

## Tree Profile: *Serissa Foetida* - Tree of a Thousand Stars

**General information:** Many varieties, most common used are Chinese Snow Rose, Cherry Blossom, Kyoto and Thousand Stars. They have been given an unjustified bad reputation, mainly because they were grown under the wrong conditions. They have small leaves, textured bark, they flower, are easily trained, and ramify quickly. They sound like the perfect tree to me. My favorites are Thousand Stars for larger trees and Kyoto for great little mame or shohin.

But considering that most people buy *Serissa* on impulse because the plant is so spectacular at the store, the bad news is ... the plant will generally drop its flowers within a day or two. Don't panic (and many *Serissas* are inadvertently killed by panicking beginners who respond by drastically over/under watering the plant) the plant will soon re-grow its leaves. You soon will discover that the *Serissa* drops its leaves if it has too much water, too little water, if it's too hot or too cold. Also if it's moved, or there is a shift in lighting or temperature.

**Lighting:** A *Serissa* likes as much sun as you can give it without stressing it. In summer morning sun and then high filtered light from noon on. Thousand Star, when you want it to develop - grow in full sun. In winter, full sun. Too little light will result in leggy growth.

**Temperature:** More important than the actual temperature seems to be that the plant dislikes a sudden change in lighting (many die from lack of light when brought indoors). Protect from heavy frost to prevent tip burn. Fastest growth in spring, autumn, and first half of winter, slowest mid-summer.

**Watering:** This is one of the keys in growing a *Serissa*, they strongly dislike continually wet roots, it will cause the leaves to turn yellow and fall off. With our heavy rains that is sometimes hard to avoid. In the summer - water every morning and have the trees go into night somewhat on the dry side. Letting them dry down between waterings is important. If they suffer heat stress with this schedule, then also water the "soil only" in the heat of the day. They actively grow in the winter here so water accordingly. Placing the *Serissa* on a moisture tray is another option.

**Feeding:** Every 10-14 days during growth, every 4-6 weeks in winter, using liquid bonsai food or half-strength plant food. Likes slightly acid soil conditions. Epsom Salt in 4 tbs per 9 ltrs of water will help the plant more readily absorb nutrients.

**Pruning and wiring:** When in bloom, remove fading flowers to encourage further flower production. Prune as needed; the *Serissa* is a fast grower and may need radical or repeated pruning to maintain its shape. Will bud back on old wood; in fact, some books recommend occasionally pruning back beyond old growth to help the plant maintain its shape. Wire during the growing period. *Serissa* will grow air roots and is often used in exposed root or root over rock styles. Eliminate unwanted suckers extending from the base. Suitable for all styles except formal upright and broom. Suitable for extra small to medium sizes.

**Propagation:** Cuttings root quite easily, put cuttings in a glass of water from early summer or straight in to propagation mix.

**Repotting:** Every 1-2 years in spring. The newly pruned roots will emit a wretched odor! Prune roots moderately. They prefer fast draining soil

**Pests and diseases:** Red spider mite, scale, woolly aphids, mildew. Pests are usually not as much of a problem as a sudden change in conditions such as light, temperature, etc.

### Some species suitable for bonsai:

***Serissa foetida*** (also called *S. japonica*): tree of a thousand stars or snow rose. Many cultivars are available,

