
StarTribune Editorial

Our perspective

Star flowers

Seizing spring's lovely moment

A magnolia tree in Minnesota seems an improbability. To the Northern mind, it's a Southern proposition. The gardening guides describe it as "marginally hardy" in our harsh climate — hardly a ringing endorsement of its prospects.

Yet a strange few among us have planted the tree anyway — fully expecting that, come spring, the unlikely will be made manifest. Most often the faith pays off: A frail, branchy skeleton brings forth an astonishment of whiteness and scent — eclipsing all of the world's hard truths.

"Mankind cannot bear too much reality," wrote T.S. Eliot, and oh, he was right. Reality is too much with us these days — in the newspaper, on the street, in the heart. Winter has given way to war. Injured children have grown into broken women and men. Thoughtlessness has grown into an art form, loneliness into a lifestyle. With too much to do and too much to bear, the simple business of walking into the world can seem daunting.

Or so it all seems — until you step into the back yard, where the magnolia stands in full, glorious

flower. It offers the gifts human beings sometimes forget to give each other: consolation, abundance, blessedness, fulfillment. A marking of time's poignant passage.

And beauty — wild, inconceivable beauty. This is Mother Nature's reality — her tender reminder that life brings loveliness as well as heartbreak. It's her countervailing truth, and far easier to bear than the stuff of the front page.

There's a retired general in Italy who keeps an aviary of fan-tailed doves in his olive grove. Two dozen of them — pure white, lilting, gorgeous, impractical. Magnolias with wings. If you ask why he keeps them, he'll look amused and answer as he always does: "For their beauty," he'll say. And no more will be said.

No more need be said. This is why gardeners take a risk with a delicate Southern stranger. It brings beauty — that thing the human heart can't do without. That thing which exists for itself, giving us a chance to seize heaven on Earth. This is why the magnolia lives among us. It calls to mind all of life's improbable enchantments, abiding against odds and the world's harsh winds.