

The Basics of Bonsai Growing

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SUMMARY

Bonsai, (Japanese: “tray planting”) living dwarf tree or trees; also, the art of training and growing them in containers. Bonsai specimens are ordinary trees and shrubs, not hereditary dwarfs; they are dwarfed by a system of pruning roots and branches and training branches by tying them with wire. The art originated in China but has been pursued and developed primarily by the Japanese. The young plant developed for Bonsai, must be planted in a small container first. Then give proper shape to that plant. Bonsai can be classified into about ten basic styles, of which the most common are; formal upright, informal upright, slanting, cascade, and semi cascade etc.

INTRODUCTION

Bonsai is an art form that stems from ancient Asian culture, originating in China and developed by the Japanese. In the 13th century, the Japanese collected and potted wild trees that had been dwarfed by nature. These naturally formed miniatures were some of the first bonsai. A bonsai (pronounced “bones-eye”) is literally a “tree in a pot,” which further imitates, in miniature, the appearance of an old tree in nature. Old specimens in nature, unlike juvenile trees, have compact rounded tops, and horizontal or drooping branches, which make them, appear aged and graceful. There are three sizes of bonsai, ranging from under five inches to about thirty inches in height. Purposes of bonsai are primarily contemplation for the viewer, and the pleasant exercise of effort and ingenuity for the grower.^[4] By contrast with other plant cultivation practices, bonsai is not intended for production of food or for medicine. Instead, bonsai practice focuses on long-term cultivation and shaping of one or more small trees growing in a container. A bonsai is created beginning with a specimen of source material. This may be a cutting, seedling, or small tree of a species suitable for bonsai development. Bonsai can be created from nearly any perennial woody-stemmed tree or shrub species^[5] that produces true branches and can be cultivated to remain small through pot confinement with crown and root pruning. Some species are popular as bonsai material because they have characteristics, such as small leaves or needles that make them appropriate for the compact visual scope of bonsai.

The Elements That Make Complete Bonsai

There are three elements which constitute a perfect Bonsai. These are:

- The pots or containers in which the Bonsai plants are planted.
- Soil or Bonsai pot mixture.
- The plants which are grown in the containers.

Out of these three elements, the first two, namely the pots or containers and soil/ media put therein, represent the earth, and the plants represents the tree, bushes and perennial herbs, that grow on the earth. If rocks are used with plants, they serve as auxiliary natural feature. The containers and soil used for Bonsai plantation must be both of such a kind as will be favorable to the growth of plants. If containers are too large, need great quantity of soil to fill, require more space than desirable and their handling become a problem. The size of containers should be like, to which one person can move them freely. The plant used for Bonsai, must be of such type, as will allow it to grow within this restricted space and yet exhibit its entire characteristic when in the natural state. In the end, the plants chosen must be of a dwarf nature, slow growing habit or one that bends itself to growing up as a miniature plant, showing all the feature of a full grown tree.

Essential Conditions for Bonsai

The essential conditions of Bonsai, the following may be listed:

- The plant used as Bonsai in a container must have all the natural characters of a living plant. It should be terminated in the top which indicate the highest point of its growth.
- The stem/trunk near the root and the main stem/trunk above the ground should have all the characters of natural growth, in addition to the appearance of age, feature of large full grown tree that are several decade old.

- The branches must be rich in variety and of artistic appearance.
- The shape of the container and the appearance of the plant, planted in it, must have perfect harmony, so that the overall effect of Bonsai will be one of stability.
- The plant selected must be of such species as exhibit all the variations that accompany the changes of the seasons, so that they will produce enjoyment to the eye round the year.
- All Bonsai-growers must choose such plant for Bonsai which will need minimum of artificiality, to develop natural Bonsai.

Some Principles for Bonsai Growing

The young plant developed for Bonsai, must be planted in a small container first:

- When you find a plant that seems suitable for Bonsai growing, it should be dug out of the soil, planted in a small pot from which water drains freely, given plentiful water to develop roots and placed in semi-shade with less/ diffuse sunlight.
- The young plant should be placed on an outdoor shelf and be watered. When the plant has developed roots, it should be kept on an airy outdoor shelf. (Do not place Bonsai directly on the ground). The plant should be exposed to enough sunlight and applied water freely to keep the surface of soil moist.
- If you have developed layering with the help of sphagnum moss, on an old tree branch, when roots come out from the sphagnum moss, cut on the branch. Plant this branch with roots (appearing from sphagnum moss) in a small container or pot with moss grass to grow it for about a year, determining each part of the tree as (1) the top, (2) the central part, and (3) the lower part.
- The soil should be sifted so that it will both drain and hold water well.
- After two years, remove the plant/tree from the pot for growing and transplant it in a Bonsai container.
- **Care:** For the growth of Bonsai, fertilizer should be given from time to time for its proper growth. When new buds start to grow, should be pinched just about the time, the leaves take definite shape. If you find any insect or pest, they should be removed. In winter, take proper care/ protection measures to prevent the container soil from freezing.
- **Transplanting:** Transplanting should be carried out once in every one or two years. This process should be taken place in the month of spring just before the new growth starts.

If all these principles kept in mind or followed properly in the care of Bonsai plants, in a few years, a true Bonsai will develop and may even bear flower or fruits, depending on the species.

Different Styles of Bonsai

Bonsai can be classified into about ten basic styles, of which the most common are; formal upright, informal upright, slanting, cascade, and semi cascade. These classifications are based on the overall shape of the tree and how much the trunk slants away from an imaginary vertical axis.

- **The formal upright style:-** It is one style of bonsai that is considered to be easy for the novice bonsai grower. This style features a straight trunk and a bottom branch that is lower and extends farther from the trunk than the opposite branch.
- **The informal upright style:-** This style is the best choice for beginners since creation of this type teaches the most about bonsai design. The trunk is upright, but curving rather than straight, usually forming a zig-zag pyramidal shape. Major branches occur at the angles where the trunk bends, and the apex is aligned over the base of the trunk regardless of the directional shifts in the trunk. Achieving the alignment of trunk base and apex makes the tree asymmetrically balanced.
- **In the slanting style:** the trunk has a single more acute angle than in the informal upright style. The lowest branch spreads in a direction opposite to that in which the tree slants.
- **The cascade style of bonsai:** In this style natural tree growing down the face of an embankment. A cascaded planting usually looks best in a deep round or hexagonal container.
- **The semi cascade style:** This style has a curving trunk that does not reach the bottom of the container as in the cascade style. Prostrate junipers and flowering plants adapt well to both of these styles.

- **Multiple trunk style:** In this style, tree may have two or more trunks. The group of trunks would have a front and back with spreading side and back branches coming from the individual trunks in the appropriate positions and roots of tree connected each other showing separate identity.
- **Group planting:** in this case plants planted cluster form and trained like a mini forest in a single container.
- **Rock Planting:** The sapling of Bonsai planted in the convinces rock places. The pieces and tree planting are arranged in such a way that it should look like a natural rockery with tree struggling out from the crevices.
- **Trees growing from one root:** In this case Bonsai developed in such a way where roots shows one plant system from which different trunk of trees arises. It look as, several trees are growing from one root.
- **Twisted trunk:** A single tree with a twisted or gnarled trunk.

CONCLUSION

Bonsai cultivation and care involves the long-term cultivation of small trees in containers, called bonsai in the Japanese tradition of this art form. The ultimate goal of growing a Bonsai is to create a miniaturized but realistic representation of nature in the form of a tree. Bonsai are not genetically dwarfed plants, in fact, any tree species can be used to grow one. Bonsai growing is considered to be more of an art form and is a skill that should be developed over time. In India bonsai preparation is wide scope in now days.

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