

Japanese Serrata Zelkova

Japanese Zelkova is a tough urban tree for residential and street plantings. It has a spreading, generally upright branching, vase-shaped habit. The crown is shorter and more rounded than the American elm. The bark is a smooth, reddish brown when young with prominent cherry-like lenticels. As the tree ages, the outer bark is gray-brown and often exfoliating exposing an orangish inner bark. Medium green leaves turn to shades of yellow, orange, brown, deep red to reddish-purple in fall. This tree will tolerate most soil types including those with a pH to about 7.5, but prefers deep, moist, well drained soils. It does well in full sun. Established trees are fairly drought and wind tolerant (if properly pruned). It is resistant to Dutch elm disease with good resistance to elm leaf beetle and Japanese beetle. Pruning should be done in fall, and Japanese zelkova will require some pruning to develop a strong structure. The main branches should be spaced along a single trunk, so they develop a secure hold on the trunk especially in urban areas. Branches should remain less than 1/2 the diameter of the trunk to maintain a strong form. Planting uses for zelkova include lawn, shade, and street tree, parking lot island, buffer strip, and bonsai.



Hardiness Zones

The Japanese zelkova can be expected to grow in Hardiness Zones 5–8.

Tree Type



Mature Size

The Japanese Zelkova grows to a height of 25-30” and a spread of around 30-35” at maturity.



Growth Rate

This tree grows at a medium rate, with height increases of 13–24" per year.



Sun Preference

Full sun is the ideal condition for this tree, meaning it should get at least six hours of direct, unfiltered sunlight each day.



Soil Preference

This tree grows in a wide range of soil textures, acidic to slightly alkaline, moist to dry. It tolerates drought (once established) and compacted soil.



Attributes

This tree:
Offers dense shade.

- Develops a peeling bark in old age, exposing orange patches of inner bark.
- Features ovate to oblong-ovate dark green leaves with serrated margins and a slightly rough texture that are 1 ¼ –2" long.
- Provides fall color in shades of yellow, orange, brown, deep red and reddish-purple.
- Yields small, kidney bean-shaped drupes that measure around ¼" in diameter and ripen in the fall.
- Is a popular bonsai tree.

- Tolerates wind, drought and air pollution.
- Grows in a vase shape.
- Turns into high-quality, durable, strong timber that is used for furniture and construction.



History/Lore

Native to Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Manchuria, the Japanese zelkova was introduced in America in 1862. This tree also goes by the common name Keaki.

