

CARING FOR YOUR BONSAI

WATERING

Begin watering every day, and cut back if the soil is still damp. Bonsai are very water demanding because they cannot send out a large root system. Even keep drought tolerant plants slightly moist.

FERTILIZING

Generally bonsai need an all-purpose granular fertilizer at half-strength. Follow package instructions. Apply in spring, summer, and fall. Flowering plants require a fertilizer higher in potassium. A rose food is ideal. Use for the spring and summer applications, with an all-purpose in the fall.

REPOTTING

Repot bonsai if water drains slowly, or plant growth is greatly retarded. Another sign is if the root mass is very dense and formed to the pot. Bonsai are repotted every one to three years when they are new. Repot older specimens less often. Timing is important, so be sure to refer to further references for specific plants.

REFERENCES

[Bonsai a Care Manual](#) by Colin Lewis

[Creating Bonsai](#) by Joe Davis

Compiled by Laura Altvater

STARTING A BONSAI

Beginning a new bonsai is best done in early spring before the plant breaks dormancy. It can also be done in fall, but the plant must be sheltered for the winter.

1. Materials for beginning. Pot, bonsai soil mix, wire, root rake, branch pruners, scissors, wire cutters, pliers, and chopstick.

2. Prepare the pot. Cover the drain holes with mesh and secure with wire. Add another long loop of wire up through the drain holes for anchoring the root ball.

3. Root pruning. Ease the tree from its pot without pulling too hard on the trunk. Gently tease apart the roots at the edges with a root rake or metal hook. Then untangle the roots on the underside. Mist the root mass occasionally to keep moist and clear away excess soil. Cut back the thick roots at the edges by 1/3. Try to leave as many of the fine, feeder root as possible. There should be 3/4" space around the edges of the pot to allow for growth.

4. Planting. Place a layer of soil in the pot with a slight mound under the trunk. Place the plant in the pot. Once the plant is in the correct position, secure with the wires from the drain holes. These wires can be cut off in 2-3 months. Fill the remaining space with soil. Soak the plant and place in a sheltered area.

Outdoor Bonsai



Ideas, Plant Suggestions,
and Tips for Care

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Bonsai is an ancient art form that captures the essence of a natural setting in miniature. Various pruning and training techniques help attain this look. The following list gives suggestions and details of plants that work well as outdoor bonsai specimens.

BONSAI FOR PART-SHADE

Acer palmatum varieties - Japanese Maple. There are so many varieties with different growth habits and characteristics. Many varieties can tolerate full shade. Repot every 1-3 years in spring. Prune in spring and keep moist.

Adina rubella- Chinese Button Bush. Clusters of white flowers in summer and beautiful fall color. Repot every 2-5 years. Prune after flowering, or in spring. Adina can dry out a bit between waterings.

Chamecyparis obtusa- Hinoki Cypress. These conifers tolerate part shade or full sun. They need to be repotted every 2-3 years in mid spring. Prune in summer. Zone 4.

Daphne spp. -Daphne. Fragrant flowers on this mounding evergreen shrub. Repot every 2-3 years. Prune in spring. Keep moist. Shelter from severe winter winds.

Rhododendron spp. -Rhododendron. Dwarf varieties tend to have small leaves and flowers. Some species can tolerate more sun. Repot every 2 years when young, and every 4-5 years when older. Prune immediately after flowering. Keep moist.

Stewartia pseudocamellia - Stewartia. This slow growing tree has white summer flowers and brilliant fall color. Repot every 2-5 years in early spring. Prune in early spring before repotting. Keep moist. Zones 4-7.

Tsuga canadensis, or *T. mertensiana* - Hemlock. A graceful conifer with flattened needles. Repot every 2-4 years. Prune in summer. Keep moist. Very cold hardy.



BONSAI FOR SUN

Bamboo - Dwarf species such as *Arundanaria* and *Pleioblastus* are excellent bonsai plants. Repot every 2-3 years in spring. Prune out older shoots spring-summer. Keep moist, especially in hot weather. Monitor for spider mites.

Chaenomeles japonica - Flowering Quince. Early spring flowers in various colors. Look for the contorted variety for extra interest. Repot every 1-2 years in spring. Cut back new shoots mid-late summer. Keep wet they are very thirsty! Zones 4-8.

Cotoneaster horizontalis - Rock Cotoneaster. Distinct stiff, fan-like structure gives many possibilities for bonsai. Repot every 1-2 years in mid-spring. Prune 3 weeks after repotting and seal wounds. Shelter from winter rains because of rot. Zones 4-7.

Cryptomeria japonica varieties - Japanese Cedar. This conifer has tight foliage and stiff branches. Repot new trees every 2 years in spring. Prune in late summer. Water thoroughly, but do not keep it permanently saturated. Protect from winter winds and extended frosts. Zone 5.

Ginkgo biloba - Ginkgo. An ancient tree with fan-shaped leaves. They can also tolerate part shade. Repot every year in late winter or early spring. Prune in late spring. Regular water. Shelter during severe winter freezing. Zones 3-8.

Ilex crenata - Japanese Holly. Small, glossy, evergreen leaves on this rounded shrub. Repot every 2-3 years in late winter. Prune in late spring. Water thoroughly in summer. Zones 5-7.

Pinus thunbergii - Japanese Black Pine. Upright, rich green needles, and black fissured bark. Repot every 2-5 years in late spring. Prune in late summer. Keep soil moist, but not saturated. Monitor for root rot.

Ulmus parvifolia - Chinese Elm. Tiny leaves and horizontal structure provide the perfect elements for bonsai. Repot in spring every 1-3 years. Keep moist in summer. Zones 4-9.

