

## Nixon Magnolia

Andrew Jackson Magnolia, Southern  
Magnolia, Bull Bay

***Magnolia grandiflora***

**Family:** Magnoliaceae

**Basic Description:** A tough, broadleaf evergreen. It has large, dark green, waxy leaves. The underside is sometimes a warm orange-brown. It has both a cone (from prehistoric, pre-flowering lineage) and a white flower. Could be a bridge at an evolutionary change in plant history from cone varieties to flowering varieties. Maybe related to a change in insect development, co-evolving with the first winged insects.



**Bloom & Fruit Description:** Large, white blooms in Spring and Summer. Some blooms can be as large as 12" across. Flowers have a citrus scent. Seeds are vibrant red.

**Cultural information/Uses/Human Interaction:** The magnolia tree at Sunnylands is referred to as the *Nixon Magnolia*, because it was a gift given to Walter by President Richard Nixon in 1972. The gift came in the form of a cutting from a magnolia at the White House. The White House Magnolia came from a cutting from a tree at Andrew Jackson's Estate, the Hermitage, in Nashville, TN.

**Andrew Jackson Magnolia Story:** When Andrew Jackson took office as the seventh President of the United States, he brought with him a cutting from one of his wife Rachel's favorite magnolia trees. At some point during his presidency (he served two terms) the tree was planted on the South Lawn, West of the portico. There is dispute over the actual date, as the planting could have taken place at any time from 1829 - 1835. References indicate it was most likely nurtured in conservatories, or the orange house, which was added to the White House by Jackson, and planted in 1835 during his second administration.

Rachel had died on December 22, 1828 after Andrew Jackson won the Presidency. She had been the target of campaign attacks, as she had been previously married. There was speculation regarding the legitimacy of their marriage. Jackson blamed her death on the cruel treatment she had received during the campaign and was still in mourning when he went to his Inauguration on March 4, 1829.

This first tree planting became a tradition, followed by later presidents, of adding features to the White House grounds. Teddy Roosevelt added an American elm. Jimmy Carter added an herb garden, a cedar of Lebanon, as well as a tree house built without nails to protect the an Atlas cedar in which it was built. George H.W. Bush added three trees, which included a red bud, purple beech, and a little leaf linden, planted with Queen Elizabeth II in 1991. George W. Bush added a cut leaf silver maple, and most recently Michelle Obama added a kitchen garden.

**White House Magnolia:** The White House Magnolia was a favorite tree of President Harry Truman. It was also

a favorite of Jacqueline Kennedy who added her own garden to the grounds, while her husband, President John F. Kennedy added a Saucer Magnolia. President Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill are said to have sat under the Andrew Jackson Magnolia to have conversations.

The tree survived a 1994 airplane crash when a single-engine Cessna crashed onto the White House South Lawn and skidded next to the magnolia, having its wing clipped by the tree. It resulted in the loss of a large portion of the tree.

Cuttings of this tree have shown up around the country. Prior to the Nat'l. Park Service taking over the monitoring of the White House gardens it was not unusual for groundskeepers to take cuttings and replant them in other locations. Cuttings were planted in FL near the Capital and others have been found growing in MS and KY. Lady Bird Johnson transplanted cuttings to her home in TX. Michelle Obama took a seedling to the USDA in February, 2009. It was added to the community garden, as part of a USDA initiative to grow gardens at their offices around the world.

In addition, cuttings have been presented to friends as gifts from American Presidents. In 1988 President Reagan gave a gift cutting to Sec. of State, Howard Baker Jr. upon his retirement. Baker planted it at his home in TN. When the original Tree at the Hermitage died after being struck by a tornado in 1998, it was from this tree that a cutting was taken to replace the original.

**\$20 bill:** From 1928 – 1998 the reverse side of the Andrew Jackson \$20 bill showed the magnolia standing Southwest of the White House Portico. Another magnolia was added on the opposite side to frame the portico.

**China:** Laura Bush used the Andrew Jackson Magnolia as inspiration for the china used in the private residence at the White House (photo below).

**Writing Contest:** In 2009 Kaitlyn Albertoli, 12, of San Clemente won the grand prize in a national essay contest entitled, "Letters From the White House." Competitors were required to ghost write a letter from an American President. She chose to write a letter from President Andrew Jackson to President-elect Martin Van Buren. The year of the letter was 1837 and in it Jackson asks Van Buren to care for his magnolia tree.

February 12, 1837

Dear President-elect Van Buren,

I would first like to congratulate you on your election as the eighth President of the United States of America. The purpose of my letter is to request a very important personal favor of you. During your term as President, would you be so kind as to look after my Southern magnolia tree planted near the White House portico? Planting this tree as a remembrance of my beloved wife Rachel, I wish for it to stand for many centuries to come.

This tree began as a cutting which I took from the large magnolia tree at my home, the Hermitage, in Nashville. An avid gardener, my wife created a lovely garden with hundreds of flowers amid her much-loved magnolia trees. As you may recall, my dear Rachel passed away just before I made the long journey to Washington to serve as President. I longed to be with her, so I planted a cutting from her beautiful tree at the White House where she could always be with me in spirit. Although I still miss her so, the magnolia brings back cheerful memories which I shall never forget. Now that I will be returning to the Hermitage, I will see the original magnolia that stands next to the gazebo by her grave.

As you see, this tree means the world to me. Your attention to maintaining its beauty is much appreciated. My predecessor, John Quincy Adams, created the breath-taking landscape surrounding the White House. Although we have been great rivals, Adams and I agree on one issue - we both appreciate the beauty of the gardens and grounds throughout this grand property. During my terms, I endeavored to carry on the garden's exquisiteness. If you will, may you strive to keep the legacy alive, and perhaps plant your own tree, or add a fountain, or something to make the gardens a remarkable place for everyone to enjoy for years to come.

Respectfully,

President Andrew Jackson

**Distribution/Range/Habitat:** Native to the US Southeastern states as far north as MD, and as far west as East TX. Now propagated throughout the US.

**Cultural Requirements:** Can grow in full sun or part shade. They do not thrive in poor draining soil, but can grow in moist soil.

**Wildlife/Plant relationships:** Butterflies and bees. Has both a cone (prehistoric link to wingless insect pollinators like beetles) and flower (link to the age of winged pollinators like bees). A species that crosses evolutionary lines, but does not attract bee or butterfly pollinators. The flowers have no nectar. The seed is spread by birds and mammals.

**Disease/Pathology/toxins:**

**Status:** (endangered, CITES, watchlist etc.) X

**Resources:**

American Forests  
The Oak Ridger, *A Magnolia Tree, Andrew Jackson and the \$20 bill*  
West Hawaii Today, *Presidents and Their Gardens*  
Eager Beaver Tree Service, *Tour of the White House Grounds.*  
Boyd Nursery Company  
New York Times, *First Lady at Agricultural Department*

**Onsite Notes:** This is not the native habitat for this tree. We do not get the prolific blooms that are seen in the Southeast. Its native environment is more humid. A benefit of our location is that it is less susceptible to diseases found in more humid climates.



First Lady Laura Bush commissioned china for the private resident using the Andrew Jackson Magnolia as an inspiration.