

Bonsai Tree

Trimming, Sculpting and Pruning





BONSAI TREES: GROWING, TRIMMING, SCULPTING AND PRUNING

PART 7

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TREES

Almost any type of tree or shrub will be suitable for bonsai. In general, most experts agree that pine trees aren't good for the beginner. When you are ready to work on your first tree you should select a species that is "forgiving" to the beginner.

One of the most often recommended is the dwarf garden juniper. They are readily available, take pruning well, can be worked on most of the year, and are generally inexpensive. They also root well as cutting, so you can begin starting your own "mini nursery" as you shape your first tree.

There are some other species of trees that are "perennial" favorites among bonsai growers.

Beech Trees

Beech make excellent Bonsai, there are types of Beech spread throughout the world's temperate zones.

They tend to be grown in informal styles, and leaf trimming every other year will reduce the size of leaves on the larger types. It is important that leaf trimming is carried out as early as possible, as beech may not come back into leaf that year if it is left to late.

The Southern Beeches are closely related to beeches from the Northern hemisphere, differing in that they have both deciduous and evergreen species. From a bonsai viewpoint they can be treated as their Northern counterparts, except that you should not leaf trim the evergreen species.

They have no special needs but tend to do better in an alkaline (lime) soil rather than a peat based compost.

Cedar

There are throughout the world many species termed 'Cedar'. Probably the first thing that springs to mind about

cedars is that they have, when in a pot, quite weak root systems. The roots themselves being rather fleshy, are prone to damage by frost, so the trees must be sheltered when conditions demand it.

As with all conifers they will do better in a more open, grittier soil than their deciduous counterparts.

Cherry

The Cherry is a member of one of the largest family of plants on the planet, the 'Rosaceous', The Rose family is really diverse, with the Cherry family at one end, apples and pears, then Quinces, Cotoneasters, through the Raspberry/Blackberry group, past Roses themselves and on to Strawberries.

The Cherry family itself includes Apricots, Peaches, Plums Damsons and Gages, all of which will make good Bonsai. The Apricot or 'Mume', as it's called in Japan is the earliest flowering of the group.

The Cherry family propagates easily from seed, sown in the autumn. The seeds need a cold winter to germinate. They will take from cuttings but can prove difficult. Plants grown from seed or cutting can take ten to fifteen years to flower.

They have no particular needs, as far as their cultivation is concerned.

Pruning should be carried out in mid summer, allowing time for next year's flower buds to develop.

Allowing them to set fruit may stress the tree beyond its ability to survive.

Elm

The elm family is a group of trees that will forgive you almost anything, will grow in a range of soils and are easy to obtain, with species native to most of the Northern hemisphere.

Zelcova and Chinese Elm are the two species you are likely to come across on a supplier's benches. Both are excellent trees although the Chinese Elm is generally not as hardy when there is frost about, but try what grows in your area as all elms are capable of making good bonsai.

The Chinese Elm is a very easy tree to grow. Deciduous in temperate areas, it may retain its leaves in tropical and sub tropical regions. The Chinese elm is often wrongly sold as an indoor tree.

This type of tree is one that many agree can be grown from seed, although be warned that doing this will not produce immediate results.

They are easy to propagate. The seed germinates readily should you wish to try growing them this way; however cuttings and layering are the best methods to increase your stock.

Elms respond well to leaf trimming, and on a vigorous tree this may be carried out twice in one season, but not every year.

Ginkgo

Ginkgo Biloba (a.k.a the Maidenhair tree), together with Larch, Swamp Cypress and Dawn Redwood is a conifer that sheds its leaves over winter. Until the 1940's, it was known only from fossilized leaves and assumed to be extinct; however living specimens were discovered in China. The tree is sexual, that is to say a tree is either male or female.

Ginkgo makes a good Bonsai, but due to its growth patterns tends to be difficult to style, and hence should be

allowed to take on its own shape. This tends to be that of the flame of a candle. The tree does not like to be wired and any changes are best made by pruning to a bud pointing in the desired direction.

It can in all other respects be treated as any other bonsai, having no unusual needs as far as feeding or watering. It will however need winter protection as it has very soft roots.

The soft, new foliage of the Ginkgo can be pruned by either pinching out, or with tools. Cuts made into old wood however, will take a long time to heal over.

Camellia

Camellias are favored for their flowers that appear in profusion. When cultivated, these trees are probably among some of the most beautiful bonsai. Camellias require partial shade and protection from frost. They can tolerate hard pruning in the winter or after flowering.

Camellias can be styled into Informal upright forms with single or multiple trunks and Cascades in large and extra-large sizes.

Cedar Elm

Cedar elms are a wonderful species choice for bonsai and like most elms, can survive quite a bit of neglect. One of its desirable features is its rough, fissured bark. Most specimens are collected from the wild and will invariably have an aged appearance. The branches ramify easily with normal pinching of shoots and the leaves are not over large. This species is a good one for beginners and collecting them is rather easy as well.

These trees will do well in almost any type of soil. Their natural environment is rather hot and arid and they do well to being kept on the dry side of moist. Like most trees, they use more water in the spring.

They can be kept in full sun to dappled sun. They have an interesting, if annoying habit when they are getting too much sun. They will rotate their leaves to be edge-up, so as to limit the exposure of the leaves to the sun's rays. If they get too much sun, they tend to go a bit yellow.

Chinese Elm

This type of tree can be both indoor and outdoor bonsai. Chinese elm are quite good plants to choose for beginners at bonsai - with a predictable growth pattern and being quite forgiving when pruned.

The bark of Chinese elms can be quite interesting, some varieties with smooth bark and the others with rough, cork-like bark which cracks and becomes deeply fissured with age - adding character to the bonsai. Generally, the smoother bark varieties will be less hardy than those with rough bark and care should be taken.

Being quite versatile plants, they can be kept in a position of shade to full sun, but make sure that the plant receives some shade during the hotter months and does not dry out.

Dwarf Pomegranate

This type of tree is becoming very popular among bonsai enthusiasts. This is mostly because of its fruiting and flowering qualities.

Apart from the pomegranate's stunning seasonal yellow-orange 'trumpet style' flowers, the dwarf pomegranate presents so many other notable characteristics.

It has a marvelous naturally-twisting style trunk that very easily adopts a gnarled, ancient appearance - something widely sought in bonsai. Its leaves are a dark green with shades of bronze and after flowering, the plant

fruits, producing attractive spherical-like red golf-ball sized pomegranates.

Suited to bonsai styles such as informal upright, forest, cascade, literati, tree on rock, root over rock, twin trunk, windswept, group and twisting trunk style, this plant responds well to hot, sunny conditions, such as that which would be found in the Mediterranean.

Ficus

Many people have "fake" ficus trees in their house. These are the larger species. However, a miniature ficus can make a beautiful bonsai addition to the larger ones.

The Ficus - or rainforest fig is a plant which is highly suited to bonsai treatment. Figs are mostly tropical plants, naturally growing wild in south-east Asian jungles. Many hundreds of species make up this large tree family.

The tiny flowers are completely enclosed in the developing fruits which are borne in the leaf axils and are produced each year. You may find that as a bonsai, however, fruiting is not very common. Figs prefer full sun to part-shade and humus-rich, moist, but well drained soil and shelter from cold winds.

Most rainforest figs produce aerial roots from the branches and trunk. Whether to leave these on or not and incorporate them into the design is a controversial issue for bonsai enthusiasts, although it does matter on the overall design of the tree.

The roots are brittle at first, but strengthen and turn into a very strong part of the tree once they reach nutrients. The striking aerial roots of the banyan fig are often featured in clasped-to-rock styles. The striking aerial roots of the banyan fig are often featured in clasped-to-rock styles.

Japanese Black Pine

Japanese black pine is the epitome of bonsai. Few trees can convey the stoic power or the subtle profundity of bonsai to the degree that a black pine can. Black pine is a tree that takes many years to achieve the mature look of a superior specimen bonsai. For this reason, it is important that those who would choose to grow them be steadfast in their attentive and uncompromising care of the tree. Growing black pine for bonsai carries with it a healthy responsibility to prepare and maintain good material for future generations to work with.

Black pine is a strong tree that responds well to the techniques used in the creation of bonsai. Working with black pine is a balancing act and its growth characteristic is such that it needs ongoing and careful maintenance in order to stay in bonsai trim.

Left on its own, a black pine will develop long, leggy branches that emerge in whorls from a leggy trunk. The branches will have lollypops of foliage at the branch tips. As pines are atypically dominant like most trees, the upper branches will get most of the tree's energy, leaving the lower branches weaker in comparison. All of these characteristics run counter to the bonsai aesthetic.

There are, of course, other varieties of trees that would work well with bonsai, but this list gives you a starting point. It is important that your trees have certain qualities to make a good bonsai.