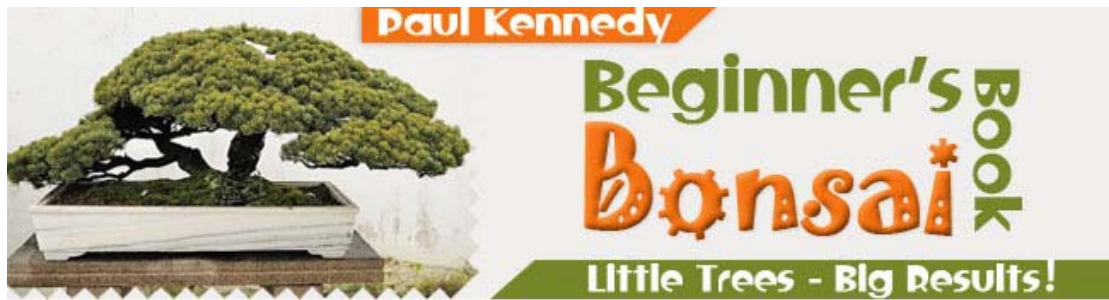


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About the Author

Paul Kennedy has been interested in bonsai for several years.

He started doing it after seeing a display and talking to the organizer who invited him to visit their nursery.

Paul thought it would be much easier than it turned out to be. But, he says that he has got a lot of benefits from his new hobby.

"I was looking for something which would encourage me to relax and take my mind away from the pressures of the business I was in."

"Growing bonsai gives me great satisfaction and a complete break from the work I do."

There's always something new and unlimited possibilities to explore."

Paul write his book to show people that almost anyone can do bonsai whatever their background or situation.

"Bonsai has an image which puts off some people – they see it as requiring a lot of study."

"It does require a commitment but most people can arrange their bonsai activities to fit around their other commitments and past times."

"I must emphasize that I can't guarantee 100% success with all your future bonsai ventures. But, I will help you to improve your results and save time, effort and money."

"Bonsai gives me great satisfaction. It is mentally challenging but is within the capabilities of almost anyone, whatever their situation, age or other circumstances."

"Bonsai can give us gentle physical exercise, mental challenges and help us to relax – all at the same time! All of that is good for our health and self-image."

"When you have read my book, you can continue to use it as a quick reference for your further adventures in the wonderful world of bonsai gardening."

Introduction

I am a little envious if you are just starting to become acquainted with bonsai.

You will find that this activity has many benefits as well as challenges.

Whatever your situation, you can be successful with bonsai.

You will need to spend some money but I will share some ways of keeping that right down.

You will find that some things which "everybody knows" are either not true or have important aspects which are little known.

Let me give you some of the benefits which will come from doing bonsai.

You control the amount of time, money and effort you put into it.

You can increase your involvement when it suits you.

You don't need a lot of space and you can use whatever space you have available.

It is also important to remember that your bonsai need regular attention and maintenance. If you want to take a trip, you'll need to arrange for a deputy to maintain them while you are away.

Otherwise, your trees could suffer a severe setback which takes more time and effort to repair, if that is even possible.

But, you can get more from your bonsai than you may believe possible right now.

By the time you finish reading my book, your eyes will be fully open to the wonderful potential of bonsai.

Bonsai appeals to the artist in us all.

You don't need to be especially talented or take special training. People are often surprised at the beautiful results they get.

One important caution: Bonsai requires patience. To develop a bonsai from seed will take years. Some people get poor results because they try to rush the development of their bonsai design.

Give it time and due care and it will give you pleasure and something your friends will admire.

Pests and Other Problems

It is important to watch for pests that attack bonsai.

You can do this when you are watering your plants or just admiring them.

The best protection which you can give your plants is regular maintenance. If you keep your plants healthy, they are more likely to be able to resist attacks.

Bonsai are particularly susceptible to attack because the sculpting which we do puts above average stress on the plants.

Adjusting the conditions which the plants experience also can cause some stress which makes the plants more of a target.

Some problems can be prevented by carefully examining any plant we consider purchasing or which we may be given by a friend or fellow bonsai enthusiast.

Many people rush to use chemicals to solve whatever problem they find with their plants.

You need to go carefully when you use any sprays on plants and this is particularly important with bonsai.

Check the label carefully.

A mild insecticidal soap is often all that you need.

Systemic sprays need special care because they stay in the plant system and the level of active ingredient can build up when they spray is used again.

Keep pets and people away from any area where you spray.

Fish and pet birds can be seriously affected by many sprays. Take them and their cages or bowls out of the area where you will be using sprays. Don't return them until you have cleaned any residues and the vapor has had sufficient time to settle and dry off.

Also, make sure that you protect yourself when you use any spray. Always wear gloves and cover up to minimize any risks.

Aphids and some other pests will usually only be removed if you use a spray.

Be vigilant for any sign of a problem. This may just be a gradual slowing of the rate of growth or damaged leaves.

Sometimes, the change is so gradual that we overlook it.

Keep your bonsai and their containers clean.

Clear away any rubbish which could provide a harbor for insects or disease.

Examine the plants more closely on a regular basis. As well as looking at the condition of the leaves, turn them over and carefully check the underside.

Misting water onto your bonsai can help to reduce some types of insect infestation.

Mites are a common problem and they favor the back of the leaves. They are very small, so you may need a low-power magnifier to see them when they are just starting to appear on your plants.

Snails are attracted to the soft, green areas of your outdoor bonsai.

If the plants are on stands, they will deter the snails to some extent.

You can also put foil collars around the legs of the stand or put them in small bowls of water to make it more difficult for the snails to reach the plants.

Never use snail baits of any kind if you allow your pets in the area. My vet says that even baits which are labeled pet-safe have caused pets serious illness!

Small bowls with a little sugar or beer in water can attract the snails so you can gather and remove them. Train your pets to avoid the alcohol which can poison them, even in low concentrations.

Aphids will cause mottling of the leaves and bumps to appear. They attract **ants** which attack the aphids but don’t eliminate them all.

Molds can start to affect your plants if they are weakened by the actions of the aphids.

Because bonsai are mostly outdoor plants, they are likely to be attacked by **caterpillars** which love the soft parts of the plants.

Immediately remove and destroy any which you see. Also, remove any

leaves which they have attacked as well as any which appear sickly. Make a careful check of the roots and root ball when you repot your bonsai to check for pests or signs of disease which might not yet be obvious on the parts of the plant which are above the soil level.

Start Right

When we start to develop a new interest, most of us try to keep expenses down.

That’s understandable and I will share some neat ways to achieve that.

But, there are some aspects of bonsai where it’s false economy to go with cheap as your rule.

Tools: When you start looking at the specialized tools available for people doing bonsai, you may think the prices are higher than you expect. It’s true that some common tools can be used as long as they are of at least acceptable quality.

I found that cheap tools are false economy when I started doing regular gardening, long before I discovered Bonsai. I’ll explain that in a later section.

Stock: You should not waste your time trying to use cheap low-quality plants for your bonsai.

There are several drawbacks which are more important than the amount you save on your initial purchase.

Your cheap stock will be more likely to fail and you won’t always be able to tell what the reason was.

So, the time and the small purchase cost which you invested is often completely wasted.

Poor plants will rarely, if ever, improve very much, so you inevitably end up with a poor result.

Seed, Cutting or Plant?: I am not a purist though I respect the traditional practises of bonsai, I feel newcomers can bend the “rules” when they first try bonsai.

Many people will be inclined to put their bonsai tools away and move on to something else when they find that it will take a couple of years minimum before their bonsai seed looks presentable, if it survives that long!

I suggest that you start with a plant so that you get a result in a relatively short time compared with the other methods.

But, don’t be too worried if your first plant does not fulfill your plans for it.

Most newcomers to bonsai can expect to have one or more die despite their best efforts.

Just chalk it up to experience and tell yourself that you have learned a few lessons which come only with hands-on experience.

You will do better with your next bonsai and the feeling of accomplishment will be even greater!

Indoor or Outdoor?

Bonsai are traditionally kept outside. This gives the bonsai the proper routine of changes through the seasons which many of them need for their best development.



But, more people are now displaying their bonsai indoors and many want to keep their plants inside all year round.

This has produced some extra challenges because many of the tree varieties are not comfortable in our artificial indoor environments.

You need to be aware of the particular needs of the plants which you choose for your bonsai experiments.

And, you will have to compensate for the differences between the plant's normal seasonal environment and the artificial one which is more comfortable and convenient for us.

We must make some effort to compensate the plant if our environment deprives it of the conditions which its natural growth cycle needs at a particular time of year.

If you use plants which are used to cold weather and need a dormant period for proper growth, you might decide to put your plants outside during the coolest months so that they can have that quiet time.

Light from regular light bulbs is not as good as that from fluorescent tubes. You may need to use them for some of your indoor plants if they seem to lose vigor.

Growth lamps should not be needed unless you are growing plants which are used to much warmer conditions than you can provide naturally.

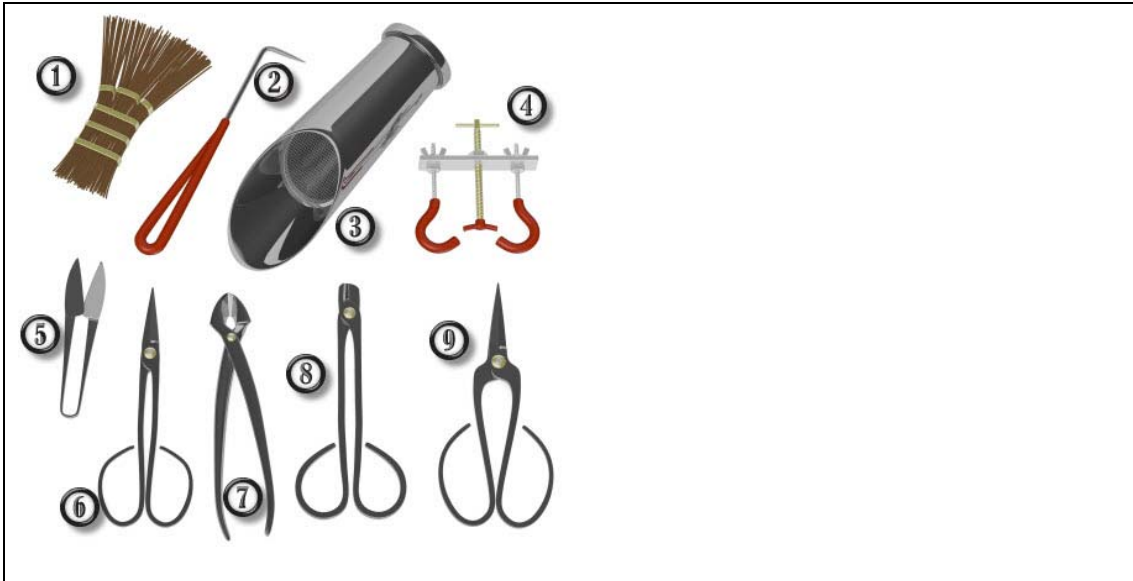
Some people even put their plants in the refrigerator but I believe that is not good for the plants or for the food items which are also there.

There are some species which don't need as much light. The best source of information is the person or company which supplied your plant.

Many tropical species are more tolerant of the indoor experience.

Tools for Bonsai

The tools offered to bonsai enthusiasts are many and varied.



1. Soft Brush
- 2, Root (Hook dislodge soil from rootballs)
- 3, Soil Scoop
4. Clamp (training bends in branches)
5. Shears
6. Trimmimg Shears
7. Concave Branch cutter
8. Wire Cutter
9. Trimmimg Shears

The basic traditional tools have been proven over time. But, good ones are fairry expensive.

Many hobbyists get good results with regular Western-style tools.

Tjthese substitutions usually work okay:

Regular garden snips can be used for bonsai.

Small concave garden saw instead of the Folding saw.

Three prong flat miniature garden fork will tease the soil off a rootball (but be gentle).

But some traditional tools are hard to find substitutes for.

A good **knob cutter** is one tool that I consider essential for anyone who is serious about their bonsai. This tool cuts a small curved depression in the end of the branch when it is cut.

The concave surface makes it easier for the plant to develop a strong callus and heal better.

I read about people that use a regular branch cutter and the try to dig out a depression with other tools. I think this will not be as effective and the digging process will cause more stress to your bonsai.

If you want your plant to look as good as possible for as long as it can and suffer less stress from your surgery, the knob cutter is worth the investment.

Some of your regular gardening tools can be suitable as substitutes for the traditional models.

But, make sure they are good quality for your sake as well as the plants.

I have seen a strong recommendation for carbon steel tools over stainless steel tools because they are stronger and the cutting tools maintain a better edge. They must be cleaned and maintained or they may develop rust spots after a fair bit of use. But, you must maintain whatever tools you use to get the value from your investment of time and money.

All of that translates into better results with your plants and also less frequent repair or replacement of the tools.

A big problem with any cheap tools is that there is no strong focus on good design. You will often find you have to exert more pressure to get results.

That puts more pressure on you and so you may also get minor injuries as well!

Accessories

Cut Paste

Whether to use a Cut Paste to seal wounds on cuts is getting a lot of debate in bonsai circles.

When you are just starting to do bonsai, I recommend that you use the paste to give the plant the best chance of recovering from the cut and any possible injury that you may cause due to lack of experience.

After a couple of years doing bonsai, you might decide that you favor letting some of the cuts and scars heal without the paste.

But, keep it handy because there will inevitably be other cuts and even small pieces removed when you are handling the plants.

The cutting paste helps cover the area while healing takes place and prevents bugs and disease getting in through the damaged area.

Choosing a Bonsai Style

One of the most interesting parts of doing bonsai is the practice of cutting and training your tree or shrub into a particular shape which you develop.

Even people that have no experience or training in art or design can develop some striking designs which attract praise and interest from their friends and other people.

These styles can be practised on many other houseplants as well as those usually favored by bonsai growers.

Make it easy on yourself by choosing a style\ for your first few plants according to the natural shapes they have and consider the strength of the plants’ trunks and branches as well.

Formal Upright:



Choose a plant with a straight trunk, lots of foliage and evenly spaced branches.

Remove the branches nearest to the level of the soil.

You may want to leave a couple of longer lower branches until you see how the tree starts to develop so that you have more options for the final design.

Remove small, thin branches from the rest of the plant.

When the plant starts growing with its previous vigor, transfer it to a bonsai pot.

Informal Upright:

This is similar to the previous style but the trunk of the plant is bent. It is important to consider how the bend will affect the final shape before doing it,

It helps to use a plant which has a fairly bendable trunk. You may find one which already has a bend in it which is a lot easier.

The bend can be made greater with the trunk bending tool after you have decided which part of the plant will be at the front when you display it.

The bend should point to one side of the plant when it is displayed.

Cut off the lower limbs and any thin ones which are higher up.

Set the plant in the position it will be displayed in.



Fix the tool to the trunk, if needed, to increase the bend. The upper curve of the bend is traditionally smaller than the curve at the bottom of the bend.

Try to balance the limbs on either side of the trunk.

They do not have to be symmetrical.

When you feel the bend is working, remove the clamp.

It may lose some of its shape.

You can use wires to hold it in place for a while to correct that.

Cascade Style



There are actually two cascade styles. One is meant to resemble a tree growing a rock with some branches covering part of it.

The other is the Full cascade where the tree is meant to resemble one that has grown to cover some of the rock and its branches flow down.

The plant is contained in a pot which is taller than most used for bonsai, so that the rootball is deeper and can better support the cascading branches.

Design Points to Remember

One design imperative for bonsai is that the leaves of the chosen plant are not so big that they will seem out of proportion with the rest of the tree when it has developed.

Bonsai trees should imitate the appearance of older, well-established trees.

Some of the designs imitate trees in situations which appear in nature

such as wind-swept or trees which cling to a boulder and have their foliage cascade down over it.

Remember that you are not trying to produce a perfect miniature version of a particular type of tree.

You are using the tree to produce a bonsai where balance is important, but symmetry is much less important.

Start with the Soil

Getting the mixture right to get best results with your bonsai is going to involve some trial and error.

Potting mixtures which are offered for regular garden plants are not suitable for your bonsai because the conditions which you grow your bonsai in are different.

The bowl is shallow, so there is less space for the roots to develop and for the soil itself.

You need to provide a mixture which will retain some moisture but allow the rest to drain away through the bottom of the pot. If water collects around the roots, less oxygen will be available to the roots of your plant.

The particular type of tree which you grow will have specific requirements. Examine the mixture which comes with your new plant and ask the supplier for information about the mixture.

Peat has been a popular component of regular potting soils and some bonsai growers use a little of it because it provides organic matter and helps to retain some moisture near the roots.

But, there is growing concern about using peat because of potential damage to the areas where it is harvested and the financial and environmental cost of transporting it from those areas to your local garden supplier.

Wet peat will hold moisture near the roots. But, the peat can prevent roots getting access to that moisture if it is allowed to dry out too much.

Perlite will provide all the water-retaining your mixture needs.

Some form of grit is useful to allow excess water to flow through the mixture so that it does not collect around the roots and, potentially, cause them to rot if it does not drain away.

You can buy the same types of ingredients which are used by bonsai growers in Japan.

But, when you are just starting, it is simpler and much less expensive to use mixtures which are produced in your country.

The main factors which influence what you use in your mixture are the

general requirements for all bonsai plants and the specific preferences of the particular type of tree you use.

The inorganic components will define the level of drainage and aeration of the mix.

The organic components will bind the mix together and provide some nutrient value.

If the mix has too much organic matter, it may become lumpy and your bonsai will not thrive.

So, you will probably adjust the ratio of the various ingredients as you gain more experience and learn to understand what the appearance of your plants indicates, both good and bad.

Pruning Your Bonsai

Pruning is one of the main skills you need to learn so that you can produce good results with your bonsai.

It will not happen overnight. Don't be disappointed if you make mistakes or don't get great results from all of your early attempts.

Whether you use the traditional tools or substitute regular garden gear for some of them, you must use good quality equipment.

Low-cost tools are fine as long as they don't damage your plants or cause you to get poor results.

A few extra dollars spent now will give you a much better chance of creating good bonsai. If you make do with cheap tools, you can't be sure if you or your tools are responsible for the poor results.

Your level of skill will improve fairly speedily when you get to the stage of having a few bonsai because you will have more pruning sessions.

The purpose of pruning is to maintain the development of the design you have in mind, keep the tree to the size you want and prevent the individual branches becoming out of proportion with the other parts of the tree.

Trees naturally reduce the proportion of nourishment to their lower branches and those closest to the trunk in favor of the higher ones.

This helps the tree in its natural environment become dominant over the other trees near it.

But, bonsai requires that the outer and highest growth areas are cut back or the tree will become too big and those more vigorous branches will thicken and lengthen to be out of proportion to the rest of the tree.

In its simplest form, the pattern for pruning is to cut back the branches which are most vigorous.

But, make sure that you don't cut them back so severely that the tree becomes unwell.

This type of pruning is a matter of balance between the needs of the tree to retain its vigor and your need to make it conform to the area and the design you have for it.

You need to learn to pinch out the most advanced buds at the top and side edges of any deciduous trees you are using for bonsai when the new growth starts to develop as the weather becomes warmer.

Don’t just cut off all the outer buds. When the leaves are fully developed but still small, open the leaves out and remove the young shoots at the tree’s extremities.

This will make your bonsai feed more nourishment to the inner shoots.

That will ensure that your bonsai retains the size and appearance you want.

Traditional Styles

There are a number of traditional styles which have proved popular and still allow for a lot of individual expression with each tree or shrub which you use.

Formal Upright

This is the usual tree shape with a straight trunk and layers of branches which are widest at the bottom and become more narrow as we get closer to the top of the plant.

Informal Upright

This is when the trunk has been bent, either by nature or the bonsai owner. The branches are not as orderly or even in number as with the previous style.

The trunk is thicker at the soil level than at the top.

The top is usually above the base and has plenty of foliage.

Leaning

This imitates the appearance of a tree which has been bent by constant attention from strong winds or grown in a difficult location which caused it to develop a slant.

The roots mostly grow in the direction of the lean so that they are better able to support the weight of the tree as it develops.

Cascade

The Cascade is the style I referred to before where the tree grows from a rock and the branches and foliage cascade down over the rock.

Rock Based

Like the Cascade, this tree grows from a rock but rises upward.

The rock should be carefully chosen as its appearance will be a strong part of the visual effect which is seen.

Windblown

This style simulates the appearance of a tree which has leaned to one side because of the effect of strong winds through its whole growing period.

There are many other styles and countless variations of the ones shown here.

Unless you intend to compete in bonsai shows, you can give free reign to your own ideas about what shape will be the best to develop from the tree you have.

Some extreme styles have had periods of popularity. There have even been special tools developed which are applied to the tree to force it to grow in a particular shape.

These styles are losing popularity in favor of those which are more natural in appearance, though there is a chance that they might be resurrected at some point in the future.

Feeding Your Bonsai

Getting the right fertilizer for your bonsai may take some experimentation.

You will need to know what the plant you are using prefers and also the effect of the different major components of the fertilizer you select.

Nitrogen encourages plants to grow. If the level of nitrogen is low, the plant will lack vigor and its health will suffer. Too much nitrogen will cause the plant to become more likely to suffer damage if knocked.

Phosphorus encourages healthy root development. If there is too little, the growth of the plant will falter. Leaves and flowers will be lower in number and quality. It is important for maintaining the plant's ability to resist stress, disease and other attacks.

Potassium is vital for fruit and flower production. It helps the plant deal with the effects of winter.

Trace elements are very important. The macro nutrients, which include potassium, nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus and sulphur are required in greater amounts than the micro-nutrients like copper, iron, zinc and molybdenum.

You may prefer a natural fertilizer to one which is a man-made blend of chemicals, but the plant won't mind as long as it gets the right chemicals in a form which it can use.

The synthetic fertilizers have some points in their favor.

When using them, you know exactly what concentrations of the different nutrients are being applied. The natural fertilizers ratio of the different components will vary.

Usually, the nutrients from the synthetics are delivered in a form which the plants can use straight away. The exceptions are those mixtures which contain some nutrients in a "slow-release" form which will become available over a period.

The soluble synthetic fertilizers are very easy to deliver when you are watering your plants. which saves you a bit of time.

Don't put any fertilizer on your plants when the sun is very bright. The

warmth will evaporate the water more quickly and the amount of mineral salts on the plants could reach levels which burn them.

Natural dry fertilizers can be included in the mix when repotting your bonsai but using too much will tend to burn the young roots as they develop.

Spreading small amounts across the surface of the mixture when the repotting is done will let it be delivered more slowly to the roots each time you water the plant.

Soluble fertilizers can be applied repeatedly in lower concentrations over several days to reduce the amount available to the plant to safe levels.

Water – Get it Right

You may have a set timetable for watering your main garden. But, watering your Bonsai needs a bit more care than normal garden watering.

Learning to judge when to water your bonsai properly is vital for its survival. But, there are no set rules which apply in all situations or even with all plants of the same type.

It will die if it does not get enough water.

Overwatering will also damage it.

The problems which result may not be obvious in the early stages.

Your supplier can give you guidelines based on their experience, but you will have to watch your plant carefully and adjust those suggestions to take account of the particular conditions you provide for your plant.

If there is too much water around the roots of your bonsai and the drainage is poor, there won't be enough oxygen getting to the plant.

The plant will start to lose condition as the roots die back.

This can be serious because an inexperienced gardener may take some time to realize what is happening.

If you see dead or sickly roots when you re-pot your plants, cut away all of the affected roots and ensure that the plant's new pot is well-drained so that any excess build-up of water is expelled.

It is advisable to check the condition of your bonsai and the compost each day before you decide how much water to give it, if any.

If the soil has dried significantly, you might want to add more water than usual.

Some people put the dish down in a slightly larger container which is full of clean water. They take it out when the bubbles, which indicate that water is replacing air in the potting mixture, stop appearing on the surface of the water.

Then, they remove their bonsai and put it somewhere that will let the excess water in the dish to drain off.

A simpler method is to gently pour some water down inside the edge of the dish. This will reduce any disturbance of the compost and not flood the

pot as much.

When Water is Needed

It is not always easy for an inexperienced bonsai grower to recognize when their plants need more water.

If you are watering at least every day, lift the dish containing each plant and you will start to recognize the lighter weight when it is running low on water.

You might also gently press your finger into the top quarter inch of the mixture to see if there is any moisture there.

If not, the plant probably needs water.

You might want to check if the water stays on the surface of the mix instead of being slowly drawn down to where the plant can get it or if the water is going straight down and out through the drainage holes.

Balanced Feeding

How and when you give your bonsai some fertilizer is as important as using the right kind of nutrition for the particular type of plant.

Always use a fertilizer which is formulated for bonsai plants.

Overfeeding is a common cause of problems.

It is usually better to provide the food in smaller doses more frequently than in a large application. If there is more fertilizer available than the plant can use for a while, the excess can accumulate and burn the roots, especially the fine feeder roots which the plant is producing.

If you ensure that the soil is slightly moist when you apply the fertilizer, it will be easier for the plant absorb and there is less risk of root damage.

Reduce the amount of food supplied during winter as most plants will be dormant for part of that period.

Using the same mixture is advisable. Some plants will be affected if you change to another brand without a specific reason.

Managing the Light

The amount and duration of light available to your bonsai is of great importance.

Most trees reduce their activity to some extent during winter.

This rest period is an important part of the tree's natural cycle.

This must be kept in mind if your bonsai are kept inside your home where we use artificial means to maintain the same sort of environment all the year round.

Some plants are affected negatively if they get too much direct sunlight.

If they are in shallow bonsai dishes, they should be kept out of direct sunlight which can raise the temperature of the bowls to dangerous levels.

If your plants are getting full-on sun for several hours a day, they may need protection. Blocking the sun entirely will deprive the plants of the benefits. Light-colored netting is probably the best protection as it reduces the level of direct light but lets enough through for the plants to thrive.

Woody plants can take higher amounts of sunlight than the soft-fleshed types.

Put the woody ones behind the sunniest window but watch them so that you can move or shade them as they show any sign of discomfort or the dishes start to warm up. Putting them in a tray of damp peat may help.

Don't have them too close to the glass because of the high risk they will be burned.

Potting Your Bonsai

This is an essential task which you will do many times.

You will have to do it when you get a new bonsai and also when one you have cultivated starts to outgrow its pot or show signs of stress which you need to investigate.

Prepare your working area and assemble the tools and supplies needed before you start the task so that you minimize the time your plant is under stress and the roots are exposed.

You need:

1. Plastic mesh
2. Wire
3. Wire cutters and scissors for the mesh
4. Pliers
5. Bonsai growing mix
6. Clean cloths
7. Water for cleaning the pot.

You may need an assistant for some of these steps if the plant and dish are large or heavy. Don't take the risk of hurting yourself or dropping and damaging the plant or dish.

If you are putting the plant back into a pot that has been used, discard any mesh and wire.

Clean the pot with water and dry it.

Cut plastic mesh to cover the drainage holes in the pot.

Twist bows from wire. They are placed around some of the larger roots, where required to better anchor the plant in the soil.

Thread loops of bent wire up through the drainage holes. The loops will go around the base of the plant and the ends tied under the bowl to help keep the plant stable while it grows.

Put a cloth or plastic sheet over your work area to keep it clean before you remove the plant from its current pot.

If the bonsai is in a bowl, lift it and cut the wires underneath which anchor

it in the current pot.

Tilt the dish so that your plant starts to slide from it. Put one hand around the base of the trunk so the plant cannot fall out and possibly be damaged.

If the plant does not slip out easily, tap gently around the pot with your hand or a tool.

If that doesn’t dislodge the plant, use a blade to cut all the way around the inside edge of the pot.

Then, the plant and soil should slide from the pot.

Look closely at the bunched roots for any sign of problems.

If the outside of the soil shows more roots than soil, you should promote the plant to a larger dish this time or it will not have room to continue growing and will be stressed.

Gently break up the root ball with the traditional root hook. A stick or a chopstick will work equally well and may be less likely to damage some of the roots if you don’t have much experience.

Do **not** use any of the old soil. That could encourage disease or contain dormant or immature bugs.

When all the old soil is off, tease out the roots and cut back the long ones.

You might trim the root ball down by about a third on most bonsai.

It’s desirable to end up with roots spreading out from around the base of the tree. This means the tree will be well supported and all the nutrient applied is likely to be used by the tree.

Roots which are growing up or down should be removed at this stage.

Use quality, sharp tools for this or you could damage the tree and provide entry points where diseases might develop.

Check the roots and trunk for any problems which would be hard to detect when the tree is repotted and starts to add more growth.

The plant will benefit from having other large roots trimmed to about one third of their length or at least to where you see fine roots growing out from them. The smaller roots are more important for the health of the plant.

Cut the roots at an angle sloping downward towards the center of the tree. This will stop water sticking to the cut surface and promote faster healing of the cut.

The root ball may still have hard sections. If so, carefully push a tool into it at those points so that some of the new mixture gets into those sections to provide entry for moisture after the plants is in its pot again.

Put new mixture into the pot and then put the plant in place. It should sit with the roots under the top of the soil when the pot has been filled.

When you put the tree in place, take care that it is arranged with the desired part facing the front side of the dish.

Secure the wire loops around a couple of the larger roots to secure the tree against damage from wind or being accidentally knocked when people are looking at it.

Add a little mixture and brush it down into the roots so that there are no air-pockets. It’s also important that you don’t press the soil too hard or it will become a solid mass in a short time which water and nutrients cannot get through; root growth will also be reduced.

Leave a small gap between the top of the mixture and the top edge of the dish so that water will not spill out of the pot when you apply it.

Give the plant some water when you are satisfied that it is correctly set up.

But, don’t apply too much water at any one session.

Always clean your tools after using them to reduce the possibility of transferring problems from one plant to another.

The plant will be a bit less tolerant of upsets for several weeks after you repot it, however careful you are.

But, most will be fine if you just be more careful than usual for a few weeks.

Caring For Your Bonsai

The plants which are commonly used for bonsai are fairly hardy.

Otherwise, they would not have such a high popularity rating for this hobby which puts much greater demands on them than if they were just allowed to grow naturally without so much interference.

Some Popular Plants for Bonsai

Serissa Foetida



Serissa Foetida is found through South East Asia in India, Japan and China.

I read that it used to be called Serissa Japonica but was renamed Serissa Foetida. Perhaps that refers to dank smell if you brush against its leaves.

It is also very sensitive to the conditions it is grown in. It will also drop some of its leaves if you shift the position of the pot.

Despite that, it is very popular as a bonsai because it usually recovers fairly quickly when it is in conditions which it is used to. The dark trunk and distinctive leaves make a colorful display as a bonsai. The trunk will lighten as it becomes older.

Pine Trees.



Pine trees are rugged and colorful, ideal for people who have a couple of years experience with other bonsai plants.

You won’t get best results with these trees unless they have access to full sun.

Pine trees can handle temperature variations well.

It needs care with its watering.

If the balance is not right, the needles may grow out of proportion to the rest of the tree.

Too much water may cause root rot on the Black Pine fairly quickly.

Despite their challenges, they are magnificent when cared for properly.

Resources

U.S.A.

U.S.A. Bonsai Club Listings

<http://www.bonsaisocietyofupstateny.org/bonsaiusa.htm>

This listing of clubs around the U.S.A. is maintained by the Bonsai Society of Upstate New York.

U.S.D.A. Growing Bonsai

<http://naldc.nal.usda.gov/catalog/CAT87213563>

<http://bonsaistudygroup.com/index.php>

Tree Identification Search Engine

http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/plant_ident/plant/search/type/1

This is primarily designed for residents of Oregon, U.S.A., but it could be some help to many other people too. As well, you could use the characteristics listed for describing a plant where you don't have a picture available.

Australia

The Association of Australian Bonsai Clubs Ltd.

<http://www.aabcltd.org/>

The Association of Australian Bonsai Clubs Ltd. (AABC) is the national body representing individual bonsai clubs throughout Australia. Some new Zealand Bonsai Clubs are also Members of this organization.

The National Bonsai and Penjing Collection of Australia

<http://www.nationalarboretum.act.gov.au/bonsai>

The National Bonsai and Penjing Collection of Australia (NBPCA) is housed in Canberra at the National Arboretum.

U.K.

The National Bonsai Society

<http://www.thenationalbonsaisociety.co.uk/>

From the site: "The National Bonsai Society caters for the needs of both beginners and experienced bonsai growers with a wide range of topics and activities".

Federation of U.K. Bonsai Societies

<http://www.fobbsbonsai.co.uk/>

FOBBS offers support to Bonsai Societies around the U.K.

It has a database of information, a file speakers available in the U.K., a national annual competition for newer Bonsai enthusiasts and support for organizations running their own bonsai events.

The Joy of Bonsai

I hope that my book will be helpful as you explore and gain more enjoyment from your bonsai.

It is a wonderful thing that a fairly small investment of time and money can give you so much mental and physical exercise.

You will get great satisfaction when you start to see the bonsai design you imagined in living, colorful form and are asked, "Did you really do that?!"

Remember that there will be bumps in your path to that point because we cannot expect to control all the aspects of a plant's growth completely.

But, the more you put into this wonderful form of gardening the more you will get from it.

Paul Kennedy

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