

Bonsai Tree Care Information

What is Bonsai?

The Japanese word "bonsai" literally translated means (planted in a shallow container)

For many hundreds of years bonsai have been cultivated by both the Chinese and Japanese and are considered to bring nature into the home.

Bonsai is all about growing miniature trees in the form of full scale, mature trees in nature. Bonsai trees are perfectly normal plant varieties that are skilfully grown, shaped and pruned in order to achieve this. Bonsai trees take many years to form and train and years of careful training is required to master the art.



Some of the world's oldest specimens are believed to be around 800 years old. It isn't possible to accurately date a tree without damaging it, so most of these ages are educated guesswork based on any records available, the species of tree, overall appearance and style in which it has been trained.

Indoor or Outdoor?

It is important to know a few basic facts about your bonsai plant. Outdoor Bonsai refers to plants that are considered frost hardy and there for can live outdoors all year round. It is important they are kept outdoors all year round because these trees require a cold dormant period, unlike many tropical and sub-tropical species cultivated indoors. (Do not bring trees indoors into the warmth during this period). In the depths of winter some trees may benefit from a little protection especially from prolonged periods of extreme cold or wet weather particularly those in very shallow pots.

Indoor Bonsai are usually tropical or sub-tropical species that benefit from being kept warm all year round. Often evergreen species, these bonsai make impressive houseplants but many will benefit from being placed outdoors for periods in the summer if possible.

It's not as hard as you think!

Caring for Bonsai is not nearly as hard as commonly thought. However, as they are planted in such small shallow pots, regular attention is needed. Use the following guidelines to achieve super results, remember to adjust your practice according to the size of the plant / planter, species and age of the tree, soil mixture and climate or site in which the tree is positioned.



MOYOGI

KENGAI

CHOKKAN

SHAKKAN

TYPES OF BONSAI



YOSE-UE

FUKINAGASHI

IKADABUKI

HAN-KENGAI

HOKIDACHI

Bonsai Styles

There are many formal styles of bonsai, each with a specific name. The style you decide upon will, to some extent depend on the specimen you are working with. Some trees will suggest a particular style and if this is the case, then that is the one you should follow for the best results. You should observe trees in nature as this is where your styling ideas should come from, a natural-looking design is key!

Common varieties

Flowering

Berberis
Serissa
Cotoneaster
Ilex crenata
Prunus varieties
Pyracantha
Azalea/Rhododendron

Deciduous

Acer
Elm (Ulmus)
Larch (larix)
Malus
Oak (Quercus)
Beech (fagus)

Indoor

Crassula
Carmona
Ficus
Serissa
Sageretia

Fruiting/Berries

Citrus
Malus (apple)
Cotoneaster
Pyracantha
Olive (Olea)

Evergreen

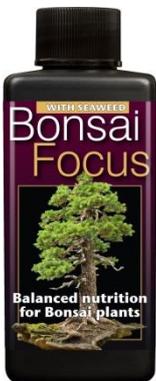
Cedrus
Pine
Juniper
Ilex (Holly)
Podocarpus

Caring for your Bonsai

Watering

Like most potted plants, bonsai need careful attention to provide the correct amount of water. It is important to keep the soil evenly moist, never allowing the soil to completely dry out. Expert growers will check daily and only add water when the soil is becoming dry. In the hot summer months twice daily watering may be required for certain species. Rain water or tepid water is best although rain water will suffice. (Remember that over watering is probably one of the biggest killers of potted plants so if in doubt exercise caution)

Fertiliser



Bonsai soil is largely inert, with little or no nutritional value. With the frequent watering bonsai require it soon washes away any nutrients that are available. We recommend applying a balanced fertiliser such as **Bonsai Focus** once a week in the growing season. For acid loving plants apply an ericaceous fertilizer at intervals throughout the growing season. There are also many slow release organic fertilisers that can be applied throughout the season. Fertiliser baskets make applications of organic pelleted feed easier preventing them from rolling off the soil surface.

Do not feed recently re-potted trees until active growth starts to take place again which is usually around 4 weeks.

Remember, unless a bonsai is actively growing and in good health fertiliser should not be applied.

Basic Pruning

Using pruning scissors and leaf cutters, prune new growth back and remove any unwanted growth throughout the growing season to maintain a desired shape. Allow shoots to develop 4-6 leaves before cutting back to the first pair. By pruning back one area you are diverting the energy within in the tree helping it to produce buds and new growth somewhere else. You can shape many deciduous trees simply by selective pruning. New growth on conifers and pines should be pinched out with a twisting motion.

Tools

There are a wide range of specialist bonsai tools designed for specific purposes. But that said a few very basic gardening tools will suffice at the beginning when you are just starting out. These tools will include a decent pair of secateurs and some small pruning scissors or shears. As you gain experience though, more tools may be required for certain tasks and will generally make life easier.

These may include

- Knob cutters
- Branch cutters
- Wire cutters
- Long nosed scissors
- Root pruning scissors
- Leaf shears/cutters
- Pruning saw
- Root hook
- Root rake
- Tweezers
- Chopsticks
- Jin pliers
- Sieve with interchangeable screen inserts
- Set of brushes plastic/stainless-steel/brass/coco (old toothbrushes work well)
- Rotary electric tool with various bushes and cutters for deadwood areas



Re-potting & Root Pruning

Periodic re-potting is essential to maintain the health and vigour of bonsai trees. If the roots of your tree are starting to circle around the inside of the pot then repotting is in order. You can usually tell when a tree is starting to become pot bound when a) the soil doesn't drain freely, b) the trees growth slows, c) the tree starts to push out of its pot or d) by simply inspecting the root system.

It is vitally important to use a good free draining soil mix

Deciduous species – Usually best re-potted in spring just before bud break

Pines – Late spring/early autumn works well to (do not remove as much existing soil from roots and use as much viable soil mix in with the new)

Junipers – Late spring/early summer

Indoor species – Late spring/early summer (when the weathers warm)

Root pruning at re-potting time encourages new fine feeder roots to multiply and develop eventually leading to healthy growth in the upper levels of the tree. It also means that there is no need for a new larger pot to used (unless desirable)

Adding a little *Rootgrow mycorrhiza fungi* at repotting time ensures quicker recovery for many trees especially pines.

- 1) Ease the tree from its pot. You may need to cut it free if it has been tied in or simply has a large root mass.
- 2) Loosen the compost from around the root ball. Use a root hook and/or rake to help you with this.
- 3) Comb out the roots and cut back the root ball by around 25% removing any dead, large or long roots as you go. Use good quality sharp root pruning scissors in order to achieve clean cuts.
- 4) Prepare your new or existing pot by placing mesh over the drainage holes. Secure these in place with some wire, threading another wire through to later secure the tree.
- 5) Fill the base of the pot with a fine layer of soil mix and place the tree on top (slightly off centre) before securing in place with the remaining wire.
- 6) Fill in the spaces you have created with fresh potting mix and use a chop stick or similar to work the soil around the roots, ensuring there are no air pockets.

Immediately after repotting, water the tree thoroughly and leave in a sheltered spot for around 4 weeks in order to allow the roots to recover before starting to feed.



Defoliating

Defoliating or partial defoliating is a process in where some or all of the leaves can be removed from deciduous trees (check your variety is suitable) in early summer once the first leaves have matured. The leaves that regrow after defoliation will stay slightly smaller than the first flush. Avoid defoliating every season and do not defoliate trees that are not fully healthy as this process reduces the vigour of the specimen. Occasional larger leaves may be removed throughout the season.

Basic wiring

Using aluminium or copper wire, the style and overall shape of your bonsai can be adjusted into the desired shape or position. Coil an appropriate wire thickness around the branch - too large and you can damage branch, too small and it won't hold the branch in the required position. Wire should be applied at around a 45 degree angle; once wrapped, bend the branch gently into position. After a period of time, the branch will hopefully set into position and the wire should then be removed by cutting it off with wire cutters taking care not to damage bark, leaves and buds in the process. If the branch has not set re-wire as necessary. Be aware that leaving wire on for too long or wrapping it too tightly may cause unsightly scarring. Handle branches with caution as they may become brittle during certain periods through the year.

Pests and diseases

If a bonsai is well maintained, in the right location, watered correctly and re-potted when needed there is little likelihood of it suffering from any major problems. Minor pests include greenfly, spider mite and various mildews which can become a problem from time to time. These can all be tackled with systemic sprays such as *Provado Ultimate Bug Killer* or *Bayer Garden Fungus Fighter*.

If you have any further questions about your bonsai tree feel free to contact us at ccc@thegardensgroup.co.uk or telephone one of our garden centres.

