

The Shining Tree (*Magnolia acuminata*)

NANPS' Iconic Plant

The North American Native Plant Society (NANPS – www.nanps.org) is steward to a nature reserve in Norfolk County, Ontario, south and west of the city of Simcoe. This part of the province is the heart of the Carolinian (botanic) Zone, where plants more commonly found to the south into the Carolinas, as well as plants found more to the west, converge, and meet the flora of the Great Lakes botanic zone. Trees, shrubs, vines, woodland, prairie and plants from other habitats are found here but almost nowhere else in Ontario, let alone in Canada.

The nature reserve is known as the Shining Tree Woods (STW) and is home to among other Carolinian trees and shrubs Tulip tree, Sassafras, Spicebush, and the iconic Cucumber magnolia (*Magnolia acuminata*). The latter is Canada's only magnolia, and such trees grow wild in only 2 parts of Ontario let alone in Canada: the Niagara Peninsula, and Norfolk County. It is entirely possible that it and other now rare botanic wonders were found spread more widely. The blessing which was Ontario's to bestow upon the indigenous population and later the European settlers was rich soil. Sadly, so much of this floral treasure was cut down to create fields for growing crops. And in this process we have lost so much. But it also has shown us that we need to focus on retaining, even restoring, what was lost.

The English language translation for what the indigenous people called the Cucumber magnolia is the "shining tree", based on the leaf sheen. As will now be evident to the reader, the name of the NANPS nature reserve is derived from naturally occurring Cucumber magnolias / shining trees within its boundaries.

This tree is endangered in Canada, and so to collect seed and propagate new trees from the seed one requires a permit. However, seed collected from planted trees is fair game. The society is pleased to announce that for the first time at any of our plant sales, we are offering a limited number of Cucumber magnolias for sale. These trees are from seed collected from a planted tree, and grown by one of our very best suppliers.

We encourage our members and our (as yet) non-members-cum-customers to give careful consideration to the purchase and planting of one of these trees. In so doing we are in a very small way increasing the numbers of this tree in our environment. And as the climate changes and overall becomes warmer, we can assist in the migration of the shining tree into areas where heretofore it was not possible for the tree to survive.

Cucumber magnolias will do well into zone 4, and are modest in their demands, able to withstand even mild alkaline conditions. They prefer soils which are moist (versus waterlogged or very dry) so are not demanding of the average gardener or park custodian.

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