

SPIRIT OF GARDENING

Bonsai

BONSAI

Though Bonsai trees are a little more delicate compared to the average indoor plant, a few basic rules should enable anyone to take care of its tree properly. Plants that are commonly grown as bonsai include pine, juniper, cypress, maple, fig and schefflera. Bonsai have been grown for many centuries by following some basic and simple growing procedures. Most important are: watering, fertilization and choosing the right position to place it.

FERTILIZING

As Bonsai trees are generally placed in small pots regular fertilization is required in order to replenish nutrients that are essential to the tree. Using a special 'Bonsai fertilizer' can be convenient, but any fertilizer will do (be careful not to use too much though). Follow the instructions as stated on the fertilizer's packaging regarding quantity and timing.

LIGHT

Filtered (shaded) natural light is necessary for growing bonsai. Avoid direct sunlight, as it may prove too intense for most varieties of bonsai.

WATERING

Soil should be kept moist, not wet. Smaller pots require more frequent watering. To water, soak pots thoroughly in a pan, tub or sink, then let drain. While soaking, rinse the foliage to clean the leaves. Plants with or sending out new leaves require more water than those resting. In our dry Calgary climate, it is recommended to check the soil daily, to see if watering is required.

Bonsais may need more humidity than is offered in this climate. Bonsais can be placed on pebble trays filled with water to increase the moisture available to the plant. As the water evaporates that plant will receive that moisture. Be sure to replenish water as it evaporates.

Bonsais should not be placed near heat vents which is a drying heat and will dry them out.

TEMPERATURE

Most bonsai prefer indoor temperatures between 15 - 25 °C. Some varieties of bonsai will benefit from experiencing cooler temperatures in the fall, for a period of 8 - 10 weeks. During this period, the temperature can range between 10 - 15 °C. These varieties include pine, juniper, cypress and maple.

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PRUNING + SHAPING

Adequate and timely pruning is essential to good bonsai development and styling. Prune by cutting or pinching back new growth 1/3 to 1/2 or to the desired shape. Root pruning is done when the bonsai is re-potted to generate new feeder roots. Frequency and extent of pruning depends upon the variety of bonsai as well as the style and size desired and cannot be adequately covered here.

Branch bending and shaping can be done on some varieties by utilizing bonsai wire. This is a soft textured wire that is wound around branches and then anchored to the trunk. The wire maintains the structure of the branch, as it is gently bent into position. The wire must be left in place for several months in order for the new branch shape to hold. Consult the information counter for details regarding this procedure.

RE-POTTING

To keep plants healthy, re-pot bonsai every two to four years. Early spring, just as the buds begin to swell is the best time. Carefully remove the plant and root ball from the pot, soil should be on the dry side. With fork or chopsticks, loosen and remove about 1/2 of the ball, working in from around the edges. Cut off any exposed portions of length. Reposition the plant in the same or new pot and fill carefully and firmly with fresh new soil. The soil should be comprised of 3/4 all purpose potting soil to 1/4 horticultural sand. After potting, water the bonsai thoroughly.

OVERWINTERING

Keeping your trees in a greenhouse or cold frame during the winter is recommended, as roots in the shallow pots easily freeze. When such accommodation is not available, use covers around the pots to protect your Bonsai's roots.

When in dormancy, be careful not to expose your trees to an extended period of high temperatures (open greenhouses when they warm up during sunny days for example) as this might bring them out of dormancy. Once it gets cold again the trees wouldn't have their natural protection and buds die off. When overwintering, keep a close eye on your trees. Water when the soil dries out, the trees don't need much water when in dormancy so be careful not to water too often. Also check your trees for insects or infections regularly.