



## Bonsai - The Imagination Tree



A Bonsai is a tree or shrub grown in a container. The word bonsai is derived from two words, BON and SAI: meaning 'planted in a tray'. The practice of bonsai has its origins in China, with naturally dwarfed trees being collected and later grown in containers. It is however, from Japanese that modern cultural guidelines, techniques and contemporary appreciation of these living works of art come. Bonsai endeavors to capture the essence of nature by creating the image of an old tree, or forest landscape, in miniature. Looking after your bonsai is relatively easy and very rewarding.

### Position

Most bonsai are primarily outdoor plants and as is the case with regular trees, they require exposure to all aspects of weather including sunshine, rain and fresh air. They are best kept in a position that receives morning sun and is shaded in the afternoon - especially during the summer. This will avoid the damaging affects of the hot afternoon sun, which is likely to burn delicate foliage and cause stress due to dehydration. Bonsai can occasionally be displayed indoors for brief periods, ie. 2 - 3 days at a time. There are exceptions to this rule, for example figs, which can be displayed inside more permanently.

### Watering

The most common cause for the loss of bonsai is insufficient or excessive watering. As a general guide: water daily during spring, summer and autumn, with additional watering on hot or windy days, as required. Water less frequently in winter, ie. every second day or so. The soil should be kept moist, but not saturated. Watering is best carried out either during early morning or late afternoon.

### Feeding

To maintain the vigour of your bonsai, nutrients used by the tree will need to be replaced. Apply a small amount of slow release fertilizer at the beginning of spring, and supplement this with the use of organic liquid fertilizers eg. fish emulsion prepared at half strength solutions, approximately every 3 - 4 weeks. When fertilizing, do so after watering and do not fertilize immediately after repotting.

### Repotting

Over a period of, on average, two years, the tree will fill the pot with roots. If left too long under these conditions, the tree will become pot-bound and will begin to weaken. To create more space for the roots to grow, root-pruning is carried out. In general, root-pruning is best practiced late in winter for deciduous species, and early in spring for conifers. Remove the tree from the pot, tease open the root ball, and trim by approximately one third, being sure to retain some of the smaller, more fibrous roots. Return the tree to the pot and fill the space with new, well-drained potting mix. Firm the mix around the roots, ensuring that there are no pockets of air. Water immediately and finish with moss.

## Pruning

Trimming and pruning are important during the growing season, to maintain and improve the shape and design of your bonsai. Through this process, you are creating your design and image of nature. Pinch or tip-prune new growth to maintain compact growth habit. Prune branches that grow in toward or across the main trunk, and those that grow straight down.

## Wiring

Besides pruning, wiring is the main method of training your bonsai to the required shape. By applying copper or aluminum wire around the trunk or branches, you can alter their position to suit your design ideas. Wiring needs to be checked frequently, making sure it is not cutting into the tree. Wire should remain in place, only until the branch has taken on its new shape.