



GROWING A STYRAX JAPONICA

Bonsai
Trees

Soils
Fertilizer
Sundries

Bonsai Southwest

Pots
Tools

Pre-Bonsai
Suiseki

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Position

The styrax prefers a sheltered position in full sun or dappled shade, with acid or neutral growing media. It does not like strong heat, so don't place it in front of a wall or on paving slabs which heat up and reflect heat during the day. The tree is frost hardy but styrax planted in bonsai containers should be protected from strong frosts for safety. DO NOT GROW INDOORS.

Flowering & Fruiting

Masses of slightly fragrant, bell-shaped white flowers hang from the branches in summer, followed by fruits (drupes) which resemble olives in both shape and colour.

Watering

Never allow soil to dry out, keep the soil evenly moist. Check the soil daily but only water when necessary. Water thoroughly with plenty of water allowing it to flow through the soil and flush out stale air and any built up chemical salt deposits.

The styrax needs a lot of water during the growing season and must not dry out, especially when it flowers or produces fruit. Those will be dropped if sufficient water is not provided in time. In winter they must be kept slightly moist. In most cases tap water is just fine for watering but it prefers soft lime free water. Watering daily as a routine when it is not required, results in soggy compost which will lead to lack of vigour, root rot and eventually death. Learn to water correctly for best results.

Feeding

Apply solid organic fertilizer every four weeks. Use a liquid tomato fertilizer every week during the growing season to encourage more flowers and berries. Take care not to use a very nitrogen-rich fertilizer while the tree flowers or develops fruit because this would encourage the tree to grow strongly instead of producing fruit. Always apply the liquid fertilizer on moist soil.

Pruning, Wiring & Development

During the growing season trim back new shoots to one or two nodes being mindful that the tree will flower on the current years growth. Any branches that have grown too thick during the season can be removed in autumn. Seal the wounds with a suitable wound sealant. Younger branches and twigs can be wired into shape in spring but older ones are very brittle and your better shaping them gently with guy wires. Developing young trees requires that you allow the tree to grow freely without pruning until the new shoots are perhaps more than 30-50 cm long. This will thicken the trunk and help any wire marks grow out. Allowing lower branches to grow and keeping the apex under control will help to develop taper in the trunk. The bark is easily marked and takes a long time for those marks to grow out.

Repotting

Young styrax trees should be repotted every 2 or 4 years in spring, older ones every four or five years or more. As the styrax bonsai tree needs a lot of water and nutrients, choose a slightly larger and deeper pot and use a soil mix which can retain enough water but is still well-draining. Use a free-draining soil medium, such as a mixture of akadama, lava rock and pumice in a ratio of 4:1:1 or 100% Akadama. The soil particle size should be approximately 2mm—6mm for medium and large trees, and slightly small for shohin size bonsai. If in any doubt please seek professional help or advice.

Don't repot for the sake of it. Repot only when the tree has obviously filled the pot with roots or when water will not percolate into the soil and drain freely.

Pests and diseases

Unfortunately the styrax can be attacked by a wide range of pests and diseases. Aphids, scale, mealybugs and caterpillars can be removed manually and / or controlled with a specific insecticide. Red spider mites require an acaricide or lime sulphur treatment. If mildew or rust occurs, a special fungicide is needed. A winter wash with lime sulphur will eradicate overwintering pests and help to control fungal problems..

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If you have any worries or questions please don't hesitate to contact me or seek more local professional help and advice.