

Bonsai Tree

Trimming, Sculpting and Pruning





BONSAI TREES: GROWING, TRIMMING, SCULPTING AND PRUNING

PART 3

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BONSAI STYLES

It is important for you to remember, as a beginner, that no single bonsai style is the "right" style. Bonsai is meant to be a representation of a tree in nature. Crafting a bonsai masterpiece is tantamount to how YOU view that tree. You are not learning from a bonsai master, you are simply being given instruction on how to create your own bonsai. What you make of it lies simply in your own mind.

You should strive to make your bonsai trees look as natural as possible. Let the tree suggest its own possibilities. If the trunk bends to the right, let it bend that way. Work with it to make it a main feature of your bonsai. You must listen to the tree and hear what it is telling you. Then you will come up with a beautiful creation!

Bonsais should simulate age. You should try and project the appearance of maturity in your tree – just in a miniature form. Even if your tree is relatively young, you can groom it so it looks like it has been growing for years and years.

Two features that give the appearance of age to trees are the caliper of the trunk and the degree of taper of the trunk. The trunks of bonsai (in most styles) will be very wide at the base and taper very smoothly to the top of the tree

There are two general styles of bonsai: the classic (koten) and the informal or 'comic' (bunjin). In the former, the trunk of the tree is wider at the base and tapers off towards the top; it is just the opposite in the 'bunjin', a style more difficult to master.

When you start a bonsai, always remember that you are working with a living plant. Look carefully at its natural characteristics and you may discern within them a suitable style, or styles. Often you can train a plant into several styles, even if it is basically upright like a beech or elegantly

slender like a maple. Even if one style only really suits a particular plant, you still can interpret this in many different ways.

More than anything else you should not try to train a bonsai to grow in a style it is not accustomed to. Study the natural growth patterns of the tree you are going to grow and enhance on the pattern nature gave it.

The five basic bonsai styles are formal upright, informal upright, slanting (or windswept), semi-cascade and cascade. All have their own individual beauty and serenity.

Formal Upright



A tree with a style such as formal upright occurs when it has grown in the open under perfect conditions. The most important requirement for this style is that the trunk should be perfectly straight, tapering naturally and evenly from base to apex. The branches should be symmetrically spaced so that they are balanced when viewed from any direction. It is quite a demanding style to achieve.

Junipers, pines, and spruces are great to try and grow in the formal upright style.

To achieve an effective formal upright style, make sure that about one third of the trunk is visible from the front. This can be from the base to the first branch or cumulatively, as seen through the tracery of its branches.

Generally, the placement of branches follows a pattern. The first branch up from the bottom is the longest and in proportion usually is trained to grow to an equivalent to a

third of the total height of the tree. This is the 'heaviest' branch almost making a right angle to the trunk.

The second branch directly opposes the first branch and is higher on the trunk. As the branch structure ascends, they taper assuming a somewhat cone-like form.

The top of the bonsai is usually very thick with foliage - so full and tightly ramified that it is difficult to see its internal structure through the mass of leaves or needles.

The tip of this style of bonsai also has a slight curve, to lean forward and effectively 'look at the viewer'. Depending on what species of tree you are using, the whole tree does not *have* to be symmetrical but rather the branches could ascend by alternating on each side.

The branches and trunk of a formal upright bonsai always take on a very distinctive taper. This is achieved by cutting off the growing tip of the trunk or branch with each new year and wiring a new branch into position to form the apex. This is something quite hard to do, however it produces a stunning result when the trunk starts to mature and the taper starts becoming prominent.

Informal Upright



In nature, such trees bend or alter their direction away from wind or shade other trees or buildings, or towards light. In an informal upright bonsai the trunk should slightly bend to the right or left - but never towards the viewer. This applies to all types of bonsai. Neither the trunk nor branches should be pointing towards the viewer when the bonsai is viewed from the front.

For this style, try a Japanese maple, Trident maple, or almost any conifer and ornamental tree. You'll have a dramatic result with a pomegranate or other flowering tree.

An informal upright bonsai basically uses the same principles of the formal upright bonsai only that it is informal. The style still requires a tapered trunk, however the trunk direction and branch positioning is more informal and closer to the way a tree would look when exposed to the elements at an early age. The trunk usually takes on an unexpected curve or series of twists and the branches are thus positioned to balance this effect.

As with formal upright, the crown of the tree is mainly very full with foliage and despite the informal trunk, is most always located directly above the base of the tree. This is an attribute of the informal upright style, if not done like this, the tree would be slanting.

Jin (carved remains of dead or unwanted branches to look like dead and rotting limbs of a tree) is also more appropriate and effective with the informal upright style.

Slanting Style



Trees that slant naturally occur as a result of buff setting winds or deep shade during early development. Whether curved or straight, the whole trunk leans at a definite angle. The stronger roots grow out on the side, away from the angle of the trunk lean, to support the weight.

Almost any type of tree will work well with this style.

This style bears a great similarity to the informal upright. The trunk can be either curved or straight, but must be on an angle to either the right or left (never to the front), with the apex *not* directly over the base of the bonsai.

This style is quite a simple one that can be achieved by many methods. At an early age, the bonsai can be trained to an angle by means of wiring the trunk until it is in position. Alternatively, the tree can be forced to grow in a slanted style by putting the actual pot on a slant, causing the tree to grow abnormally.

With formal upright, informal upright and slanted styles, the number three is significant.

The lowest branches are grouped in threes, and this grouping begins one-third of the way up the trunk. The bottom-most three branches almost encircle the trunk, with two branches thrusting forward, one slightly higher than the other. The third branch, emanating from a point between the first two, is set at such an angle as to make the foliage appear lower than the other two.

This pattern presents an easy way to tell front from back and sets the tone of the entire composition.

Cascade Style



The growing tip of a cascade bonsai reaches below the base of a container. The trunk has a natural taper and gives the impression of the forces of nature pulling against the forces of gravity. Branches appear to be seeking the light.

The winding main trunk is reminiscent of a stream meandering down the side of a mountain.

There are many types of trees that can be used to achieve a cascading bonsai. The key here is to make sure the tree isn't naturally straight and upright. You should not try and coax a naturally straight trunk tree into a cascading bonsai.

If done right, this style of bonsai can be quite aesthetically pleasing. The trunk, which is tapered, grows down below the container and gives the impression of the tree being forced down by the forces of gravity. The tree trunk usually also twists as if to emulate a meandering stream with elegant alternating branches protruding from it.

All that is required to create this style is a tall, narrow pot which will enhance the style and accommodate the cascade and a species of plant that will willingly adopt this style if trained.

The main trunk should be wired to spill over and down the edge of the pot, with the main focus on the major bend (forming an upside-down U shape). Emphasis should also be kept on keeping the branches uniform and horizontal to the almost directly vertical trunk. Another major aspect to remember is that both cascade and semi-cascade should be positioned right into the center of the pot, the opposite to what you would do for any other style.

Semi-Cascade



The tip of a semi-cascade, like the cascade, projects over the rim of the container, but does not drop below its base. The style occurs in nature when trees grow on cliffs or overhang water. The angle of the trunk in this bonsai is not precise, as long as the effect is strongly horizontal, even if the plant grows well below the level of the pot rim. Any exposed roots should balance the trunk.

Flowering cherry trees, cedars, and junipers work very well in this style of bonsai. Many people feel this style of bonsai is the epitome of beauty in the art.

In general, bonsai cultivation is considered an outdoor art. Since bonsai is the miniaturization of trees and means tree in a pot, one may wonder which is better – outside or inside bonsai gardening. The opinions vary.