



Bonsai

Literally translated, bonsai means “container planted,” but bonsai has evolved into a form of living art representing heaven and earth in one container. Traditional subjects for bonsai include pine, maple, elm, flowering apricot, Japanese wisteria, juniper, flowering cherry, azalea and larch.

Temperature

Indoor temperature should be 70° to 80° during the day and 60° to 65° at night. This nighttime temperature drop is important because it allows the plant to tolerate higher daytime temperatures. Many indoor bonsai will go into a dormant period in winter resulting in some leaf drop and slower growth.

Light

Place the bonsai plant in a bright sunny window facing east, west or south, but shield it from hot sun.

Water

Correct watering is essential for a bonsai to remain healthy. They should be checked daily for watering and be kept evenly moist, never allowing the plant to completely dry out. However, overwatering is equally harmful. They will require more water during the active growing season, and less water in the winter resting period.

Water the soil slowly, allowing the soil to soak up all it wants. Keep watering until water flows from the drainage holes. Another watering method is to soak the pot thoroughly in a pan or sink for about five minutes, then allow it to drain. Use soft water, never hard, at room temperature.



Fertilizer

During active growth in spring and summer, fertilize every two weeks with a balanced water soluble fertilizer applied at half strength. In the fall, as growth slows, fertilize once every six to eight weeks. Always water your bonsai with clear water first before watering with fertilizer water, this will avoid any fertilizer burn.

Humidity

To increase humidity, stand bonsai pots on a humidity tray (saucer filled with pebbles and water). Frequent misting and rinsing the leaves once a month to remove dust are also beneficial.

Repotting

Young or fast growing varieties should be repotted every one to two years. Older trees every three or four years. The best time to repot is the beginning of spring. Wait until the soil is on the dry side, loosen and remove half of the soil from the roots. Cut back the roots by about a third to a half. Older specimens can usually be repotted into the same pot with fresh soil. Younger plants should be placed in a slightly larger pot. After repotting, do not apply fertilizer for four to six weeks and water more sparingly.

Pruning

Pruning controls growth and determines the form of the bonsai. Branches may be pruned throughout the year, but flowering trees should only be pruned after the blooming period. New shoots should be continually mipped back to two to three leaves after five or six leaves have formed.

Wiring

Next to pruning, wiring is the most important technique in training bonsai. Wiring requires patience, skill and practice. Always wire from the trunk to a branch, wind the wire in the direction of growth, don't wind too tightly, and check often to make sure the wire doesn't become embedded into the bark.

With a little effort and care, growing a bonsai will be a rewarding experience.

Questions or comments? Contact Jim Gainan via email jim@gainans.com.