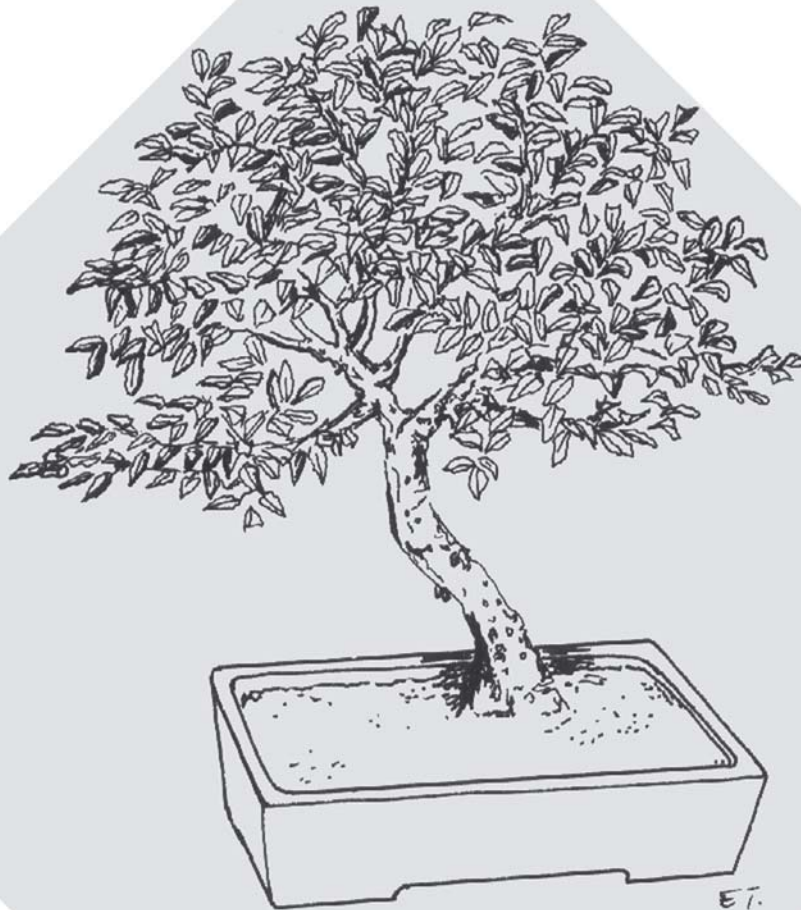


Welcome to the art and culture of bonsai. Practicing bonsai can help us develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world and for our fellow human beings. Bonsai require patience, diligence, responsibility, creativity, and awareness, among other things. It is not always easy, yet bonsai can enrich our lives with beauty and inspiration. If you pay attention to your bonsai and take good care of it, you will enjoy it for many years. It's up to you! We can help you if you have questions.




CHINESE ELM BONSAI

Ulmus parvifolia

This is one of the best trees for starting out in bonsai. Chinese Elms are strong, adaptable, and forgiving (up to a point!) Please don't confuse these trees with Zelkova, which are more winter-hardy, and are a different species. Chinese Elms have small, serrated leaves. They can develop twiggy branching— another plus for bonsai. They are neither strictly indoor nor outdoor, but they do like to be outside for the summer.

WATER




No single watering schedule can be applied to bonsai. Bonsai can dry out quickly because they are planted in coarse soil and in shallow containers. In some cases, you may need to water every day, *however*, the frequency of watering depends on the type of tree, size of pot, type of soil, climate conditions, and more. The best way to tell if the bonsai needs water is to feel the soil. Stick your finger a half inch or so into the soil. Overall, if you do not feel much moisture in the top half inch of the soil, then it's time to water.

You must soak it well. Take the bonsai to the sink, and either let it sit in the water for a few minutes (until it has soaked up enough from the drainage holes in the bottom), or shower from above, letting the water drain through several times. *Never* let the soil dry out completely, but don't keep it soaking wet all the time. Base your watering on how the soil feels. If you are not sure if it is wet or dry, take the bonsai to the sink and soak it well. Feel it an hour later, two hours later, four hours later, etc. This can help you understand how the soil dries down.

Check it every day. If you can feel moisture, then you may not need to water. However, if your bonsai is in a very small pot and/or it is a hot or windy day, or if the bonsai is pot-bound, then you may need to water. Better safe than sorry. Feel the soil in several areas. If one part is dry, then you need to water that part.

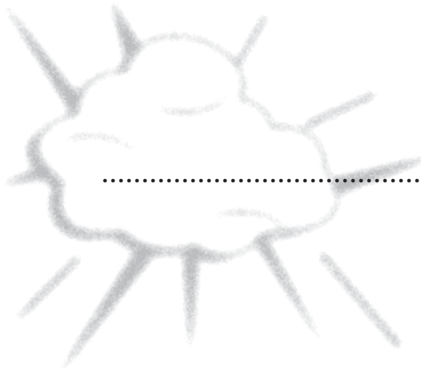
Never let the bonsai get too dry!

LIGHT




Chinese Elms can take full sun. Please be sure that the leaves are accustomed to sun before you put the tree in strong sun. If the tree has been indoors, you need to expose it to sun slowly so that the leaves do not burn. Once they are acclimated, Chinese Elms thrive in full sun—and a lot of sun also helps to keep the leaves smaller.

AIR



Good air circulation is essential for the health of your bonsai. Always keep your Chinese Elm in a well-ventilated place, such as an open window when inside, or use a small fan to increase air movement.

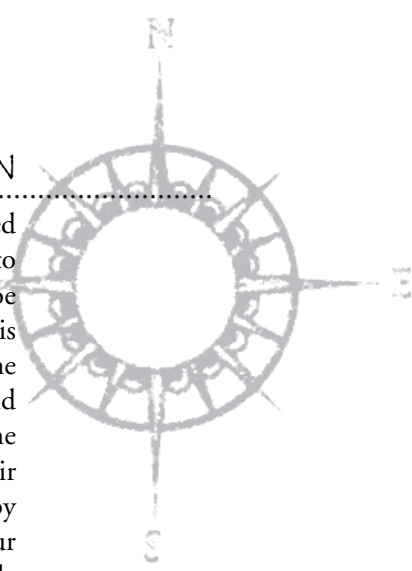
FERTILIZING



When your bonsai starts to push out fresh, light-green growth, it is time to start feeding. Apply mild organic fertilizer in the form of pellets or liquid, usually with equal parts nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium (NPK) during the growing season, and less nitrogen in the fall. Apply the pellets about once a month, and the liquid about every two weeks. Once the growth of the tree starts to slow down, in mid to late summer, you can cut the fertilizer back to once a month for the liquid. When the bonsai is in winter dormancy, there is no need to feed it. Remember, never fertilize a weak tree.

LOCATION

Chinese Elm trees are very flexible about their environment. If adapted properly, they can be grown indoors year-round. If hardened off to the cold gradually, they can drop their leaves in the fall and be considered deciduous trees, so you have a few options. *However*, it is important to find out how your Elm has been growing recently. Some Elms come from southern China, and have never experienced cold conditions. It would be dangerous to keep these Elms too cold the first year or two. Other Elms have gone to freezing and dropped their leaves for many years; as a result, these Elms may not be too happy indoors for the first year or two. If you can not determine where your Elm has been, then keep it outside for the summer and bring it inside for the winter. You can bring it in when the temperatures are around 50°F. If kept indoors for the winter, a cooler location is preferable (50°F–65°F). Chinese Elms may drop some leaves in the winter due to the natural decrease in light. This is normal.



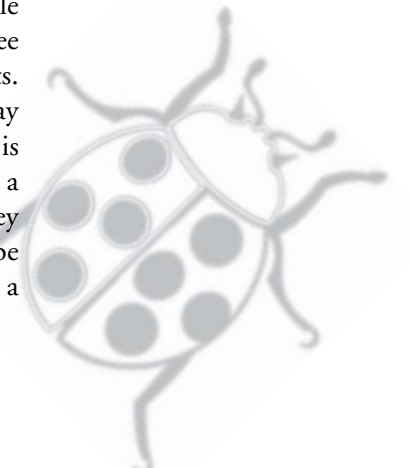
CLEANLINESS

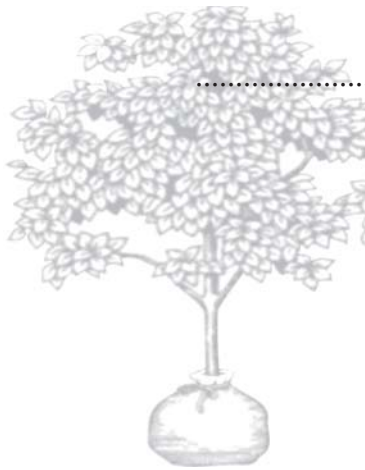
As your bonsai grows, it will naturally shed some leaves. Always remove dead leaves from the tree and from the top soil, and gently shower down the foliage once a week. This will help discourage pests and diseases.



PESTS AND DISEASES

Just as children can catch a cold, your bonsai are susceptible to the common houseplant pests and diseases. The best defense is to keep your tree clean and healthy. Always observe the bonsai closely. Chinese Elms are prone to a fungal disease called black spot which appears as dark spots on the leaves. This must be treated. Spray with a fungicide (always follow directions) and remove any leaves which are more than half damaged. Keep the bonsai in excellent air circulation and sun, and do not mist. You may need to treat it more than once. If you notice any abnormal leaf drop, stickiness to the foliage, or visible insects, you need to treat the problem. Start by showering the tree down with lukewarm water to thoroughly wash away any insects. Then spray with a mild insecticidal soap or rotenone pyrethrin spray (always follow directions when using any insecticides). One spray is usually not enough. You may need to repeat the treatment once a week for two or three weeks. Insects may be knocked back, but they can reappear in a few weeks or months. Keep a watchful eye and be diligent about treating them. It is always best to consult with a professional as soon as you think you might have a problem.



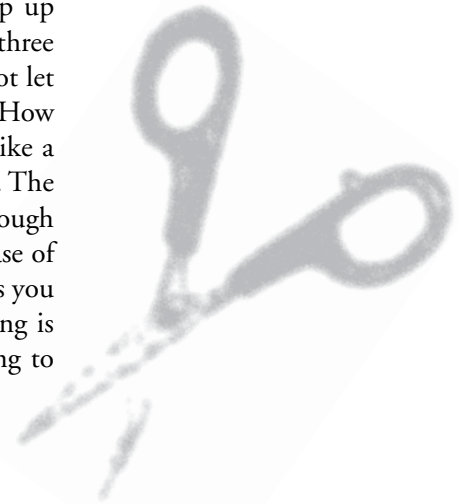


REPOTTING

The safest time to repot your Chinese Elm is when you see a lot of buds just starting to swell. The time will vary from tree to tree, and from year to year. Even if your Elm has not dropped all its leaves, this is the best way to tell when it is ready to transplant. Frequency of repotting depends on the size and age of the tree, the condition of the roots, and other factors. A younger tree may need transplanting every year. Older trees or those in larger pots, may need repotting every two to four years. Repotting is an important procedure which usually involves root pruning, and must be done properly. We can help you with this. You can also take a workshop or consult a reliable book, bonsai hobbyist, or local bonsai club.

PRUNING AND SHAPING

Chinese Elms are very fast-growing, so you can develop good branch ramification in a relatively short time. It is important to keep up with trimming when the Elm is growing quickly. Let two or three new sets of leaves grow out, and cut back to one or two. Do not let the branch grow too long (unless you are trying to thicken it). How often you trim will depend on how fast your tree grows. It's like a haircut: you trim the foliage when it starts to look out-of-shape. The key is to never cut so much as to weaken the tree, but to cut enough to keep it well-shaped. Sucker growth, which appears at the base of the trunk and in the 'elbows' of the tree, can be removed, unless you want to cultivate a branch or trunk in that area. Major pruning is usually done when the bonsai is at its strongest, in early spring to early summer.



DESIGN AND STYLING

The very best, most beautiful bonsai are those which look natural. If you observe aged trees in their native environment, you can feel their character and strength. This is the ideal that we strive for in bonsai. Chinese Elms can be trained in every bonsai style, except maybe, formal upright. Because they are fast growing you can train a younger specimen to have a twisty trunk, or as a cascade or semi-cascade, in a relatively short amount of time. Broom style is also a good option.



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