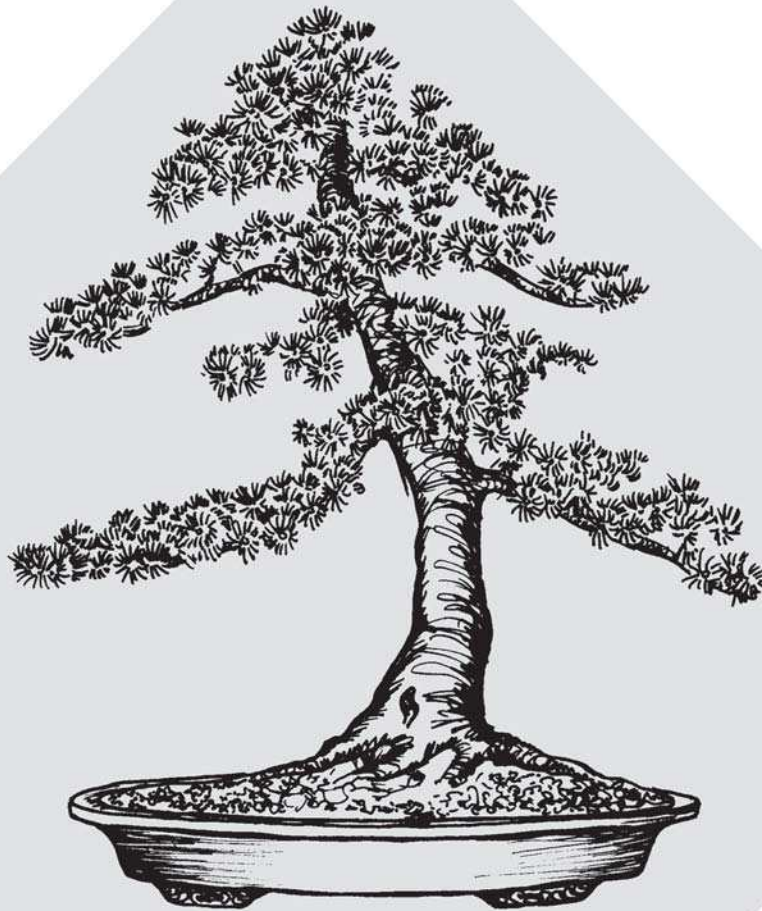


Welcome to the art and culture of bonsai. Practicing bonsai can help us develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world and for our fellow human beings. Bonsai require patience, diligence, responsibility, creativity, and awareness, among other things. It is not always easy, yet bonsai can enrich 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.



CONIFER BONSAI

Conifers are winter-hardy, cone-producing trees. Almost all conifers are slow-growing evergreens such as Japanese Black Pine, Japanese White Pine, Shimpaku Juniper (and other junipers), Spruce, Cypress, Larch, and many more. These varieties make excellent outdoor bonsai.

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

Most conifers can tolerate and even prefer direct sun, especially Pine and Juniper varieties. Cypress and Cedars are not as sun-loving, but still must be outside in very good light.

AIR

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

CLEANLINESS

It is natural for all conifers to shed interior needles toward the end of summer. Please clean these yellow and brown needles from your bonsai. If the yellow needles still cling to the branch and trunk, just leave them until they come off easily. Make sure all the dead needles are removed from the tree and the top of the soil before the bonsai goes into winter storage.

FERTILIZING

When your bonsai start 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. When 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

Almost all conifers are considered outdoor bonsai. They cannot be successfully grown inside. The best place to put them is outside on a porch, deck, or bench from spring through fall, and even into winter. The important factor regulating how long you leave them out is temperature. If the conifer bonsai is acclimated, it can tolerate temperatures of freezing, and even somewhat below. Here in New England, the winter-hardy trees are outside all spring and summer, and come in for protection around the third week in November. Bring them in when the night temperatures go to freezing consistently. Ideally, you want to put your conifer in a protected area that stays between 25° and 45°F, has good air circulation and some light—a garage or an unheated room or cold frame, for example. Try to avoid wide fluctuations in temperature. **Don't forget to water.** Generally, bonsai need to be watered less frequently when they are in dormancy, but you still have to check them. You still need to water when the tree is somewhat dry, and soak it well when you do water. Light is not as important—since the tree is not pushing out new growth, it does not need much light. Some small bonsai can winter on a cold windowsill. Be sure the tree is not near a heat source.

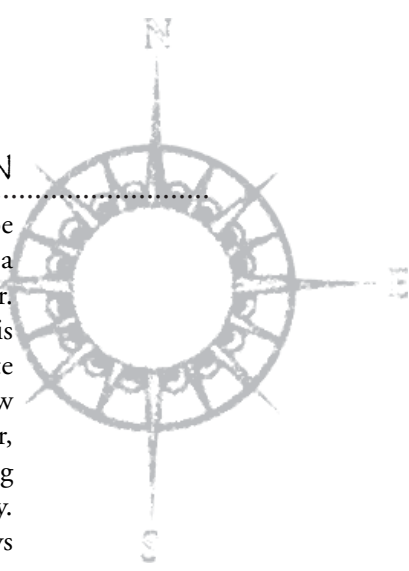
Some people prefer to winter their hardy bonsai by burying them in the ground in a protected spot. This is riskier. You must be sure that the tree is healthy and inherently hardy enough to survive a full hard dormancy. Success depends on what part of the country you are in, how cold it gets, how strong the tree is, and other factors.

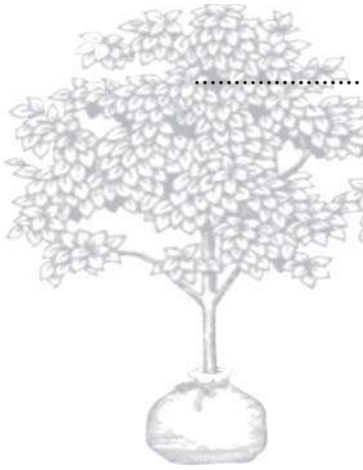
Keep an eye on your winter-hardy bonsai. If you notice new growth starting in the late winter or early spring then the trees will need sun, usually more than they are getting in their winter storage area. Bonsai that come out of dormancy and begin to grow in a lot of sun will have smaller, stronger leaves or needles.

As soon as the temperatures are above freezing consistently, bring the conifer bonsai back outside. If there happens to be a very cold night and the temperature drops below 32°F, you should bring it in for that night.

PESTS AND DISEASES

Conifers are strong trees in general, but they can be affected by some insects and diseases. Watch for scale—small sucking insects that look like little helmets. These must be picked off, then spray the foliage with a mild insecticidal soap or rotenone pyrethrin spray. There is no need to treat for insects unless you actually detect an infestation. If you see caterpillars or larger insects, simply remove them by hand. If your conifer has a fungus, spray the foliage with a mild fungicide such as liquid copper. Do not spray the fungicide into the soil. If you suspect something is wrong with your bonsai, please call us right away.



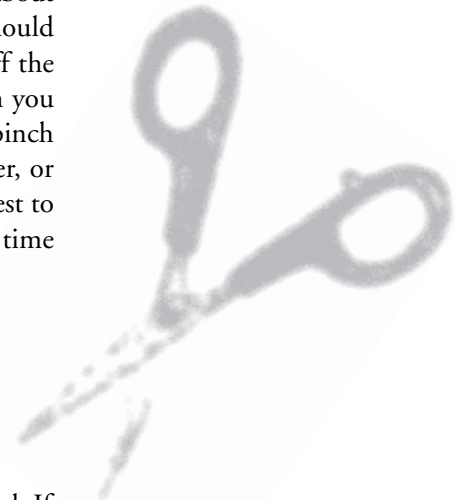


REPOTTING

Frequency of repotting depends on the size and age of the tree, the condition of the roots, and other factors. Older trees, or those in larger pots, may need repotting every two to four years. Younger conifers, or those in small pots, may need to be repotted every year. The best time to transplant conifers is when they are just starting to push out new buds in the spring. The time will vary from tree to tree, and from season to season. 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

Our friend and fellow bonsai professional Mr. Masaru Ishii says about conifers: 'No poodle cut, no barbershop cut.' This means you should never shear-cut the top of conifers. You can cut the needles off the branch directly, but if you are shortening or thinning a branch you must remove each individual bud or cluster of buds. You can pinch new buds by pulling them out with your thumb and forefinger, or you can carefully cut them out with sharp bonsai shears. It is best to consult with a bonsai professional to learn the proper way and time to pinch and pluck needles.



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. Conifers are suited to many styles of bonsai, from formal upright to full cascade. Japanese White Pines make excellent informal upright bonsai, while some cedar and cypress are suited to formal upright. Observe how these trees grow in nature, and you can see them in their most natural and beautiful style. Conifers are traditionally potted in unglazed containers. The browns and reds of the bark and the rich deep green of the foliage are well-suited to the earth tones of unglazed pots.



NEW ENGLAND



BONSAI
Gardens

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