

Bonsai

What is Bonsai?

Bonsai (pronounced bone-sigh) is an ancient oriental horticultural art form. The word Bonsai literally means, in both Chinese and in the Japanese language, tree-in-a-pot. Originally developed in the Orient almost 2000 years ago, today the sublime art of bonsai is practiced throughout the world. Shape-harmony-proportion-scale are all weighed carefully as art, and the human hand combines this in a common cause with nature.



A tree planted in a small pot is not a bonsai until it has been pruned, shaped, and trained into the desired shape. Bonsai are kept small by careful control of the plant's growing conditions. Only branches important to the bonsai's overall design are allowed to remain and unwanted growth is pruned away. Roots are confined to a pot and are periodically clipped. Bonsai may have a stylized or an exaggerated form ... but, as found in nature. The appearance of old age of a plant is much prized and bonsai may live to be hundreds of years old. The living bonsai will change from season to season and from year to year requiring pruning and training throughout its lifetime ... and as time goes on it will become more and more beautiful.

It is impossible to write a simple set of care rules. Every species of plant has its own special needs. Each location and environment is different too, and have to be considered. Therefore it is important, when starting in bonsai, to read all you can on the art. Take advantage of your local bonsai club.

Basic Care of Bonsai

Watering

More bonsai are lost due to improper watering than from all other causes combined. The length of time between

watering can vary quite a bit depending on conditions such as humidity, soil moisture retention, weather conditions, and size of pot. Bonsai usually need to be watered every day or two. The best time to water is early in the day or late in the afternoon at the same time every day. A thorough watering is accomplished when excess water runs out of the drainage holes in the bottom of the pot, BUT ... too much water can be just as bad as too little water. In general the soil should be moist, not soaking wet, and not dry

Fertilising

Feedings vary from plant to plant (such as flowering plants have different requirements than the junipers). A water-soluble fertilizer is usually applied every 2 to 4 weeks during the growing season, in a half-strength solution. Miracle-Gro or Miracid are commonly used, but check label directions for your tree. DO NOT FEED right after repotting (wait for 3-4 weeks). Don't feed if the tree is in a sicken condition. Premoisten the plant soil first. Never fertilizer a very dry bonsai.

Repotting

A bonsai must periodically be repotted to supply a pot-bound root system with fresh soil. It is also necessary to keep the root system in balance with the top growth. Most require repotting every two or three years. This depends on the growth of the tree and also on the size of the pot. This should be done in the early spring. Do not fertilize for 3-4 weeks after repotting. Do not let the roots go dry while repotting. Water well when finished.

Insects and Disease

A bonsai is nothing more than a miniature version of a normal plant, therefore it can be treated with commonly found insecticides and fungicides according to directions on the package. Insects such as aphids, spider mites, scale, and root aphids are a common problem corrected by sprays, soapy rinse, or a systemic.

Trimming Pruning and Training

Trimming and pruning are the means by which a bonsai is kept miniature. This involves the systematic removal of vigorous growth in the spring. It is important however, to understand

that for the health of the tree one should never remove all the new growth at one time. The roots are trimmed and so is the foliage on the plant. The tree is wired to assist in getting branches to grow in a specific position and to enhance the look of the tree. The wire is removed after 6 months. Usually the branch should then stay in that position on its own. Wire should be carefully cut from the branches. Do not unwind wires as this could break the branch. Trim branches to expose the trunk and to shape the tree into the look you want. Two goals in bonsai are to make young trees look older by thickening the trunk and the positioning of the branches, and to find enjoyment in Nature.

Indoor Bonsai

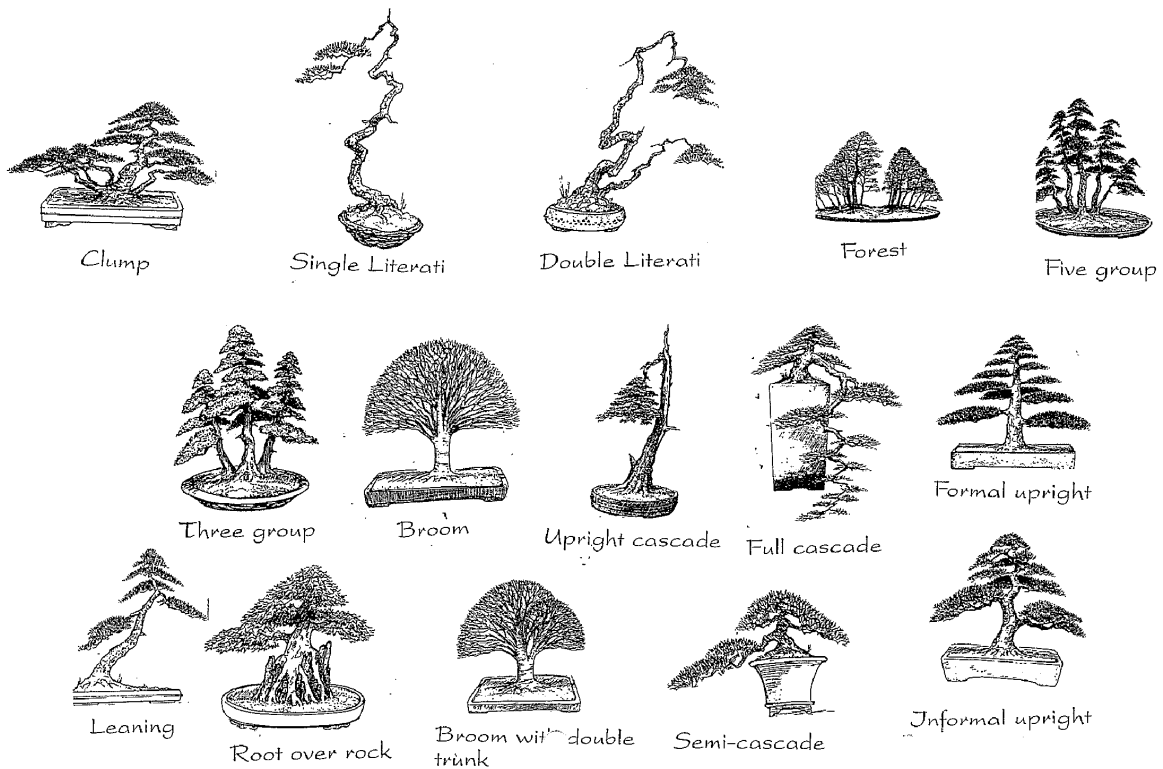
There are many varieties of plants that do well as an indoor bonsai such as ficus, aralia, azalea, norfolk pine, serissa, gardenia, or boxwood. Note that these are all woody-stemmed plants and can have their limbs wired to direct the growth. Tropical and subtropical varieties can not tolerate temps below 40 - 50 degrees F. These plants can be left outside when the temperatures stay above this. Light inside the house should be by filtered sunlight from an east, south, or west window. Grow lights 12 hours per day work well. Outside in summer place in partial shade

Outdoor Bonsai

There is a wide choice of trees for outside bonsai. The winter dormant period is essential to the general good health of a bonsai. In northern climates winter protection from freeze-drying winds is necessary.

Trees should be kept in an unheated area. An unheated garage, shed, breezeway, or cold frame can provide this. Check with your bonsai club for other ways. Check the root system for moisture and water as necessary while in winter storage. Unless the root ball is frozen they will need to be watered every week or so. In the summer water more often as weather conditions demand. Never let the tree go dry but do not keep it soaked either. Some of the trees suitable for outdoor bonsai are, junipers, maples, elms, pines, ginkgo, hawthorn, and flowering crab apple.

Old Favourites		Good Beginners	Group Plantings	Multi Trunks	Semi and Full Cascade
Chamaecyparis obtuse nana	Betula pendula	Cotoneaster danimeri	Beech	Azalea	Cedrus atlantica glauca
Acer palmatum	Camellia japonica	Punica granatum nana	Chinese elm	Beech	Cotoneaster
Wisteria floribunda	Crassula arborescens	Juniper conferta	Cedrus deodara	Cornus kousa	Punis thumbergiana
Prunus types	Punica granatum	Sophora seedlings	Betula pendula	Betula alba	Acer palmatum
Azalea types	Buxux microphilla	Pyrocantha species	Acer palmatum	Acer palmatum	Wisteria floribunda
Fagus sylvatisea reversii	Mallus types	Acer species	Luquidamber		
Sophora types	Betula pendula	Chamaecyparis obtuse nana			
Juniper types	Camellia japonica	Juniperus procumbens nana			



CREDITS

This introduction to the art of bonsai was written by Connie Todd and has been provided through the courtesy of The Iowa Bonsai Association, a non-profit organization devoted to the art and study of bonsai. The Iowa Bonsai Association provides its members with programs and workshops relating to bonsai and the horticultural species adaptable to this art. The illustrations are by Norman Haddrick, a bonsai grower and artist living in Canada.

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