

## MAGNOLIA

**BOTANICAL NAME:** *Magnolia*

**FAMILY:** *Magnoliaceae*

Magnolias are some of the very oldest flowering plants on earth. They are pre-history and one of the first to be pollinated by insects. Other prehistoric plants to survive worldwide are water lilies, but the ginkgo and magnolias were found only in Asia and America but not Europe.



The earliest magnolias to reach Europe came from America. Philip II's Spanish physician, Francisco Hernandez described a Mexican magnolia in the 1570's; however the first to arrive in Europe was a "swamp magnolia" from Virginia sent by John Banister in 1688. This particular magnolia is odd in that as soon as the flower is pollinated, the flower withers and turns brown.

By 1737 the *Magnolia grandiflora* was growing in Britain. The more beautiful magnolias came from China. They were sent to the Englishman Sir Joseph Banks at Kew in about 1780. The Chinese varieties were much hardier and could be grown outdoors in a protected area. Previously they were thought to be tropical and in need of greenhouse protection in the winter. There is a debate as to who named the family: Charles Plumier or Linnaeus. Regardless the plant was named for Magnol, Louis XIV's doctor and professor of botany at the University of Montpellier.



One of the most popular magnolias today is the pink *Magnolia X soulangiana* that appeared in Monsieur Etienne Soulange-Bodia in 1826. He founded the national Horticultural Society of France. His garden was located near Paris and in it were two magnolias, *M. denudata* (or *heptapeta*) and *M. liliiflora* (or *quinquepeta*.) The product of these two was a chance seedling that came to be known as *Magnolia X soulangiana*.

No one is sure whether Pierre Magnol knew about the magnolia. Naming the magnolia after him was very wise as he was the first to divide plants into distinctive families. William Bartram recognized the magnolia family in 1791 as an extraordinary and "celebrated family of flowering trees," and we celebrate their ancient and particular beauty today.

***100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names***

By Diana Wells