

BONSAI

HUMBER NURSERIES 'GREEN THUMB GUIDE'



BONSAI HISTORY

The art of Bonsai began over 2000 years ago in the Han Dynasty in China. When introduced to the Japanese, the art was further developed and refined.

"Nature, captured and sculptured in the form of a tree"

CREATING A BONSAI

Most trees can be shaped and formed as a Bonsai. One can create a Bonsai from a seedling, but the preferred method is to use a more mature plant and sculpt it. When choosing a specimen from the nursery, one should look for a tree having heavy lower branches and branches fairly evenly distributed with short internodes or distances between leaves. The leaves should be small.

The specimen should have attractive bark and a trunk with girth, giving the illusion of maturity. When the tree is closely examined, a style seems inherent in the plant. To Bonsai your specimen, learn first through classes, clubs or literature. Learning the methods and applying them to the specimen is the art.

A few hints: Bonsai require a special soil with good drainage. Bonsai pots should be small to balance the creation. Place the Bonsai off center in the container. Wiring is used to shape and strengthen the tree with initial shaping and pruning of the plant. Roots are also pruned.

Favourites for Bonsai:

Junipers – *Juniperus varieties*

Ficus – *Ficus varieties*

Elms – *Ulmus parvifolia*

Fukien – *Carmona microphylla*

Japanese Maple – *Acer palmatum varieties*

Maidenhair tree – *Ginkgo biloba*

Myrtle – *Myrtus communis and variegated*

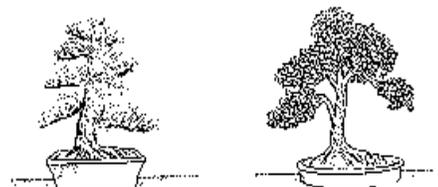
CARING FOR THE BONSAI

When choosing a Bonsai first know what conditions you can offer it in terms of lighting and winter location.

WINTERING

Tropical Bonsai spend winters in our homes growing in windows that provide the correct lighting they require.

Temperate Bonsai spend winters in the cooler areas of our homes and temperature will affect the lighting required. Hardy Bonsai must have a winter dormancy period to flourish. Safe areas for winter dormancy can be well-protected deep cold frames or a bright area where temperatures are maintained between 36°F and 43°F. One can also refrigerate the plant after it goes through a cooling, darkening period.



During the winter months, all Bonsai will still need watering. The colder they are, the less watering will be required. Hardy Bonsai may only need 2 – 3 waterings through the winter.

WATERING

This will most definitely be the most challenging aspect of being a Bonsai owner. One should understand that these mature plants, in tiny pots, have delicate, small root systems. Tiny pots may need watering many times a day in the summer. At the same time, over watering will most definitely cause your plant to fail. When first getting to know your Bonsai's watering needs:

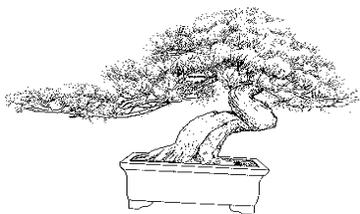
- **Keep the surface soil exposed for observation**
- **Remove decorative gravels and rocks that obscure your assessment of the soil**

A Bonsai requires watering when the soil surface is dry to the touch.

Precisely observe the surface soil. As the plant dries, the soil will begin to lighten, (usually around the outside edge). As the soil becomes lighter around the base of the plant, it is time to water. Sometimes a light scratch of the surface will reveal a dry medium.

The best way to water a Bonsai is to immerse the pot in water. The water should be room temperature and tepid. Allow it to sit in the water until bubbles cease to rise from the soil. Then remove and let drain.

Bonsai that are indoors, especially in winter, will benefit from misting or pebble tray arrangements because of the dry air our homes tend to have. This will allow the leaves to remain lush.



FERTILIZING

The best fertilizers for Bonsai organic, such as fish emulsion or Kelp Meal. Follow the manufacturer's directions for fertilizing and remember that Bonsai will probably not need fertilizer during the winter.

SHAPING YOUR BONSAI

Pruning, trimming and pinching are the magic of the training of Bonsai. A Bonsai is never really finished.

Pruning of deciduous Bonsai is done whenever the plant looks untidy. The stem should be pruned back to the first or second leaf. Junipers need the new scale shoots pruned back any time they appear. Pines need spring pruning and occasionally autumn pruning. The spring bud should be cut back to half or one third of the original length.

Spring can be a busy time for Bonsai owners because this is when Bonsai should be repotted. Some Bonsai may need repotting once a year. A spring root pruning will keep the roots forever young and healthy, whether you are repotting or not. Spring root pruning or re-potting should only be done when the buds begin to swell. When buds are dormant it is too early, and once they leaf out it is too late. Root pruning of Bonsai encourages a healthy plant.



Keeping Bonsai is an art. For success, one needs to practice and study. There is an abundance of information out there to teach you. Remember, art is a form of one's personality that in the case of Bonsai allows the magnificence of nature to be held in the palm of your hand.

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**Green is not just a colour.....
It's our future.**

