

BONSAI CARE

WATER -- Soil should be kept moist, not wet. Smaller pots require more frequent watering. To water, soak pots thoroughly in a pan, tub or sink, then let drain. While soaking, rinse the foliage to clean the leaves. Plants with or sending out new leaves require more water than when resting but remember, moist - not wet. Some even do better if kept on the dry side.

FERTILIZING -- Miniaturizing is accomplished by pruning and pinching, not by starving. A 20-20-20 water soluble fertilizer applied at half strength every 10 to 14 days during the growth period will keep plants healthy.

TEMPERATURE -- Outdoor types do best indoors at 65° to 80°. Most need an annual rest (dormancy) of approximately 60 to 90 days at 30° to 50°, normally in the fall. Keep moist but not wet while dormant. They can withstand a light frost but should not freeze hard. After dormancy, they can beg grown again at 65° to 80° for the rest of the year. Indoor types are more ideally suited to day time temperatures of 70° to 80° and 60° to 65° at night. Do not permit indoor types to freeze.

LIGHT -- Filtered (shaded) natural light is necessary for growing bonsai. Avoid direct sunlight if adequate ventilation cannot be provided.

RELATIVE HUMIDITY around bonsai kept indoors may be maintained by setting pots on pebbles in trays in which water is kept almost to the bottom of the pot: Cover with polyethylene when away but only if out of direct sunlight. Bonsai kept outdoors should be misted frequently during real hot windy days.

MOSS helps conserve moisture. A fine spray mist once or twice daily will keep moss in good condition.

PRUNING -- Adequate and timely pruning is essential to good bonsai development and styling. Prune by cutting or pinching back new growth 1/3 to 1/2 or to the desired shape. Proper pruning also helps thicken trunks and branches. Root pruning is done when repotting to generate new feeder roots. Frequency and extent depends upon the kind of plant as well as the style and size desired and cannot be adequately covered here.

REPOTTING -- To keep plants healthy, repot broad-leaved plants every two to three years and conifer or needle leafed evergreens every four to five years. Early spring just as the buds begin to swell is the best time. Carefully remove the plant and pot ball from the pot, soil should be on the dry side. With a fork loosen and remove about 1/2 of the ball, working in from around the edges. Cut off any exposed portions of real heavy roots. Cut back remaining fine roots 1/2 their exposed length. Reposition the plant in the same or a new pot and fill carefully and firmly with fresh new soil specially formulated for bonsai. Water thoroughly and keep the plant in shade until new roots are formed, then fertilize.

GOOD FORTUNE -- These much condensed suggestions are basic though sufficient to keep your bonsai healthy and attractive. You will find much more in the many publications that are available. Why not join a club for maximum enjoyment and satisfaction from your hobby.