
StarTribune Editorial

Our perspective

Star flowers

A joy beyond owning

A magnolia in Minnesota seems an improbability. Even 20 years into its annual performance, the delicate tree in the yard near the creek appears to exclaim spring's coming against odds. The feat is less remarkable than its planter once thought — for *Magnolia stellata*, it turns out, is deemed a “likely survivor” in these parts. But “likely,” the gardener knows, is a proposition quite apart from “certain”: Daring to bet on what seems an almost-sure thing, she tells herself, is the best way to learn the meaning of “almost.”

Thus the gardener neither bets nor assumes. Come April, she listens for the sound of whiteness — for the coming of spring's first and loveliest blossoms. Just how she knows that the day has arrived even she can't say. But once it's at hand she's quick to travel across town for a visit: She leans on the picket fence encircling land she once called her own — and conducts her yearly conversation with the tree.

It's remarkable, this magnolia: its thousand-flower chorus, its audacious reach toward the sky, its radiant insistence on being beautiful no matter who is looking —

or not looking. Indeed, the gardener wonders for a moment whether anyone else basks in the tree's blessedness as she does.

She wincingly recalls a plan she once hatched to take the tree with her on moving day; it would have been quite a feat, but not beyond trying. The unearthing experts, however, couldn't promise she'd end up with a living tree once the deed was done.

Today the gardener laughs to recall when “owning” the magnolia meant so much that she contemplated risking its life. What folly, she wonders, led her to think of tearing a tree from the Earth — carting it off as one might a rocking chair? Hadn't the magnolia shown for years on end its passion for blooming right where she'd planted it?

Thus does the admiring visitor find consolation in the fact that the tree remains rooted in its home ground: Whenever she yearns for a visit, she'll know right where it is. The magnolia, blooming for doubters, believers and all spring rejoicers, belongs to the Earth, and welcomes all who appreciate its gift.