



Styrax japonicus Japanese Snowbell¹

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INTRODUCTION

Japanese Snowbell is a small deciduous tree that slowly grows from 20 to 30 feet in height and has rounded canopy with a horizontal branching pattern (Fig. 1). With lower branches removed, it forms a more vase-shaped patio-sized shade tree. The smooth, attractive bark has orange-brown interlacing fissures adding winter interest to any landscape. The white, bell-shaped, drooping flower clusters of Japanese Snowbell are quite showy in May to June.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Styrax japonicus*

Pronunciation: STY-racks juh-PAWN-ih-kuss

Common name(s): Japanese Snowbell

Family: *Styracaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 6 through 8A (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; trainable as a standard; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree; no proven urban tolerance

Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

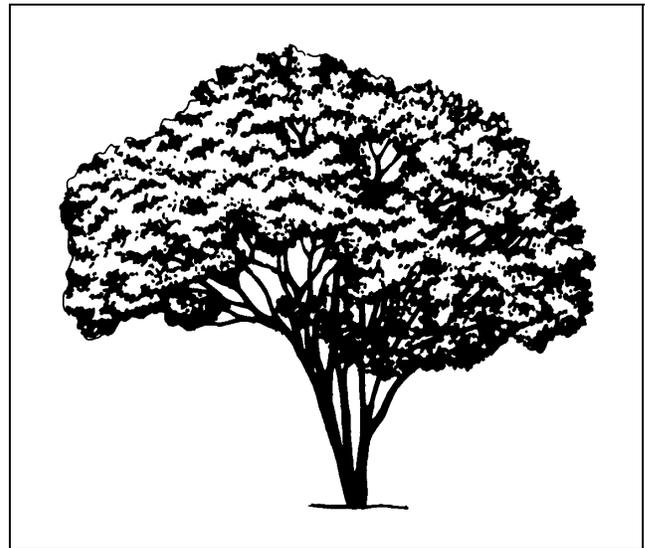


Figure 1. Middle-aged Japanese Snowbell.

DESCRIPTION

Height: 20 to 30 feet

Spread: 15 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: symmetrical canopy with a regular (or smooth) outline, and individuals have more or less identical crown forms

Crown shape: round; vase shape

Crown density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire; serrate; sinuate

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval); oblong

Leaf venation: banchidodrome; pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches; less than 2 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: red; yellow

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristics: showy; spring flowering; summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval; round

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch; < .5 inch

Fruit covering: fleshy

Fruit color: green

Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; showy trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: needs little pruning to develop a strong structure

Breakage: resistant

Current year twig color: green

Current year twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained

Drought tolerance: moderate

Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerance: poor

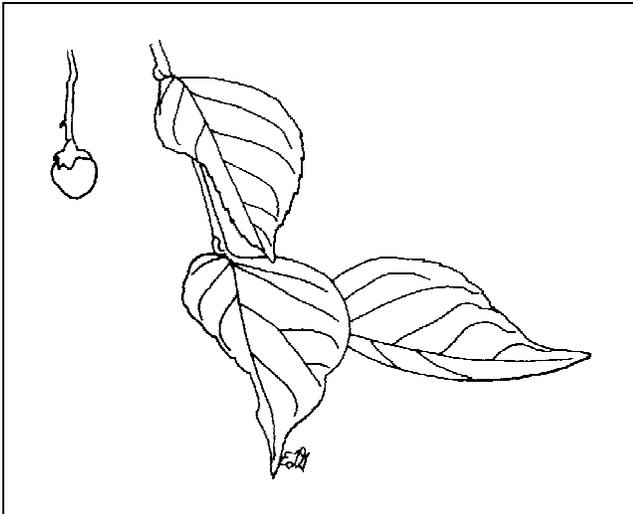


Figure 3. Foliage of Japanese Snowbell.

'Crystal' - upright to fastigate habit, black green foliage, crisp white flowers with purple pedicels (zone 5); 'Issai' - cold hardy to zone 6, grows faster than species and roots easily; 'Pink Chimes' - pink flowers, cold hardy to zone 6.

Propagate by softwood cuttings in summer. Seeds eventually germinate but exhibit a double dormancy.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern. Ambrosia beetle can attack and lead to further decline of stressed plants.

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: tree has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Pest resistance: no pests are normally seen on the tree

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Styrax species is an excellent small patio tree where the flowers and interesting bark can be viewed up close; however, the flowers attract tremendous numbers of bees and one should be cautious about approaching the plant at that time. Japanese Snowbell also makes a wonderful addition to the mixed shrubby border. Due to its small stature and vase-shape, it can make a nice street tree where overhead space is limited. The fruit is somewhat showy and may cause a small litter problem for a short time in the fall. Fall leaf color is unreliable.

Snowbell prefers a peaty, acid soil that is moist but not waterlogged. In colder areas (USDA hardiness zone 5), locate this tree in an area protected from winter winds. Plants grow better with a couple hours of shade in USDA hardiness zones 7 and 8 but full sun is fine in the North.

Cultivars include: 'Carillon' is hardy only to zone 6, grows about one-foot per year and has a weeping habit, can be staked to encourage weeping habit;