Premna Care Sheet

“The Stinky Lady”

“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”
—Mahatma Gandhi—

Brought to you by
S & S Bonsai of Colorado Springs, Colorado
(Most of the included information is obtained from several online sources.)

P. microphylla

P. obtusifolia

P. japonica

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The coastal species (*P. obtusifolia*) is most often sought after for bonsai use because of its unique texture of the trunk. It is especially noted for its natural jin and shari. Premna is very fast growing. It will grow a lot of suckers from the surface roots. These make perfect material for Shohin or Mame bonsai because it is possible to reduce the size of a Premna leaf from its full size of 9cm (3-1/2") down to 2mm (3/4"), giving you very compact foliage. Some species have leaves as large as 6 inches.

**CARE**

**Temperature:** Zones 8-11, temperatures no lower than 50°F (10°C). Difficult as an indoor tree for a temperate climate.

**Lighting:** Premna grow well in most light conditions but respond best to a bright, sunny location. They respond quite well to good artificial light.

**Air:** High humidity

**Watering:** Premna like water and will tolerate a moister soil than most bonsai. Do not let them get too dry. The leaves, stems and new growth will droop when dry to let you know when they need water. Lots of water in the growing season and evenly moist in the Winter.

**Fertilizing:** Fertilize weekly with a weak solution throughout the growing season. Stop in late Summer.

**Pruning / Training:** The branches of Premna grow in an untidy manor so wiring is required on the initial styling efforts of the primary branches. Once this is done, due to its fast growth and prolific back-budding, it is best to use the clip-and-grow method to maintain a good shape. For the most part, you will find that Premna does not need much wiring because it has so much character. Will tolerate extreme leaf reductions and defoliation with much smaller leaves growing back.

**Insects / Pests:** It is said that the foul smell keeps most bugs away but Premna are still prone to white fly, aphids and scale. Some of these insects will penetrate the bark and cause branch die-back.

**Propagation:** Propagated from seed or cuttings.

**Repotting:** Repot every two years in the Spring or in the rainy season. Use a well draining bonsai soil with some sand.

**Design and Styling:** Premna is perfect for most bonsai styles including literati, cascade, wind-swept, informal upright, forest and raft. Has a hard wood that can be used for jin and shari development.

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**General Information:** To date, there is a lot of information on the Premna but not a lot on its use as a bonsai. In the words of Robert Stevens, “In five years to come, I believe Premna will be one of the most favorite tropical bonsai in many countries.”

This plant is a sub-tropical plant native to various islands in the western Indian Ocean: Comoros, Mauritius, Reunion and the Seychelles. In temperate Asia it occurs in China, Taiwan, Japan and the Ryukyu Islands. In tropical Asia it is found in many parts of the Indian subcontinent. It is native to almost everywhere in the East Indies and the Philippines. It is even in Australia and New Zealand. It is also native to the Marshall Islands, Palau, Fiji, New Caledonia, Samoa and the Solomon Islands.

Premna is one of the most widely used plants for medicinal as well as magical purposes. Referred to as Agnimantha, it is used for stingray and stonefish stings, cardiac ailments, various baby ailments, to improve people’s luck, to protect them from illness and often used to make love potions! The leaves of the *P. obtusifolia* are used in the alleviation of headaches. This is why it is known as the “Headache Tree”. The list goes on, in fact, I don’t think there is not much this plant is not useful for, including the alleviation of farts!!

In China this tree is called Qou Niang Tze, which means “Stinky Lady” because of the bad odor that comes from parts of the tree (not all species of Premna have a bad odor). The description of this odor varies from, “unpleasant, like cat’s urine”, to “hideous smell like a combination of Malathion and Lime Sulfur, quite strong and disgusting!!”. Do not let this deter you from obtaining one of these gems, they make an awesome bonsai tree.

There are more than 200 species of Premna but not all of these can be successfully used for bonsai because some of the leaves cannot be reduced. Most Premna available in the USA come from Puerto Rico as rooted cuttings from Indonesia (*P. serratifolia*) and Taiwan (*P. microphylla*). The different species of Premna are still confusing, some call the *P. microphylla* as *P. naoseose*. And the *P. japonica* is sometimes referred to as *P. microphylla japonica*, also known as the Musk Maple. And *P. integrifolia* is no longer an acceptable name.