

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.



JUNIPER BONSAI

The Japanese Garden Juniper (*Juniperus procumbens* 'nana') is the most popular and recognizable bonsai in the United States, with good reason. They are rugged, adaptable trees well-suited to bonsai culture. There are many other juniper varieties, as well. Junipers can live a very long time. There are some Juniper bonsai over 500 years old, so if you acquire a Juniper bonsai, you can look forward to many years of enjoyment.

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

Contrary to popular belief, Junipers tolerate and even prefer full sun.

AIR

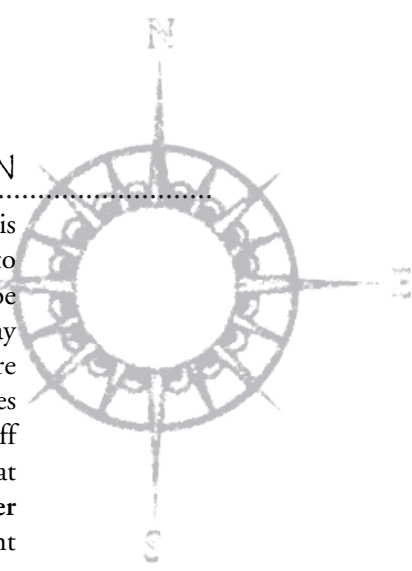
Good air circulation increases cell growth. Keep your Juniper bonsai in a well-ventilated area at all times. This is very important.

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.

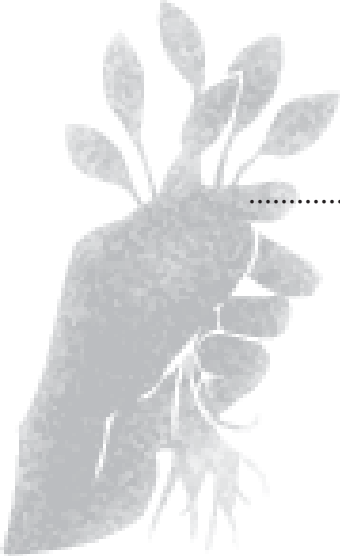
LOCATION

Junipers should be put outside in the spring when the temperature is above 40°F. A porch, deck, or similar exposed place is good. Try to give your juniper at least a half day of full sun. It is important to be consistent and not keep moving it in and out. Keep it outside day and night, until the late autumn/early winter temperatures are consistently around freezing. This will insure that the bonsai goes into dormancy slowly and naturally, and will have time to harden off and store energy to prepare for the winter. Once temperatures are at freezing consistently you will need to give your bonsai some **winter protection**. A cool or cold (25°F to 45°F), well-ventilated, bright place is best. An unheated room, attached garage, cool basement, etc., is sufficient. **Don't forget to check for water through the winter.** You may find you do not need to water as frequently, but when you do water, you still need to soak it well. There are other ways to winter the bonsai, such as burying the whole pot in the ground, but we prefer the above method. If you receive a Juniper in the winter months, keep it indoors in the coolest, brightest window you have until it can go outside safely. Be sure the tree is not near a heat source and mist frequently.



CLEANLINESS

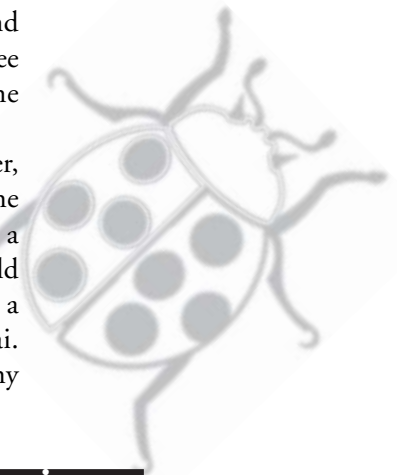
Always keep your juniper clean of old needles, dead branches, etc. Remove these dead needles from the top soil, as well as from the tree. Tweezers are a good tool for this job. Also, a weekly gentle shower is helpful.

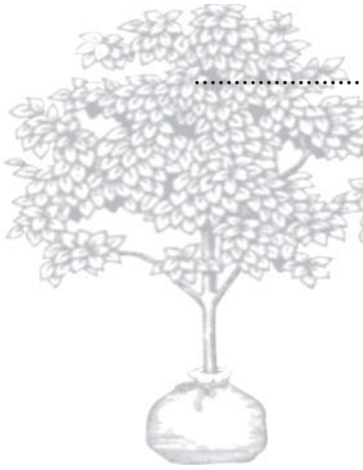


PESTS AND DISEASES

Spider mites love Junipers. They are tiny, sucking insects barely visible to the naked eye. If you see dense webbing at the top of the tree (not from branch to branch, which usually indicates a regular spider, which is not harmful), or the foliage looks gray or bleached out, then you may have mites. Place a clean, white sheet of paper under the bonsai and gently agitate the foliage over the paper. Tiny specks will fall onto the paper. Wait a few seconds. If any of these specks start to walk around, then you probably have spider mites. Shower the tree with lukewarm water, then apply a mild insecticide (we recommend rotenone pyrethrin spray.) Spray thoroughly once a week, for three weeks, and check for mites again. You may need to repeat the procedure.

Junipers are also susceptible to fungus, especially if grown in darker, cooler places. Fungus can appear as a gray, tan, or black area on the branches. If you suspect fungus, it is best to let a professional take a look. If you are sure it has a fungus, then you can spray with a mild fungicide such as liquid copper. It is a good idea to consult with a professional if you think something is wrong with your bonsai. Remember, the best defense against insects and disease is a healthy bonsai.



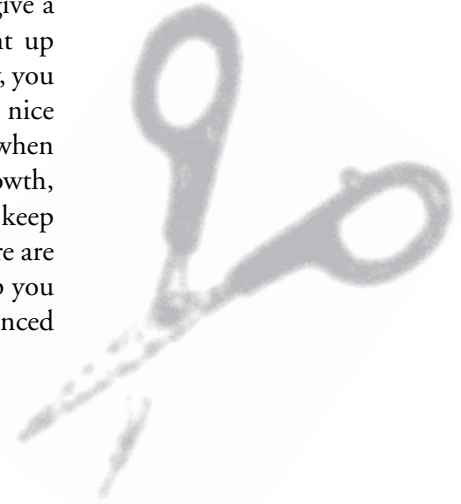


REPOTTING

Frequency of repotting depends on the size and age of the tree, the condition of the roots, and other factors. Younger Junipers, or those in small pots, may need to be repotted every year. Older trees, or those in larger pots, may need repotting every two to four years. The safest time to transplant Junipers is when they are starting to push out new growth in the spring. When the new growth starts will vary from climate to climate and tree to tree, but watch for the fresh green buds. 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

Do not 'poodle cut' Junipers. The best way to reduce leggy top growth is to pinch the buds between your thumb and forefinger and give a little twist until the bud pops out. The needles growing right up against the trunk and branches can also be pinched off. Basically, you want to be able to see the trunk and branches, and also have a nice cloud-like crown of foliage on top of the branches. **Remember:** when the bonsai is growing vigorously and pushing out a lot of new growth, you can prune and pinch safely. The idea is to prune enough to keep the shape, but not so much that the bonsai becomes weak. There are many more salient points to pruning and shaping. We can help you with this. A good book and/or a consultation with an experienced bonsai enthusiast is also recommended.



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. John Naka says that all Junipers should have jin and shari—this is carving the wood to create a driftwood effect on the branches or trunk. Since Junipers are low-growing trees, they are particularly suited to informal upright, windswept, semi-cascade, and cascade styles. Junipers are traditionally potted in unglazed containers.



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