

Styrax - A spectacular small tree or shrub

John Wood

Styracaceae is a small family with eleven genera in the Ericales, with approximately another 160 trees and shrubs also in the order, most of them from the tropics and sub tropics of the northern hemisphere. However, there is one species, *Styrax japonicus* (Japanese snowbell) a deciduous shrub or small tree, which is a native of China, Japan and Korea.

It is hardy here, and quite happy in most soils that are well drained, humus rich, neutral or acid, in sun or partial shade. There are several varieties available, all of which are very floriferous and showy; they flower in late spring or early summer. *Styrax* is also related to the beautiful American plant *Halesia* (Snowdrop tree).

Styrax japonicus is one of those plants that stands out and attracts your immediate attention when it is in full bloom. An added bonus is the autumn colour of the leaves. The varieties that I am familiar with are: *S. japonicus* 'Pink Chimes', which has the addition of pink shades at the base of the sepals' and *S. japonicus* 'Evening Light' which I have grown for a number of years and is my favourite as it has yet another surprise, in that the leaves gradually change from green in the spring to a rich burgundy colour in the summer before its final display of autumn colour.

It's a plant that I certainly wouldn't want to be without.