

**Yard and Garden - 03-24-2012 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant**

Will it continue? That is the question on most everyone's mind. Although the calendar officially declared spring's arrival on Tuesday of this week, weather-wise, spring-like conditions arrived nearly two weeks ago. I have never had daffodils blooming before St. Paddy's Day. This year I picked our first daffodil on March 13. By Saint Patrick's Day, March 17, our saucer magnolia was and continues to be in full bloom.



Prior to that, the earliest I recall seeing our magnolia bloom was on March 27, 2007. It was then I was so excited to see it flowering that I devoted my entire March 31, 2007, column to it. In that story, I bragged about its resilience.

Reflect back for a moment. Four months earlier, this beautiful tree along with all other living creatures had just survived the infamous ice storm of 2006/2007. As a result, devastation abounded. Although the ice storm had caused considerable branch damage to our magnolia as well as other trees and shrubs, on that day in March, 2007, I was elated to see it had not only survived, but it was rewarding me with such astounding beauty. Sadly, at the time, I was unaware that only days later it would be exposed to yet another dreadful natural catastrophe.

During the first week in April, 2007, spring-like weather conditions quickly vanished and winter returned. Temperatures dipped into the teens and stayed there for nearly a week. Immediately, the beautiful flowers of my magnolia changed to ugly, limp, blackened, dead vegetation. The killer freeze had taken its toll. As it turned out, not only had the frigid conditions destroyed the flowers, but the freeze also had destroyed the leaf buds.

As the weeks unfolded, I anxiously watched as the vast majority of our flowers and other trees displayed remarkable resilience resuming their normal growth. Unfortunately, the

magnolia tree remained barren. Each week, as the surrounding landscape turned green, its ghastly appearance became more apparent. Only time would tell.

Interestingly, buds on trees form during one growing season and remain dormant until the next growing period when they emerge into new stems, leaves or flowers. If a current season's buds are damaged or destroyed, a tree will expend its energy reserves to activate its latent buds. Latent buds remain dormant for many seasons and act as a plant's life insurance. If needed, latent buds will draw upon the plant's energy reserves and ultimately emerge as new stems or leaves. If a stressed plant lacks the energy to support the latent buds, it will perish. Fortunately, as it turned out, by May 22, 2007, I began noticing leaves and branches returning to our magnolia tree. Today, as you can see from this photo, thanks to its latent buds, our beautiful tree survived.

Saucer magnolia, *Magnolia x soulangiana*, is marginally hardy to Zone 4. Knowing Minden is in Zone 5, I felt comfortable planting ours. Even then, I made an effort to plant our tree in a somewhat protected area. Because this species blooms extremely early, and due to Nebraska's fickle weather, its flowers are always subject to the potential threat of frost.

So what about the question of will it continue? Obviously, I am referring to the wonderful, unusual, early spring weather we have been experiencing. Is it here to stay or will winter sneak back in? For now, I remain optimistic, but the real answer is — time will tell.