

## Plant of the Month – May

### Styrax (Snowbell)

For smaller scale landscapes, there is a need for ornamental trees that offer multiple attractions along with compact ultimate size. The Snowbell family fits beautifully into this category, and since it is underused, it adds the spice of rarity to the landscape.

*Styrax japonica* is most often grown as a large shrub or a small multi-stem tree. The foliage is neat and delicate throughout the summer, turning a soft yellow in the fall. Its showy white bell-shaped flowers appear in May in great quantity, and perfume the area with their fragrance. When they drop, the ground looks like it has a white carpet. The flowers are followed in late summer by interesting brown seeds that look like coffee beans.

Dr. JC Raulston of NC State University found a *Styrax japonica* that is even more beautiful, on one of his plant collection trips to Korea. He brought back cuttings of it and introduced it to the nursery trade under the name of 'Emerald Pagoda'. It has larger glossy leaves, bigger showier white flowers, and a definite tree form habit. It grows vigorously in both sun and shade, eventually reaching 25'. It is not fussy in its site requirements, but prefers soil rich in organic material.

*Styrax obassia* (Fragrant Snowbell) also has the characteristic white bell-like flowers, but they are held on long chains or racemes which hang from the branches for a beautiful show. The leaves are much larger than the Japanese Snowbell, and the habit of *Styrax obassia* is correspondingly more open and tree-like. Its eventual height will be 30', and it is happy in both sun and shade. The bark is an attractive smooth grey-brown in the winter, and the ascending zigzag branching habit is of added interest. It blooms a little earlier in May than the Japanese Snowbell, and is somewhat more tolerant of the winter cold.