

The serissa

Serissa foetida or Serissa japonica, also called "Snow of June" because of it's little white flowers.

Family: Rubiaceae.

Origin: India, China and Japan.

The most known species are Serissa foetida (so called because the roots smell fetid), Serissa japonica variegata (green leaves with yellow borders). With correct pruning they wear little white flowers between may and september.

Temperature and exposure: Serissas are supposed to be interior plants but I have them outside the whole year protecting them from hot summer light and extreme freeze. They are not as sensible as is mentioned in some literature, my trees have suffered temperatures between -5° and 36° C without any problem. Caution with hot summer winds.

Pruning and cleaning: During the vegetative period the serissas grow very fast producing long and linear ramifications which must be pruned often to obtain a more dense growth. The always green tree changes leaves continuously, the yellow ones should be cut off. Dry branches must be eliminated completely. **Pruning after repotting:** Branches must be pruned to obtain good growth. **Main pruning:** Should be done every two or three years to reactivate the growth. **Flower pruning:** Eliminate the withered flowers to favor the growth of new ones.

Wiring: I don't do much wiring on the Serissas because the branches are normally very fine and break easily. I like most the Hokidachi style with pronounced roots and a strong trunk culminating in a dense foliage. If wiring is required it should be done with care as the branches are very soft and sensible. Scars, as always, should be avoided with raffia.

Repotting / Soil: Depending on the size of the pot I repot the plants every year or I wait up to three years. If I want the plant to grow, I don't prune the roots but replant in a bigger pot. I use a mixture of humus, compost and sand in same proportion and finally add a bit of clay. Serissas look good in blue or green ceramic and also in earth colored rectangular pots.

Watering: Care must be taken in summer and in winter. In summertime Serissas are quite thirsty, lack of water even for a short period can be fatal. In wintertime watering must be controlled with care, as the roots tend to rotten very easily. A good drainage is essential. Serissas are tropical plants and prefer humid summers, vaporization is effective in dry regions (not during flowering).

Fertilizer: Should be applied during the vegetative period only and never after repotting. I prefer the solid type which dissolves itself slowly. Reduce dose during the flowering period. In wintertime a little dose can be applied if the plant stays in a warm environment.

Diseases: Aphids: The best remedy I have found is removing the parasites manually followed by a shower of water. If the attack persists, I use three drops of Folithion per 1 liter of water. **Rotten roots:** The roots get brown and soft normally caused by too much watering. A adequate repotting into a pot with good drainage could save the tree.

Light: The serissa are very light-sensible. They require much light but don't like direct sun in very hot summers. Light changes will cause immediately leaf loss.