



THE ROSEDALE PLANTSMAN'S GUIDE TO GROWING BONSAI

THE ART OF BONSAI

Bonsai is the art of training potted trees or shrubs to grow with dwarfed, picturesque habits. Although there are a number of different, highly-specialized Bonsai styles or "landscapes", all Bonsai are grown in small pots, which limit the amounts of soil, nutrients and water that are available to the plants.

OVERWINTERING AND KEEPING BONSAI INDOORS

Most of the varieties of Bonsai plants that we offer do not require a winter cold period, and therefore, will grow well indoors year-round. Some of the "indoor" bonsai plants are from tropical areas, and others are not dependably frost-hardy in their Bonsai containers. Therefore, tender Bonsai plants should be kept indoors during cold weather. All of these plants can be kept outside during warm weather, but should be placed in a protected area where they are not exposed to direct sun or toppling winds.

A few varieties of Bonsai plants (e.g., Japanese Maple) require winter cold periods. For these "hardy" plants, either store in an unheated garage or wrap the pots and roots well with salt hay or leaves, and place in a sheltered outdoor location in late fall. "Hardy" plants can be brought indoors (gradually exposing them to more warmth) after about 6-8 weeks of outside (below 45 degrees) cold weather.

When indoors, all Bonsai plants should be kept in locations with good window light, but away from hot, drying radiators. The best temperature range for Bonsai plants is about 60-65 degrees daytime and 50-55 degrees nighttime (for Junipers, other Conifers, Azaleas, and Japanese Maples) and 65-75 degrees daytime and 60-65 degrees nighttime for other varieties (from tropical and subtropical areas).

WATERING

Because Bonsai containers contain a relatively small amount of free-draining soil, plants can dry out quickly and need frequent, gentle watering. Experience with your plant and house location is the best guide. As a general rule, however, small Bonsai pots need watering as often as every day, while larger containers with more soil may need water every 2-3 days. To keep the Bonsai plant (and moss or other groundcover) fresh, it helps to water the entire soil area. Since the air inside a house is usually dry, Bonsai plants and their moss groundcovers also benefit from daily misting.

FERTILIZING

Bonsai pots do not have much soil for storing nutrients, and frequent watering rapidly removes available nutrients. For best results, fertilize Bonsai containers regularly (usually monthly) with a gentle, low-salt formula, such as fish emulsion.

REPOTTING AND TRAINING

Bonsai plants should be repotted about every 1-2 years (small pots) to 2-4 years (larger pots). Pruning, shaping and displaying Bonsai plants is a specialized, but enjoyable and attainable art. The most important shaping is done by pruning and training branch development with wiring. For further information, we recommend the following references:

CREATING JAPANESE GARDENS (Ortho Books)
BONSAI: SPECIAL TECHNIQUES (Brooklyn Botanic Garden)
INDOOR BONSAI (Brooklyn Botanic Garden)
THE ESSENTIALS OF BONSAI (Timber Press)
BEGINNING BONSAI (Tuttle)

You may also wish to contact local Bonsai clubs or teachers, whose names are available from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

HELPFUL MATERIALS AND TOOLS

We offer a good selection of well-made Bonsai pots and hand tools. Also available:

- Bonsai "starter" plants
- Black, river-polished pebbles from Japan
- Copper wire (for training branches)
- Japanese-style garden ornaments and wind chimes

Please feel free to ask us any questions you may have about selecting and caring for Bonsai plants. We hope you will enjoy your Bonsai plants for many years to come.