

Bonsai Care Sheet

(‘bon’= tray/‘sai’= grow)

The traditional Japanese art of bonsai is one of appreciation of nature and its free form. Where bonsai fits in, is essentially capturing a ‘life-size’ sample in the controlled setting of a pot. There are many forms in which trees may be shaped to retain the tradition, through training and growth restriction. The art has been westernized to fit the owner’s likes more than what nature can naturally provide. Both styles come with the same general care.

TREE STYLES:

- *Chokkan*: (Formal Upright) single, upright tree, with a straight vertical trunk with branches that progressively get smaller towards the crown (top of the tree). This form is balanced both right to left and front to back.
- *Moyôgi*: (Informal Upright) single, semi-upright tree that may have curves or grow at a slight slant. The apex of the tree is directly over the base.
- *Shakan*: (Slanted) the trunk slants either to the left or the right side of the tree with branches growing on either side of the trunk.
- *Ban Kan*: (Coiled) The trunk is extremely crooked, in some cases entwined around itself.
- *Kengai*: (Cascade) This tree has an arched trunk that grows downward, over the pot and to the floor or across a table. This tree ‘spills’ only to one side.
- *Han-kengai*: (Semi-cascading) This tree grows in a similar way to the cascading, but the branches do not go below the pot. Also associated with the shakan style.
- *Fukinagashi*: (Wind-swept) All the branches are ‘swept’ to one side (the side that the tree leans to) of the tree as if driven by strong wind. Resembles tress often found by the sea shore or on cliffs.
- *Hôkidachi*: (Broom) Main, upright trunk, who’s branches spread outward, resembling and upside-down broom. This is a very symmetrical shape.
- *Bunjingi*: (Literati) This style features a slender, slightly-slanted trunk with few branches just on the crown if the tree.
- *Ishitzuki*: (Rock-grown) This style not only alters the tree, but now a rock or rocks are introduced. The tree can either be grown directly in the rock or the roots can spread over the rock.
- *Sokan*: (Twin-trunk) the trunk is divided in two at the base of the tree with one trunk larger and thicker than the other. Grown from a single root stalk.
- *Sakan*: Just like the sokan, but with three trunks that are all different sizes and source from one root stalk.
- *Gokan*: Just like the sokan and sakan, but with five trunks from one root stalk.
- *Ikada Buki*: (Raft) Multiple trees grown from a branch laid on it’s side and the trunk are actually the smaller branches. Gives the appearance of yose-ue.

- *Netsuranari*: (Sinuous) Numerous tree that grow from a single root that weaves under the soil. More numerous than the gokan.
- *Neagari*: (Exposed Roots) A tree with its roots exposed out of the soil, giving the appearance of years of weathering.
- *Yose-ue*: (Group or Forest Planting) Multiple trees with their own root stalks in the same pot to resemble a natural occurring forest.

Bonsai Care:

- **LIGHT:** Bright, indirect light is best. Bonsais need good light to keep them from ‘stretching’, but full sun can dry out roots or even burn the plant quite quickly due to the smaller pot size. This applies to both indoor and outdoor trees.
- **WATER:** Keep evenly moist and mist the foliage often. If the tree is outside, wetting down the ground around the tree can help with humidity or even simply, lightly spraying down the foliage with a watering can or mister setting on a hose. For indoor bonsai, place the whole pot (without the saucer if detachable) into a container that can hold water above the level of the hole in the bottom of the pot. This is where the roots and soil will soak up the water. Let the tree sit for 20 to 30 minutes or until the soil is evenly moist. Depending on the air temperature, pot size, soil, location and environment of your tree, the frequency of watering will vary.
- **FERTILIZER:** Fertilizing bonsai trees is a little controversial in a few ways. Some believe that bonsai trees do not need to be fertilized as bonsai is about restricting the growth of the tree, where others believe in feeding once a month during the growing season (spring to autumn). The other point of debate is synthetic verses natural food. Bonsai is about capturing nature in a pot, thus the food should be natural. Where the western take is about ease, thus a liquid, most likely synthetic food is the better choice. Either way you go, a fertilizer for bonsai is ideally 50% nitrates, 30% phosphate, and 20% potash. Also, make sure the plant is not dry. If it is, water first then fertilize – this will prevent fertilizer burn. One note about flowing bonsai, is to not feed until they have finished flowering even if it is during the growing season. The feeding method for some styles should be heavily considered as to not damage your plant or its roots.
- **GENERAL CARE:** Inspect your tree often for damage and pests. If you wired your tree, the wire should be removed/replaced every six months as not to damage the tree. Trimming and repotting is tree species dependent and is also influenced by the bonsai form.
- **WINTER CARE:** Do not let your tree freeze. No matter the hardiness of your tree, freezing soil, water in the pot or a winter rain could be the end for your bonsai. If you bring your bonsai indoors, be sure that the temperature does not reach above 41 F. If kept outdoors, the temperature where the tree is tucked away, should not drop below 23 F.