic Gardens overlooking the Great Basin just past the sensory garden. You might have to special order this tree for spring planting which may seem like an inconvenience. It's actually an advantage because like a rare dog breed

