

## Bonsai Basic Care Guide

### Outdoor Bonsai Care

If you have an outdoor bonsai it is a temperate tree, which means it prefers to be outside with other trees. It also means that it needs the changes in temperature and daylight length to know when it's time to do all the normal "tree stuff" throughout the year. Genetically, it's just like all the other trees. Because it doesn't have the benefit of being in the ground, the tree needs special care to accommodate for a containerized environment.

**Placement of Bonsai:** The tree should be placed outside in an area where it can get sun and rain. It should also be in a location that is protected from wind. In the summer months, if temperatures exceed 80°, the tree should be placed in partial shade and be monitored closely for water needs. In the winter, if the temperature drops below 35°, the tree should be placed on the ground. If it rains for more than a week, place the tree on a slight tilt so that there will be some water mobility inside the pot. This will promote a healthy balance of water and oxygen. Return the tree to sitting flat in the spring or when the rain subsides.

**Light:** Bonsai plants like sun but must be protected during the heat of the day. Morning sun and afternoon shade is best. All day dappled shade is also acceptable, except for big junipers and big pines, which require direct sun for at least half a day.

**Watering:** When rain levels are not sufficient to keep the tree evenly moist, water regularly. Get to know your tree's water needs. A good way to do this is to notice the weight of the tree when it's dry and again after watering. Begin watering from the top until it drains through the bottom of the pot. Always water your tree until it drains. Watering can be challenging as it does not adhere to a regular schedule. Watering is highly dependent upon the climate, the time a tree has been in a particular pot, fertilizer application, and the general vigor and species of the tree. **Note:** Moss should be treated as an independent entity with entirely different watering needs than the tree itself. Mist your moss and top dress regularly to keep it moist, alive, and growing all the time. Remember that unlike moss, trees don't necessarily require constant moisture.

**Fertilizer:** Fall is a great time to apply fertilizer. You may also use a complete fertilizer during the growing seasons.

**Winter Care:** After 2-3 frosts, or when the leaves have fallen, your Bonsai is ready for winter storage. Clean the tree by brushing the soil clear of dried needles, leaves, and spent blossoms. Remove anything that might grow mold or fungus during storage. Place your Bonsai in a cool and protected location where it will not freeze and water sparingly. This will keep the soil barely moist. Do not feed in winter. Remember that Larch trees are deciduous and will turn yellow and lose their needles in the fall. When growth begins in the spring, remove it from storage, place it in its summer location, and begin spring and summer care.

**Pruning:** Fresh bright green growth will appear at the tips of the branches during the spring and summer months. If the new growth results in a pleasing shape, leave it, if you prefer, trim the tree to look the way you think the tree should look. Each time you pinch the bonsai, new growth will appear. This pinching leads to a nice dense tree. Needles, leaves, and branches that grow from the underside of large branches can be removed.

## Indoor Bonsai Care

If you have an indoor bonsai plant, it will need to be placed inside your home for most of the year with the exception of the warmer summer months. The most common indoor type is a Ficus tree. Some other popular types include Carmona, Schefflera, and Sageretia. Indoor bonsai is different than other indoor houseplants as they are in smaller pots and have limited access to nutrients and water. This means houseplants and indoor bonsai each need to be cared for differently.

**Light:** Indoor Bonsai needs about five hours of indirect or filtered sunlight each day. In the warmer months it will benefit from being outside but avoid direct afternoon sun. During the summer, a few hours of direct morning sun, while the day is still cool, is beneficial to the bonsai.

**Water:** Establish the correct watering schedule appropriate for your bonsai's environment. The top layer of soil should dry slightly between each watering, but never allow the soil to dry completely. Never water based on an established routine. The best practice is to monitor your tree and its soil and only water when needed. Indoor bonsai needs relatively high humidity that is much higher than your house's normal conditions. You can increase humidity levels near your bonsai tree by placing a tray or saucer of gravel covered by water under the bonsai pot or misting regularly.

**Fertilizing:** In the spring, when you see new growth, feed your plant continuously by adding a weak fertilizer solution. Another option is using a slow-release fertilizer on the bonsai.

**Temperature:** During the winter keep your tree where it receives maximum indirect light. Be aware that tender trees may freeze on windowsills or that direct sunlight may be too hot. Also keep away from heat registers, fireplaces, or other heat sources.

**Pruning:** During spring and summer, fresh bright green growth will appear at the tips of the branches. If the new growth results in a pleasing shape leave it as is. If you prefer, trim the tree to change its appearance to match the look you desire. Each time you pinch the bonsai, new growth will appear. Pinching leads to a nice dense bonsai. Leaves and branches that grow from the underside of large branches can be removed.