

# BONSAI

Bonsai (pronounced bone-sigh) is an oriental horticultural art form that artistically trains plants to look like small landscape trees. Bonsai is an ancient oriental horticultural art form with a history that dates back to before the birth of Christ. Connected to the Buddhist religion, it began in China and eventually found its way to Japan in the 15th century.

As a horticultural art form, Bonsai is a living sculpture. Being a new owner of a Bonsai, you should be aware that it is possible to grow some Bonsai indoors year-round and some require the use of cold frames during the winter months. Most of the Bonsai we sell at Bennett's are for year-round use in the home.

## LIGHT

A primary concern when considering Bonsai is an adequate light source. The ideal location, for the most commonly used plants, is in a south or west-facing window, un-shaded by buildings or trees. Artificial lighting may be used to supplement poorly lit areas.

## TEMPERATURE

Another consideration when growing Bonsai is the average temperature of your location, especially during the winter. Windowsills are subject to fluctuations in temperature more than the interior of your home. For most Bonsai plants, the range in temperature should be from 60 to 85 degrees F.

## WATERING

Novices usually lose their first plant to improper watering. Every bonsai needs to be checked daily for soil moisture. The best way to judge if water is needed is to stick your finger an inch or so down into the soil. If it is moist, it does not need water. In very hot or windy weather, or in the low humidity of winter, especially with bonsai in very small pots, soil moisture should be checked twice a day.

Soil should never be permitted to become bone dry or to remain soggy. The goal in bonsai watering is to provide even and moderate moisture to the entire root and soil mass.

If your plant dries out to the point of wilt, wet the foliage and soak the soil, then place it in a shady spot until it has recovered. At this point you can then move the plant back to its normal location.

An easy way to water indoors is to set your Bonsai in a pan of water, two to three times a week, letting it soak for 10-15 minutes. Keep the water level high but below the top edge of the pot. Never use softened water because of the salts used in the softening process. Well water or rainwater is best. When using any water that has been treated, it is best to flush the built-up minerals from the soil once every month by watering the top of the soil several times and allowing the water to drain off. Because your Bonsai is planted in a good porous soil there is very little chance of over watering.

Watering bonsai grown outdoors is usually accomplished by overhead watering. Be sure to use a hose nozzle or watering can rosette that delivers a fine spray of water because a forceful jet of water will blast soil out of the pot and can damage the leaves. Continue watering until water runs out of the drainage holes on the bottom of the pot and then continue for another minute or two to insure that the entire soil mass is soaked.

## HUMIDITY

In the average home or office, the dry heat of winter and air-conditioning in summer greatly reduces the humidity levels. Because of their smaller leaf surface and confined pot and soil area, Bonsai seem to suffer a great deal from lack of humidity. This can be corrected by growing them on top of a tray filled with small pebbles. By filling a shallow tray or saucer with ½-1" of pebbles and filling with water to just below the surface of the stones you can create a more humid environment for your Bonsai.

## FERTILIZATION

During the active growing season, Bonsai should be fertilized sparingly with a diluted, water-soluble houseplant fertilizer about once a month. During the winter months, no fertilizer is necessary.

## PRUNING

Since bonsai are living, growing plants, foliage will need to be trimmed to maintain the original design of the tree. New shoots sprouting from branches and twigs should be trimmed periodically,

and shoots emerging from the trunk or its base need to be removed promptly, especially in the growing season. When foliage is trimmed frequently, denser twigging with more and smaller leaves result and the scale of the tree improves.

As the top of the tree grows, so do the roots. All bonsai need periodically root pruned and repotted to maintain good health. Eventually roots will run out of room in the pot and need to be trimmed. Soil becomes worn out and often washed out, so fresh soil must be provided.

Pruning is definitely an art and requires more in-depth information, so we recommend you purchase a book on bonsai to assist you.

At Bennett's, we hope you enjoy the world of Bonsai culture and we welcome your comments and experiences. Your new plant has the potential to join a rare group of plants that may grow to be thousands of years old. As a hobby, investment, or just for fun, your Bonsai should, over the years, become more and more beautiful.

We at Bennett's are here every day to give "Helping Hand Hints" personally, one to one. Many gardening problems are very specific, and we couldn't possibly cover all aspects in these pamphlets. Any time you have a specific problem or need help, feel free to call. It's our job to help you be successful in your growing endeavors, and we thoroughly enjoy giving you a "helping hand."

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## HELPING HAND HINTS



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