

Nature in Miniature – Bonsai

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SUMMARY

The growing of bonsai is more of an art than science, which requires lot of patience and interest and can be developed as a hobby. Further growing of bonsai in houses have additional benefits besides adding the beauty like purifying the air, reduces stress, improves creativity and self-confidence.

INTRODUCTION

Bonsai is defined as the art of growing miniature trees and shrubs in a shallow container. The goal is to keep the plant small while ensuring that it resembles larger full-size trees or shrubs growing naturally in the wild. There are numerous styles and techniques that can be used to achieve the art of growing a small tree or shrub. The term bonsai is derived from the Japanese words bon, which means shallow pan, and sai, which means plant, which means pot or tray planting.



Goal:

The goal of bonsai is to give the impression of great size and age. A very old Bonsai will never be appreciated if its shape or appearance is unappealing, whereas a less old Bonsai will be appreciated more if its shape and branch arrangement are appealing. So, instead of focusing on the age of a Bonsai, focus on its basic structure of trunk, branches, roots, and so on. Bonsai differs from pot plants in which the main criteria is the flower or foliage, whereas in bonsai the artistic look of the plant in the miniature form is important. Bonsai trees range in height from 5 to 30 inches. The ultimate goal of growing a Bonsai is to create a miniaturized but realistic representation of nature in the form of a tree.

Selection of plants of bonsai:

The hardiness of a plant is the most important factor in determining its suitability as a "Bonsai." It should be able to grow in shallow containers and withstand root and branch pruning as well as tough training. Bonsai are best suited to plants with seasonal variation in growth pattern and flowering. A Bonsai plant can be grown from seeds, cuttings, layering, or plants collected in the wild. A wide variety of tropical trees can be grown as "Bonsai." [Abhilash Shukla *et al.*, 2016]. The most popular plants used for bonsai are: *Ficus spp*, Juniper Bonsai (juniperus), *Bougainvillea spp*, *Duranta spp*, *Jasminum spp*, *Murraya spp*, *Hamelia patens*, *Hibiscus rosea sinensis*, *Juniper chinensis*, Neem, Pine, Pomegranate, Poinsettia, Mini Kumquat, Sapota, Schefflera, Bottle Brush, Cypress are some of the plants that make good bonsai. Some of the shrubs or woody climbers may also be grown as Bonsai. The bark should be appealing, and the trunk should be thicker at the bottom than at the top to give the appearance of maturity. Such trees have attractive branches on the lower side of the trunk that are longer and wider in diameter than the branches on the upper side of the trunk. The upper side branches should be smaller in diameter to give the tree a more natural appearance. The adaptability of the plant to that area is also an important consideration when choosing a tree for bonsai planting. [Udit Joshi, 2020]

Being genetically small is ideal for bonsai. Plants that are naturally hardy or tolerable; • Bark that is rough and dark in colour; • Well-branched plants with huge small leaves; • Plants with short internodes; • Plants with small fruits and flowers will be considered for bonsai practise. [Ashraful Kabir and Trevor J. Hawkeswood. 2021]

Selection of containers for bonsai:

The container should be the proper depth and proportionate to the plant's growth. It must be visually appealing as well as long-lasting. The container can be round, oval, or rectangular in shape. A rectangular container looks more artistic for a cascade style than an oval or round container for a single upright stem. An unglazed container is preferred because it allows the soil to breathe. The container's colour should be as natural as possible. Plant growth is slowed or stunted when grown in shallow containers, but the plant is not starved.

Repotting

Repotted bonsai should be done every one to five years, depending on the species and the extent of root growth. Fast-growing plants must be replanted every year, whereas slow-growing plants can be repotted every two to three years. The plant is gently removed from the pot using the earth ball, and all drainage materials are removed. One-third of the old subsoil is removed. Soil that has become lodged between a few of the roots may be removed. Any root that is longer than the container's capacity is cut with a secateur. The plant is then placed in the container, and the container is filled with compost. The plant is watered right away.

Pruning and pinching:

Pruning and pinching are operations that aid in the maintenance of the Bonsai dwarf. Shoots are pruned or pinched to achieve the desired shape of the plant as well as to reduce leaf area. It is required for healthy tree growth. Water supply to the plant is significantly reduced after pruning and pinching of leaves because these plants can only draw a limited amount of water. Such plants, however, require a lot of sunlight.

Styles of bonsai:

There are various types like upright or chokkan style, winding or kyokkuk style, oblique or shakan style, gnarled or hankan style, cascade or kengai style, ikadi buki style, clasped to stone style.

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