

General Guide To Bonsai Care

WATERING

If the water supply is heavily chlorinated, draw water and let it sit for 24 hours before using it. This allows the chlorine to evaporate. Softened water has too much salt for your plant's health. Use rainwater or water from an outside tap, which is not softened. Frequency of watering is somewhat dependent on weather conditions and placement.

General Guidelines:

Thorough watering is recommended every one to three days in the spring, summer and fall; less in the winter. Do not let the roots dry out completely. If it is very hot and/or windy, watering more than once a day may be necessary. It is best to water in the early morning or late afternoon. The method of watering should simulate natural rainfall – use an attachment on the watering can or hose which makes the spray soft enough so as not to disturb the soil. Water until excess water runs out of the drainage holes in the bottom of the pot. In particularly hot, dry weather, or if you are not sure you are watering thoroughly enough, the pot can be placed in a shallow pan of cool standing water (to 1" deep) and soaked for up to ½ hour. Notice how heavy the plant is when it is thoroughly watered. The difference in weight between wet and dry will help you to know when the roots are dry, even if the top soil is moist.

FERTILIZING

Application of an 8-9 month time release feed in early spring should last for the season. As an alternate, a 3-4 month time release feed can be applied in the spring and again in the summer. Use fertilizer in moderation on ericaceous plants such as azaleas. For flowering and fruiting trees, feed with a 0-10-10 fertilizer in the fall to winter-harden and improve next year's display.

A general all-purpose liquid feed can be applied once a month in the main growing season to supplement the slow release feed. For those who prefer an Akadama, pumice and lava rock soil mix, you should fertilize with an organic feed, such as Whitney Farms 5-5-5 Organic feed, mixed with pelleted fish meal. This combination works well, and also encourages the formation of beneficial symbiotic fungi on the roots.

Traditionally, if a tree has just been repotted, fertilize after it has had several weeks to adjust to its new soil. On the other hand, recent research has shown that immediate feeding may even be preferable, and more beneficial.

OUTDOOR BONSAI

These are mostly deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs from cool temperate climates, which have a definite dormant season. The ideal location is on a bench or table at a good viewing height, on a patio, deck or balcony where the plant will have morning sun, afternoon shade, and shelter from drying winds. Avoid heat-reflective walls, and keep off the ground. Generally, outdoor bonsai can tolerate full sun most of the late fall, winter and early spring. Pines and junipers can take full sun year round, but will tend to yellow; for best color, shade them from hottest (midday to late afternoon) sun. Maples, azaleas, rhododendrons, and other plants with delicate foliage should be placed in 50%-70% shade.

Turn the tree monthly for even lighting and growth, more frequently in the spring. Outdoor bonsai may be displayed indoors 2-3 days per month at the most, but keep them away from direct sunlight, fireplaces, and other heat sources.

Winter Protection:

Mild winter areas: Protect bonsai from winds and heavy winter storms by moving to a sheltered area.

Cold winter areas: Protect from hard frosts, but do not avoid winter dormant period by placing in a heated area. The bonsai can be heeled into a protected flower bed, cold frame or unheated greenhouse, put in an unheated garage or storage shed, window well of an unheated basement, or in an enclosed, unheated porch.

INDOOR BONSAI

Indoor bonsai are largely evergreen tropical, sub-tropical and warm temperature climate plants which normally experience little if any dormant period. Winter air temperatures should range from 50 degrees F night to 75 degrees F day for most sub-tropicals; 10 degrees F lower for cooler climate plants such as conifers. Summer temperatures can be higher. Humidity should be fairly high. Placement in the kitchen, bathroom or on a saucer with a layer of pebbles and water will help raise the humidity. Adequate light may be found at an east or west window in the fall, winter or spring. In these locations, summer light is best filtered through a sheer curtain.

TRIMMING, PRUNING, TRAINING

Remove vigorous new growth in the spring and periodically throughout the growing season. Never remove all the new growth at one time, retaining 2 to 3 leaves at the base of the shoot.

Remove training wire (if any) after several months by snipping into short lengths or unwinding any thin sizes. Do not allow wire to stay on the tree long enough to create scars. If the tree

springs out of its wired shape, you can rewire it in the opposite direction, to avoid applying the wire in exactly the same place as before. Although copper wire is considered the best by many bonsai masters, aluminum is widely used and more available.

REPOTTING

Deciduous trees should be repotted every 2-3 years. Slower growing evergreens need repotting every 4-5 years.

Examine the root system in late fall to determine if the tree needs repotting. If repotting is required, plan to do it before the start of the next growing season. Always use a well-drained soil mix containing some sharp sand (1/8" – 1/16"); this makes the roots divide and keeps them vigorous. Inclusion or exclusive use of Akadama in a soil mix is becoming increasingly popular, and can produce spectacular results.

PESTS AND DISEASES

Although miniatures, bonsai can experience the same problems as their larger relatives, and should also be treated with the appropriate insecticides or fungicides. Organic forms of the latter are becoming more popular, and more readily available.

RECOMMENDED REFERENCES:

Sunset Bonsai by Susan Lang, January 2003
ISBN 0376030461

Sunset Western Garden Book, 2001
ISBN 0376038756

RHS Plant Finder, April 2006
ISBN 1405314559

**Hortus Third, A Concise Dictionary of Plants
Cultivated in the U.S. and Canada**, November 1976
ISBN 0025054708

Suggested Supplier for Books:

Timber Press Horticulture Books
(800) 327-5680

Books and Tools:

Ron Kelley, California Bonsai Service
(707) 525-9684

Websites for more information:

www.evergreengardenworks.com
www.bonsai-nbf.org