

# Basic Bonsai

## History

The art of dwarfing trees can be traced back to ancient Egypt, Greece and India. The original purpose was purely functional to facilitate transporting live medicinal plant materials.

It was not until the Tang Dynasty in China (600 – 900 AD) that the practice took more of an elitist, decorative position. During this period, in Japan, Chinese culture was being absorbed, refined, and advanced. Bonsai as we know it today has gone through much development and change.

Rules and regulations have only recently been established into the three major styles; 'Upright', 'Slanting' and 'Cascade', from which all other styles are derived. Profiles can include single and multi-trunk specimens, formal and informal trunk, windswept and twisted shape and a number of other styles. There are two general types of bonsai – traditional and, more recently, indoor.

## Traditional Bonsai

Traditional bonsai uses outdoor material such as pines, junipers, maples and other evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs. These must be grown outdoors, subjected to the natural elements and seasonal changes that maintain their appearance and health. Attempting to grow these as indoor plants would only result in weak, unnatural growth.

Grown throughout the year in locations that are relatively sheltered from severs such as the hottest afternoon summer sun and the coldest drying winter winds, these plants may be brought indoors for anywhere from two days in winter to seven days in summer. Make absolutely sure that the plant is well watered prior to replacing it in your outdoor growing area.

Root pruning and transplanting should be done in very early spring or after flowering, according to the species. As the plant ages, this is required less often as the growth slows and the plant naturally dwarfs.

## Indoor Bonsai

Indoor bonsai uses materials such as ficus, schefflera, azalea and other tropicals. Many outdoor species of plants, including boxwood, dwarf holly and nandina are adaptable to indoor conditions. Bright light, an unheated area and careful monitoring will ensure success.

Locate your indoor bonsai according to the specific plant's requirements, keeping in mind the size of the container. During warmer spring, summer and fall months, your plants will benefit

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greatly being outdoors with protection from the extremes. Root pruning and transplanting should be done only when required. Remember, rootbound 'houseplants' fare better.

## **Watering**

Watering any bonsai must be thorough to ensure saturation of the rootball which must never be allowed to completely dry out. Overhead watering (rain) should be repetitive. Occasional plunging of the entire pot (root ball) will help greatly. The trick is to water according to the plant type, growth rate, size, soil mix and seasonal temperatures.

## **Feeding**

To ensure even growth and reduce the risk of 'burning', it is best to feed frequently but lightly with a water soluble growth or to stimulate one aspect of the plant ie: root development, flowering or fruiting and leaf growth.

## **Pruning**

Typically, prune or pinch frequently during the active growing season or after flowering to maintain shape. Any severe pruning should be judicious and well thought out before making the cuts.

## **Diseases**

Watch for insects and disease on ANY bonsai specimen. Such small plants can be devastated in very short periods. All varieties are prone to the same problems as their full size counterparts. Few plants grown well are susceptible to disease but if one should occur, take appropriate measures.

Bonsai is very quickly becoming a popular hobby and the general market offers material ranging from poor to excellent potential. Be wary of your purchase. Nothing is more disheartening than losing a find due to a lack of knowledge. Read books... ask questions... members of our staff are well versed on this subject and will be glad to counsel you with regard to your particular needs.

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