

# Meet Little Gem, a one-fourth sized magnolia

Dang it. I just discovered a young tree seedling in my garden that will sooner or later have to be cut down, but it seems wrong, maybe unpatriotic, to do it.

Carolina's palmetto; I think it's the Magnolia State's proudest brands. Ought to be on our flag.

There are benefits to it, of course, besides making a statement. The native woodland tree is a thick, sound-muffling evergreen with great climbing limbs and huge, highly fragrant flowers followed by attractive pods with protruding red seeds whose fermenting coverings have a wonderful funky aroma.

But yeah, it gets big. Enter Little Gem, a genetic aberration found growing as a chance seedling in 1952 and grown ever since from rooted cuttings or grafted. It's a diminutive version that gets only about a fourth the size of its big mama, taking years to get just a few yards tall.

Like most Southern magnolias, Little Gem and the somewhat similar one called Teddy Bear have glossy deep green leaves with furry brown undersides, but they are just a few inches long and wide; the fragrant creamy white flowers will fit in your hand. And Little Gem is the longest-blooming magnolia; where others have a big spring flush and a few sporadic blooms scattered over the summer, Little Gem is adorned with lemon-citrusy blossoms from April into November.

I've seen it grown for years in large pots even up in New England, and trimmed into large evergreen hedges here. It's a choice screen between houses and condos, and per-



FELDER RUSHING



Little Gem magnolia and Vitex.

fect for espaliering against walls.

Little Gem is fast to bloom but kinda slow growing. To help my son get his new ones off to a good start we dug extra-wide holes, added a small amount of bark to the native dirt, and loosened the potting soil and roots to help them start growing outwards as quickly as possible - the key to fast top growth. We mulched underneath, and to protect the trunk from the mower we planted some Liriope, which is one of the few plants that will thrive under a magnolia. He promised to water really deeply every week or two this first summer; any more or less than that can cause root problems.

My Little Gem, which is about twenty years old now,

is flanked with a vitex tree with summer spires of vivid purple-blue flowers, and a couple of dwarf nandinas for their ferny leaves and winter berries. Ira went with Emerald Green arborvitae because his wife Stevie likes how the bright green sparkles against the darker magnolias.

From the late winter flowering pink Asian species and pure white small star magnolias, to our native "bigleaf" and smaller, wet soil-tolerant sweetbay, magnolias are garden mainstays. But I think every Mississippi garden should have room for our own state favorite evergreen, or squeeze in a dwarf Little Gem.

It's more than just patriotic; if you have room, it'll make your garden pure Mis-

# Hyde-Smith backs bill to increase Medicare payments to Miss. rural hospitals

### Press Release

U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) has thrown her support behind legislation to increase Medicare payments to rural states like Mississippi, which could help rural Mississippi hospitals ease growing financial pressures.

Hyde-Smith, a member of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee, is cosponsoring the bipartisan Save Rural Hospitals Act of 2020 (S.3665). The bill would benefit Mississippi by setting a national minimum for the Medicare Area Wage Index (AWI) for determining Medicare reimbursements to hospitals

Hyde-Smith last year successfully encouraged the Trump administration to update the AWI formula for reimbursements for patient care, taking into account, among other things, the cost of labor in that geographic area.

According to the Mississippi Hospital Association, this formula update would provide an estimated more than \$20 million in additional Medicare reimbursements

mississippi. *Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the "Gestalt Garden" on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to rushingfelder@yahoo.com.*

to Mississippi hospitals annually. These changes, however, expire in three years.

"I was pleased last year when the Trump administration updated this Medicare formula to be fairer to rural states like Mississippi. The prior policy exacerbated inequities between rural and urban areas, and I am glad that our rural hospitals are now finally getting paid fairly," Hyde-Smith said. "This bill would permanently reform the formula by setting a nationwide minimum. It is something we need to help fortify our rural hospitals, especially those at risk of closing."

Authored by Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), S.3665 would:

- Establish an appropriate AWI national minimum (0.85);
  - Ensure payments to rural hospitals for the care they provide while preserving the existing reimbursements for urban hospitals;
  - Ensure fairness in reimbursements for hospitals across the country, including many hospitals that are facing closure in rural areas;
  - Fix severe and disproportionate disadvantages that unfairly penalize hundreds of communities and hospitals across the United States.
- Under a national 0.85 rural wage index floor, nearly all Mississippi hospitals would see a AWI reimbursement rate increase.

## Obituary

### JOE W. SMART

Joe W. Smart, 86, of Durant, passed away Saturday, June 6, 2020. Graveside services will be held Saturday, June 13, 2020 at 11:00 a.m. at Gages Springs Cemetery in Durant. Visitation will be held Friday, June 12, 2020 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at 300 W. Madison Street in Durant. Services are entrusted to Affordable Funeral Home of Durant LLC.



# CBP continues to seize large number of counterfeit and unapproved COVID-19 products

### Press Release

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) continues to identify and seize a large number of counterfeit, unapproved or otherwise substandard COVID-19 products that threaten the health and safety of American consumers.

As of June 1, CBP had seized more than:

- 107,300 FDA-prohibited COVID-19 test kits in 301 incidents;
- 750,000 counterfeit face masks in 86 incidents;
- 2,500 EPA-prohibited anti-virus lanyards in 89 incidents; and
- 11,000 FDA-prohibited

chloroquine tablets in 91 incidents.

"Criminals and other bad actors are trying to profit from the coronavirus pandemic by introducing unauthorized, unproven and potentially unsafe goods into the United States," said CBP Acting Commissioner Mark Morgan. "CBP continues to target these dangerous shipments while facilitating the entry of legitimate pharmaceuticals and medical supplies that are needed to protect Americans."

Criminal organizations are attempting to exploit the limited supply of and

increased demand for some pharmaceuticals, personal protective equipment and other medical goods required to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among other products, these criminals are smuggling and selling counterfeit safety equipment, unapproved COVID-19 test kits, unproven medicines and substandard hygiene products through the online marketplace.

To combat these criminal activities, CBP is targeting imports and exports that may contain counterfeit or illicit goods. The products in targeted shipments often include false or misleading claims, lack required warnings or lack proper approvals.

Among other locations, CBP has made significant seizures of counterfeit and unauthorized COVID-19 products in Baltimore, MD; Chicago, IL; El Paso, TX; Los Angeles, CA; Rochester, NY; Seattle, WA; and Vicksburg, MS.

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