

Zelkova serrata – Japanese Elm

Zelkova serrata, commonly known as Japanese Elm is a genus of about 6 species of deciduous, semi-evergreen trees occurring in woodland, thickets and hedgerows in Italy, Greece, Turkey, Iran and Asia. Zelkova have alternate, ovate to elliptic toothed leaves and most species display good autumn colour of yellows and orange-browns. This one can be bonsai'd or used as a feature tree. Japanese Elms are often sold as indoor bonsai and as such are acclimatised to indoor growing conditions. Those sold as outdoor bonsai and all other species of Zelkova should be cultivated outdoors, those grown indoors (or in climates with very mild winters) will remain evergreen whereas outdoor cultivation results in a deciduous tree. Ensure indoor trees do not become too cold in their first winter outside. Zelkovas should be able to cope with the adverse growing conditions indoors though they are never as vigorous as their outdoor counterparts.

Propagation

PRE-TREATMENT – Stratify seed for 60 days prior to sowing.

SOW – Surface sow seed in a good quality seed raising mix, cover lightly and keep the medium lightly moist. Optimum germination temperature is 16 to 18°C.

PLANT CARE – (Indoors) Well lit, cool position on a sunny windowsill during the Winter. Keep up humidity levels and place outside after last frosts have finished. Try to keep outside until Autumn when the leaves can be allowed to fall naturally before bringing indoors. (Outdoors) Outdoor Zelkovas/acclimatised Zelkovas are hardy to frost though temperatures below -5°C can result in fine branches dying back and root damage so should be afforded some protection. Frost protection can include placement in darkened outhouses and garages as when out of leaf Zelkovas do not require light.

Watering – (Indoors) Never allow compost to dry out, keep the compost evenly moist. Check the compost daily but only water when necessary, watering daily as a routine results in sodden compost, leading to lack of vigour, rootrot and eventually death. Mist daily and use a humidity tray. (Outdoors) As with indoor watering though during periods of strong sun, high temperatures or strong growth in the Spring, trees can need far more frequent watering.

Feeding – (Indoors) Balanced feed weekly through Spring and Summer. Monthly through the Winter. Do not feed when out of leaf. (Outdoors) Once buds open in Spring, feed weekly with high nitrogen for first month then every two weeks until late summer with balanced feed.

Repotting – in Spring as buds extend annually until around 10 years old or more and then repot as required. Trees overwintered indoors can be repotted in Autumn when brought indoors after leaf drop. Repot in basic soil mix.

Pruning – Allow shoots to extend 3 or 4 nodes then prune back to 1 or 2 leaves as required Larger-leaved Zelkovas respond well to leaf cutting in Summer

Wiring – In mid-summer though indoor trees can be wired mid-winter particularly if out of leaf. Care should be taken as bark marks easily.

