

Sweetbay

(*Magnolia virginiana* L.)



Sweetbay, often called swamp magnolia or white bay, commonly grows on low, or wet lands in the Coastal Plain and less often in the eastern portion of the Piedmont region. It is often the most common tree in bays and wet pocosin. Sweetbay sprouts up quickly after fires, sometimes forming thickets. It often is cultivated as a garden plant in the United States and in Europe.

Sweetbay **leaves** are oblong and 4 to 6 inches long, with smooth margins. The leaves are blunt-pointed. They are shiny bright green on the upper surfaces, pale or whitish on the lower surfaces and have conspicuous midribs and veins. When crushed, the leaves and twigs have a strong pleasant, spicy odor.

The creamy white **flowers** are cup-shaped, 2 to 3 inches across and fragrant. The oblong, aggregate **fruit** is dark red and about 2 inches long. The tree may reach 60 feet in height on the best sites but usually is a slender tree that grows 20 to 30 feet high.

Sweetbay leaves remain on the tree throughout the winter in the South, and fall when the new leaves appear in spring. In northern parts of its range, sweetbay is deciduous.

Sweetbay **wood** is soft. It is used commercially for some minor products such as handles, novelty woodenware and occasionally as core stock for furniture. When large enough to be sawn into lumber, Sweetbay is sold as magnolia.