



Bucks Country Gardens

Caring For Your Bonsai

BONSAI (pronounced bone-sigh) means “planted in a shallow vessel” or “tray planting.” This art form started in the Orient 1000 to 2000 years ago as hacki-no-ki (tree-in-pot.) Bonsai have been grown many centuries following some basic – but not difficult growing procedures. Like humans, they respond to tender loving care. Broadly classified, bonsai are considered indoor or outdoor according to their ability to survive naturally in either temperate or tropical zones. An understanding of the basic plant requirements makes it possible to grow the bonsai of your choice where and when you want it. Some of these are printed below:

WATER

Soil should be kept moist, not wet. Smaller pots require more frequent watering. To water, soak pots thoroughly in a pan, tub or sink, then let drain. While soaking, rinse the foliage to clean the leaves. Plants with or sending out new leaves require more water than when resting – but remember, moist, NOT WET. Some even do better if kept on the dry side.

FERTILIZING

Miniaturizing is accomplished by pruning and pinching, not by starving. A 20-20-20 water-soluble fertilizer applied at half-strength every 10-14 days during the growth period will keep plants healthy.

TEMPERATURE

Outdoor types do best indoors at 65-80 degrees F. Most need an annual rest (dormancy) of approximately 60-90 days at 30-50 degrees F., normally in the fall. Keep moist but not wet while dormant. They can withstand a light frost but should not freeze hard. After dormancy they can be grown again at 65-80 degrees for the rest of the year. Indoor types are more ideally suited to daytime temperatures of 70-80 degrees and 60-65 degrees at night. Do not permit indoor types of bonsai to freeze.

LIGHT

Filtered (shaded) natural light is necessary for growing bonsai. Avoid direct sunlight if adequate ventilation cannot be provided.

RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Bonsai kept indoors may be maintained by setting pots on pebbles in trays in which water is kept almost to the bottom of the pot. Cover with polyethylene when away but only if out of direct sunlight. Bonsai kept outdoors should be misted frequently during real hot, windy days.

USING MOSS WITH YOUR BONSAI

Moss helps conserve moisture. A fine spray mist once or twice daily will keep the moss in good condition.

PRUNING

Adequate and timely pruning is essential to good bonsai development and styling. Prune by cutting or pinching back new growth 1/3 to 1/2 OR to the desired shape. Proper pruning also helps thicken trunks and branches. Root pruning is done when repotting to generate new feeder roots. Frequency and extent depends upon the kind of plant as well as the style and size desired and can not be adequately covered here.*

REPOTTING YOUR BONSAI

To keep plants healthy repot broad-leaved plants every two to three years; conifer or needle-leaved evergreens every four to five years. Early spring (just as the buds begin to swell) is the best time. Carefully remove the plant and pot ball from the pot, soil should be on the dry side. With a fork, loosen and remove about 1/2 of the ball, working in from around the edges. Cut off any exposed portions of real heavy roots. Cut back remaining fine root 1/2 their exposed length. Reposition the plant in the same or a new pot and fill carefully and firmly with fresh new soil that is specially formulated for bonsai. Water thoroughly and keep the plant in shade until new roots are formed, then you may fertilize.

GOOD FORTUNE

These much-condensed suggestions are BASIC though sufficient to keep your bonsai healthy and attractive. You will find more detailed information in the many publications that are available in the garden center. You may also consider joining a bonsai club for maximum enjoyment and satisfaction from your new hobby.