

San Diego Bonsai Club

Basic Bonsai Care



1. The word Bonsai (pronounced bone-sigh), literally translated, means a tree in a shallow pot. It has come to mean small trees, planted in pots of varying depth and size.

2. Bonsai are real outdoor trees. As such, they are basically out-of-doors in nature. Families in Japan usually have a central place (Tokonoma) in the house where their trees are displayed, one at a time. They will usually have a collection of several trees, so they may be rotated after a short stay indoors.

3. Bonsai, being quite small and planted in containers, are more sensitive to extremes of heat and cold than their brothers in nature.

In the summer they should be protected from the glaring rays of direct sunlight. Placing them under a lath house, shade cloth or simply keeping them in a shady portion of your yard can do this.

In the cold winter months, they should be protected from extended periods of freezing temperatures. This can be accomplished by one of the following:

- a. Place them close to the house under a protected patio.
- b. Keeping them temporarily, indoors in a sunny location. Longer stays indoors can be tolerated in the winter months, as the trees will be somewhat dormant during these months.
- c. A heated greenhouse is an excellent place for wintering your trees.

4. Bonsai should be watered daily in most climates, but in cool, damp weather every two or three days is enough. In hot, dry weather, watering twice daily may be necessary.

5. Bonsai should be “fed” regularly during their growing season (spring through mid summer). Feeding every two weeks during this period, with a diluted fish emulsion, would be fine. Almost any fertilizer will do. Just remember to dilute to about one-third strength given on the label. **DO NOT FEED DURING WINTER MONTHS!**

6. Periodic pruning or pinching will be required to retain the shape of the tree. This can be done whenever you feel a shoot or branch detracts from the look of the tree. Small snips or pruning scissors, may be used for this task.

7. The most important step required in keeping the tree small is periodic repotting and root pruning. How often this needs to be done depends on the tree. The younger, smaller trees may require repotting about every two years. Larger, more established trees may go for several years without repotting. This operation can be done in late winter to early spring.

- a. Remove the tree from the pot and remove about two-third of the soil from the roots.
- b. Remove, by pruning, about one-third of the roots.
- c. Replace the tree in the pot with fresh soil making sure that soil fills the spaces or air pockets between the roots.
- d. The first watering after the above steps should be done immediately placing the pot in a shallow pan of water, with water level just below the edge of the pot. This waters the tree from the bottom up, removes air bubbles from the soil and does not disturb the freshly placed soil.
- e. A sharpened chopstick, or dowel, is an excellent tool for both removing and replacing the soil mixture.

8. The soil used for bonsai must retain moisture but must drain well at the same time. A simple basic mixture for most trees would be: 1 Part Scoria (small volcanic rock), 1 Part Pumice, and 1 Part Fir Bark. As you progress in your bonsai journey you will learn of other successful soil recipes from your instructors.

Bonsai pots have drainage holes over which is screen is placed to allow drainage without loss of soil.

9. If you desire further, or more detailed information about the care of bonsai, many books on the subject are available. Plus, the San Diego Bonsai Club offers beginning classes to it's members. www.sandiegobonsaiclub.com

Enjoy your bonsai!