

Bonsai various

A BONSAI IS A TREE AND MUST BE KEPT OUTSIDE.

Position

A Bonsai prefers morning sun with protection from afternoon sun in summer. Filtered sun in the afternoon is okay.

If your Bonsai is placed against a wall make sure you turn it around every two weeks. If the tree is not turned every two weeks it may grow out of shape as it grows towards the light. Do not place a bonsai pot directly onto concrete if it will be subject to direct sunlight for long periods. The heat generated off the concrete coupled with the small amount of soil in a bonsai pot can bake the roots of the tree and kill it.

Avoid sea breezes with some species as the salty air can kill the tree. Protect some varieties, especially figs, from winter frosts.

Watering

Correct watering is the most important thing to learn about caring for bonsai. Most trees need more water in summer than they do in winter. The more leaves on a tree and the larger the leaves will determine the amount of water a tree requires. As you become familiar with your Bonsai you will be able to tell by the weight of the pot when watering is required.

Try and avoid watering the plant with the normal garden hose as this can wash out the soil in the pot. Place the bonsai pot in a tub of water making sure that the water is deep enough so it covers all the soil and is at least one inch deep up the trunk. Leave the pot to soak until all the air bubbles have escaped, usually only 2 or 3 minutes, and remove from the water.

Be careful not to overwater in winter, especially deciduous trees as a tree with no winter foliage uses very little water.

Fertilising

Bonsai should be fertilized once every two weeks during spring and early summer. With deciduous trees do not fertilize in spring until two weeks after the leaves have opened. Fertilize twice again in Autumn, two weeks apart. With deciduous trees fertilize when leaves start to change colour in autumn .

Make up a mixture of half the recommended strength of fish emulsion fertiliser and soak the pot in this mixture as you would for watering.

Pruning

To help your tree maintain shape and style it is necessary to cut the branches back at certain times of the year. The idea of cutting back is to maintain horizontal branching with 'pads' of leaves to imitate mature trees with heavy solid branches being pulled down by the weight of the leaves. Regular and correct branch cutting also reduces the size of the leaf. There will be times between these cuttings that your tree will have that "shaggy dog" appearance.

Don't panic and cut the branches too early or at the wrong time. A little patience is all that is required to have a beautiful plant that should last a lifetime.

When the new shoots have 'set' its time to cut them back. When the shoots first grow they are green, as they get older they appear more woody, it is when they look woody that they are 'set'. Some trees can be cut back twice a year and others only once. See the individual instructions for your tree to establish branch cutting times.

The shoot should be cut above the leaf from where you want the new shoot to grow. Remember that you want outward growing horizontal branches. Cut this



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shoot back to the first, second or third leaf of the new growth depending on which direction you want the new branch to grow. Don't worry if you make a mistake, the tree will continually grow, and most mistakes will grow better.

Pests and Diseases

All Bonsai are susceptible to disease and attack by pests. It is important to diagnose the symptoms of a problem correctly so it may be treated with the correct substance.

Be careful not to confuse over watering for a disease of some sort. The leaves on trees that are over watered can turn yellow and fall off. Overwatering is nearly always the cause of drastic off- seasonal leaf fall .

Re Potting

Bonsai require special soil and should never be potted in 'potting mix' or soil from the garden. For good results plant into Searles Bonsai Mix. There are many good books on the market about Bonsai

which have comprehensive instructions about re potting if you feel confident enough to try it for yourself. Take care when consulting a book that you follow seasonal instructions rather than monthly, if a book is printed in Britain the seasons will be in opposite months to Australia.

General Maintenance

Pots should be kept weeded making sure to remove dead leaves from the surface.

The moss on this tree is naturally grown. From re potting time to fully mossed is about 10 months. As most trees can go for two years between re-potting the moss is by then really lush. This moss helps the soil to retain moisture and helps provide protection from severe drying out in hot or windy weather. During times of heatwaves or times of hot drying winds, you can spray the moss twice daily with a mist sprayer, don't overdo the mist spraying or you may waterlog the tree.

If your tree has wire on it when you buy it keep watch on the wire to make sure it doesn't start cutting in to the bark of the tree. If this should happen gently remove the wire with wire cutters or by carefully unwinding it. Most wire on branches only has to be left on for 12 months or so to achieve the necessary shape desired. Wire not removed will eventually cut into the branches, as the branch grows and becomes thicker - so the wire tightens !

Don't forget *your Bonsai when you go on holidays. Leave it with a neighbour and give them good watering instructions. A tree abandoned for even 3 days in very hot weather may die.*

