

Importing magnolias into the United States

Harry Heineman

For most magnolia growers in the United States, American nurseries offer as varied a selection of magnolias as they will ever want. But once the grower becomes a connoisseur, he may begin to wish for a larger list of magnolias from which to choose than is currently available from the mail-order nurseries in the U.S. In which case, he may want to consider importing his plants from abroad. As far as I know, no nursery in the world can match the variety of clones available from Eisenhut in Switzerland, to choose an example. But some growers may be intimidated by the prospect of importing magnolias because they are not familiar with the procedure.

It is relatively easy. You must first write for an Import Permit. Address your request to:

U. S. Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Plant Protection and Quarantine
4700 River Road, Unit 136
Riverdale, Maryland 20737-1236

You will receive a large packet of information on plants which are forbidden entry; on inspection, treatment and phytosanitary certificates required; on approved packing material, ports of entry, etc. Magnolias are not on the prohibited list. You fill out the application form for importing plants that will be found in the packet and return it to the above address. In due time, you will receive your import permit and permit number and some permit slips bearing your permit number and the address of the port of entry through which your plants will pass (For instance, plants ordered from the northeast will be directed to the Inspection Station at JFK International Airport in Jamaica, NY.). After inspecting the plants, the Station then redirects them to the person who ordered

them. There are inspection stations, of course, located throughout the country. You decide which one is best for you. At the time you order plants from abroad, you enclose a permit slip with each order.

That's about all there is to it. If you order from Eisenhut, or any other nursery familiar with the procedure for shipping plants to the U.S., the details will be taken care of by the nursery. Details such as bare-rooting the plants and including a phytosanitary certificate. The cost for all of this is not excessive. For instance, two-year old grafted plants from Eisenhut normally cost between \$50 and \$70 each (1998 prices) which includes shipping by air and all other costs.

I have had very good success in importing plants from England, Switzerland and New Zealand. Sometimes magnolias arrive with blackened roots, presumably caused by delays at the inspection station or the treatment they have received there. But with TLC, even plants with blackened roots will often survive. I prefer to have my magnolias shipped in late October (or after they go into fall dormancy), because the inspection stations are not so busy as they would be in the spring and hence shipments are held up for a shorter time. When the plants arrive here, I pot them up in a compost high in organic matter and well-aerated and hold them in my intermediate temperature greenhouse (50°F night temperature) being sure that they never dry out nor get too wet. An unheated room where the temperatures don't drop below 40°F ought to do as well. It is much better to establish the plants in pots before setting them out in the garden.

I spray the bare branches of the newly-potted magnolias with water whenever I think of it, but this isn't necessary. Your new magnolias will leaf out come spring, and you will be happy to have a magnolia that is rare and precious. ♡

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