

Lamorinda is bursting with color

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Pat Doughty's magnolia tree

Photo Andy Scheck

One of the most incredible magnolias around has to be the Soulangeana, or tulip magnolia, majestically towering in the backyard of Pat Doughty's Lafayette home. "The tree was large and amazing when I moved in 35 years ago," she said. "It just keeps on getting better." Two weeks ago, it was covered in beautiful and fragrant goblet-shaped pink flowers; by now, the delicate flower petals have faded to white and are covering the ground, replaced by green leaves that will provide shady spots for Doughty to enjoy all summer.

Doughty insists she's not a gardener. "Anything I grow has to thrive on neglect," she said laughingly. She happily has a great arborist, who's "the only one I let touch this tree." Murakami said that young magnolias, like other immature plants, need "pretty religious watering and mulching." But as these trees age, they do become more self-sufficient and are moderately drought tolerant.

For Doughty, who planted two more magnolias so "I'll still have something to enjoy in case anything ever happens to this grand old tree," her magnolia is a way to

celebrate springtime and entertain casually. Every year she invites friends and neighbors over for an informal afternoon to enjoy each other's company and share in the tree's beauty. "Everyone takes home cuttings from the tree so they can make their own floral arrangements," Doughty said. "Everyone typically leaves with a vase of buds, which in a day or two will open in a very dramatic way," allowing for some beautiful and creative floral centerpieces gracing her friends' homes.

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