

(continued from inside)

- Fertilize bonsai with fish emulsion or a water soluble fertilizer every two weeks during the spring and summer, every 4-6 weeks during the fall and every 7-8 weeks in the winter.
- Pruning and training are the most important requirements for maintaining the size and shape of your bonsai. This involves the removal of some of the vigorous new growth in the spring and occasionally throughout the growing season. Never remove all new growth. Occasionally, the plant should be removed from the pot or tray and root pruning should be done to maintain the plant's size. For training branches, soft copper wire is used by loosely winding it around the branch and gently bending it to the desired shape and direction. It should be removed several months later before it scars or cuts into the bark.
- Insect and disease problems may occasionally show up on bonsai. Spider mite is perhaps the most common problem (especially on junipers) but it can safely be controlled with insecticidal soap. Sometimes powdery mildew appears on the leaves. This can be controlled with a sulfur- or copper-based fungicide. For other insect and disease problems, seek the advice of our experienced and knowledgeable staff or of trusted fellow enthusiasts for the correct diagnosis and remedy.
- Be patient; almost nothing in bonsai is immediate. Trees may takes years to develop into a "bonsai".
- You may want to display your bonsai, perhaps using a stand for a single bonsai or for a grouping. Bonsai always look best if displayed a few feet above the ground to near eye level and facing forward.



Shopping List:

- Small watering can
- Water-soluble plant food
- Small pruning shear
- Saucer

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All About Bonsai

A guide
to the
ancient
art of
growing
miniature
trees



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Bonsai

What is it?

Bonsai is the art of growing trees in a confined space (usually in a pot or shallow tray) to

simulate certain natural, environmentally induced characteristics such as a twisted or contorted form from extreme weathering, or simply old age in a reduced scale. The word bonsai roughly translates from Japanese as “to pot” or “to plant.”

The art of bonsai recreates some of the most stunning and beautiful effects on trees in a miniature form. As you embark on this journey of discovering how to care for your bonsai, keep in mind the three primary goals for creating and growing a bonsai: nature, beauty and maturity.



The interesting shapes and forms of bonsai are achieved through the selective pruning and training of branches using copper wire. Most of the so-called “mysteries” surrounding this ancient art prove to be nothing more than good, common sense gardening practices.

A Brief History of Bonsai

Bonsai was first developed in the Far East thousands of years ago where it is considered an expression of the harmony between heaven, earth, man and nature. Although today the art of bonsai comes to us from Japan, the Chinese were the first to grow miniature trees in shallow pots and trays.

During the Yan Dynasty (AD 1280-1368), Japanese government ministers and merchants first brought bonsai home to Japan as gifts from China. Since then the art of bonsai has flourished and spread throughout Japan and has more recently become extremely popular worldwide.

- **You will kill some trees and you will make mistakes.** Lots of them! Everyone does, even the experts. It's inevitable, especially when you are starting out. You are dealing with living things and you must be respectful of that. Over time you will get better at it. Commit yourself to understanding why every tree dies and what could have been done to prevent it. Learn from your mistakes and do your best to prevent them in the future.
- **At first, limit yourself to a few kinds of plants.** Every tree is different. Maples have different requirements than junipers and serrisas. As you become a more accomplished bonsai enthusiast, you can grow your collection.
- **Ask lots of questions.** When considering purchasing a new bonsai, ask our staff about the one you're interested in. There is lots to know, from basic styles and their meaning to tools, containers and soil. It may be helpful to find a local bonsai club or organization in your area and join. Club members are always willing to help newcomers and are very enthusiastic. This is perhaps one of the best ways to learn. They often hold workshops or have guest speakers at meetings and more experienced members are very willing to share their knowledge. And don't forget books – there are many good books on the care and training of bonsai available here at Hicks Nurseries and at the public library.
- **Watering is extremely important** and can never be neglected. Most bonsai die because of improper or insufficient watering. It may be necessary to thoroughly water bonsai once a day during the spring, summer and fall. During the winter only water enough to ensure the roots never completely dry out. The best time to water is early morning or late afternoon. Bonsai like it best when watered at the same time each day using a consistent amount of water each time.

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Caring for Bonsai

- **Generally, bonsai is an outdoor activity.** Most bonsai plants are outdoor trees such as junipers, pines and maples. Putting them in pots does not transform them into indoor plants. With very few exceptions, if you keep bonsai indoors they will die.

Bonsai should be grown outdoors in an area that gets 3-4 hours or more of direct sun, preferably in the morning or late afternoon. In late fall they should be moved to a more protected area out of direct exposure to wind and sun and the pots or trays should be covered with a protective layer of mulch. Move bonsai back into the sun in early spring.

- **Bonsai that are created from tropical plants** such as ficus, leptospermum, serrisa or false aralia should be grown indoors and placed in an east or west window in summer and a southern window in winter. (Not sure whether your new bonsai is for growing indoors or out? Our staff is glad to help with that.)
- **Grow and show your bonsai.** The place where you grow your bonsai is its home, but occasionally you may want to show it off in your home as a centerpiece display or a conversation piece on the coffee table of your living room when you have company. Or, you may want to enter it in a competition. That is part of the fun of bonsai. But remember, your bonsai should be returned to its home after a few days otherwise its health and looks will deteriorate.