

Bonsai Care Sheet

Many people have told us they kill bonsai trees. It's an education thing. If you're not educated on proper care, it's not really your fault. Read through for some helpful tips to keeping your bonsai tree alive. Good luck and enjoy your tree.

Placement or Location:

First you must remember your new purchase might look like a cute little houseplant but it's actually a tree and trees live outside. Yes, there are some species that can do well indoors but the majority need to be outside. They can tolerate full sun but would do better in morning and late afternoon sun. From 10 AM to 2 PM, the sun can be too hot. You know how that feels if you are outside with the sun beating down on you.

A screen in patio is ideal. It allows your bonsai tree to receive filtered sun light and will be protect from strong winds.

If you wish to enjoy a tree in your house that's fine, but what you must realize is that can kill your tree. The air conditioning pulls moisture out of the air. You need to check the soil more often to make sure it hasn't dried out. This means you may have to water your tree twice a day. The lack of sun – photosynthesis keeps your tree green.

You take your tree outside for several days and then bring it back inside for a day or two so you can enjoy it.

Watering:

Generally, bonsai like to be moist, not soggy. That is, when the top half of the soil becomes dry, it is time to water; and soak it thoroughly. To check the level of moisture in soil, use a moisture meter, a wooden chopstick or a toothpick, which will indicate a watermark.

A thorough way to water is the "dishpan method" which is placing the bonsai in a pan, with the water level above the soil---when the air bubbles stop, it has obtained sufficient water.

Mist-spraying foliage serves to provide humidity and washes away dust off your tree. Avoid spraying blooms to prevent early wilting. Trays filled with gravel and water (humidity trays) adds humidity around the bonsai resting on top of the gravel.

Check the moisture requirement for each tree. Soil elements and watering may vary. Some species need to be kept on the dryer side, while others favor to be dryer during certain times of the year.

Check daily for water needs---never use a watering schedule, but water when the tree requires it. The smaller the pot, the more often it must be watered.

As a general rule in our area (South Florida) - Spring through summer – with our hot temperatures and drying winds may require you to water twice a day. Fall through winter – cooler temperatures, less wind and slowing of growth also means less water. Some trees may only need to be watered once a day or every other day. Be sure to water thoroughly. When hand watering, a gently spray is better. Allow the water to flow out the drain holes--- wait a couple minutes and repeat.

Feeding or Fertilizing:

We recommend you use different types of fertilizers and rotate their application.

We sell a 12-6-8 formula with trace elements that we recommend for Tropicals. It's a 2-3 month application. If you don't have access to it, then our next suggestion is a time-release granular fertilizer such as Dynamite or Shake-N-Feed (from the big box stores) It gives your tree a well-balanced start. It usually lasts from 4-6 months..

This should be supplemented with a liquid of water-soluble fertilizer such as Peters or Miracle Grow at half strength (1/2 tablespoon per gallon of water) every 10-14 days. You may wish to rotate with a high nitrogen liquid fertilizer such as Fish Emulsion (5-2-2).

Liquid fertilizers should be sprayed on the foliage as well as saturated into the roots. When applying liquid fertilizer – first water the tree well with plain water then apply the liquid fertilizer. That way you will not burn the roots and possibly kill your tree.

Because bonsai are watered so frequently, and so thoroughly, a lot of the nutrients the tree needs are constantly being leached out. Therefore, regular fertilizing is important.

Pests and Diseases - Insect Control:

A healthy tree resists pests, but check weekly for signs of withering new growth, foliage turning silver/gray, yellow, leaf curling, chewing marks, sawdust or missing. Keep dead leaves off the surface, remove weeds and trim away dead branches. Common insects that attack plants will also attack bonsai trees. Raid Home & Garden aerosol (green can) is a convenient and effective spray or use Safer Insecticide Soap. Both are available at Home Depot or your local grocery stores. Spraying the entire tree will not kill it.

Training:

Pinching leaves: trees produce smaller leaves than normal if new buds are pinched. Pinch off the new growth with your fingernail. New leaves will come out smaller in size. Pruning branches: the number of branches increases with pruning. When you cut off the end of a branch, generally two new branches will form. Cutting both of those will produce 2 new branches and so on.

Shaping:

The first branch (lowest) should be the longest and alternate up the tree and get shorter up to the top. The branches and leaf should form a triangular shape. The triangle is one of the traditional bonsai shapes, and the three points wisely represent our relationship to heaven, earth, and our fellow man.

Wiring:

Wiring is done to imitate the natural curves of trees in nature. Wire is wrapped around the trunk and branches securely. Very carefully, you bend the branch to the shape you desire. You will need to check the wire on a regular basis. You will need to remove the wire before it cuts in and damages the bark. If the branch does not hold the shape you desired, it should be rewrapped and reshaped. Good wiring is a skill that takes time to learn.

Repotting:

Repotting refreshes the soil and keeps the tree from being root-bound. It gives your tree a new lease on life. New soil promotes new root growth that promotes new branches and leaves. Before repotting any tree, be sure it's the correct season to do it. Generally, Tropicals can be done in the spring or summer while pines, junipers or cypress can be done in winter. Depending on how fast your tree grows will determine how often you will need to repot. The minimum is a year. Some trees can go 3-5 years before it needs to be done. If you're not sure whether to repot or how to repot your tree, contact us for help.