

Juniper Bonsai

The Japanese Garden Juniper (*Juniperus procumbens* 'nana') is widely regarded as the most beloved and iconic bonsai tree in the United States, and for good cause. These hardy and versatile trees are ideal for bonsai cultivation. Aside from this variety, there are numerous other types of junipers available. Junipers have an impressive lifespan and can thrive for many years. In fact, there are Juniper bonsai trees that are over 500 years old, so owning a Juniper bonsai promises years of delight ahead.



Water

There is no universal watering schedule that applies to all bonsai trees. Bonsai trees can quickly dry out due to their placement in coarse soil and shallow containers. Depending on factors such as the tree species, pot size, soil type, climate, and more, you may need to water your bonsai daily in certain cases. To determine if your bonsai needs watering, check the soil moisture level by inserting your finger about half an inch into the soil. If the top half inch feels dry, it is time to water the bonsai thoroughly.

When watering, ensure that the bonsai is soaked adequately. You can either let it soak in water for a few minutes until it absorbs enough moisture from the drainage holes, or water it from above, allowing the water to drain through multiple times. Avoid letting the soil completely dry out or keeping it excessively wet at all times. Base your watering frequency on the soil's moisture level. If you are unsure whether the soil is wet or dry, soak the bonsai thoroughly and monitor how the soil dries over time by checking it periodically.

It is essential to check your bonsai daily and assess the soil moisture levels. If the soil still feels moist, you may not need to water immediately. However, on hot or windy days, or if your bonsai is confined in a small pot or root-bound, you may need to water more frequently. It is better to err on the side of caution. Check different areas of the soil; if one part is dry, focus on watering that specific area. Remember, never let your bonsai tree become excessively dry to ensure its health and vitality.



Light

Despite common misconceptions, Junipers actually thrive and even favor full sun.



Air

Adequate air circulation promotes cell growth. It is crucial to always place your Juniper bonsai in a well-ventilated location to ensure optimal health.



Fertilizing

When your bonsai displays fresh, light-green growth, it signals the right time to begin fertilizing. Utilize a gentle organic fertilizer in either pellet or liquid form, typically with an equal distribution of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium (NPK) throughout the growing season, adjusting to lower nitrogen levels in the autumn. Administer the pellets once per month and the liquid fertilizer every two weeks. As the tree's growth rate decelerates in mid to late summer, reduce the frequency of liquid fertilizer to once a month. During the bonsai's winter dormancy period, abstain from fertilizing. It is important to note that under no circumstances should a feeble tree be fertilized.



Location

Junipers should be placed outdoors in spring when the temperature exceeds 40°F. A porch, deck, or similarly exposed area is ideal. Aim to provide your juniper with at least half a day of direct sunlight. It is crucial to maintain consistency and avoid frequently moving it indoors and outdoors. Keep the juniper outdoors day and night until the late autumn/early winter when temperatures consistently hover around freezing. This gradual transition ensures that the bonsai enters dormancy naturally and slowly, allowing it to fortify and store energy for the winter ahead. Once temperatures consistently remain at freezing levels, it is essential to provide winter protection for your bonsai. A cool or cold (25°F to 45°F), well-ventilated, and well-lit location is preferable. An unheated room, attached garage, or cool basement will suffice. Remember to monitor the bonsai's water needs throughout the winter. While you may not need water as frequently, ensure thorough soaking when necessary. While there are alternative methods to overwinter bonsai, such as burying the entire pot in the ground, the method

described above is recommended. If you receive a Juniper during the winter months, keep it indoors near the coolest and brightest window until it can be safely moved outside. Ensure the tree is not positioned close to a heat source and regularly mist it.



Cleanliness

Ensure that your juniper remains free of old needles, dead branches, and any other debris. Remove these deceased needles not only from the tree itself but also from the topsoil using tweezers, which are effective tools for this task. Additionally, a gentle weekly shower can be beneficial for the juniper's maintenance.



Pests & Diseases

Junipers are a favorite of spider mites, tiny sucking insects that are hardly noticeable to the naked eye. If you observe dense webbing at the tree's top (not between branches, which is typically from harmless regular spiders), or if the foliage appears gray or bleached, spider mites may be present. To check, place a clean white sheet of paper under the bonsai and gently shake the foliage over it. If tiny specks fall onto the paper, wait a moment. If these specks start moving, it is likely spider mites. To address this, shower the tree with lukewarm water and then apply a mild insecticide like rotenone pyrethrin spray. Repeat this thorough spraying once a week for three weeks, monitoring for mites. The process may need to be repeated.

Junipers can also be vulnerable to fungus, especially in darker, cooler environments. Fungus may manifest as gray, tan, or black areas on the branches. If fungus is suspected, it is advisable to seek professional assistance. If confirmed, you can treat it with a mild fungicide such as liquid copper. When in doubt about the health of your bonsai, consulting with a professional is recommended. Remember, maintaining a healthy bonsai is the best defense against pests and diseases.



Repotting

The frequency of repotting is determined by numerous factors such as the size and age of the tree, the root condition, and other considerations. Younger Junipers or those in smaller pots may require repotting annually, while older trees or those in larger pots may need repotting every two to four years. The optimal time for transplanting Junipers is when they begin to show new growth in the spring. The timing of new growth initiation varies depending on the climate and the specific tree, so keep an eye out for fresh green buds. Repotting, a crucial procedure that often involves root pruning, should be performed correctly. Assistance with this process is available. Additional resources include workshops, reputable bonsai books, fellow bonsai enthusiasts, or local bonsai clubs for guidance and support.



Pruning & Shaping

Avoid giving Junipers a "poodle cut." To reduce excessive top growth, gently pinch the buds between your thumb and forefinger, twisting them until they pop out. You can also pinch off needles that are growing close to the trunk and branches. The goal is to maintain visibility of the trunk and branches while cultivating a pleasing, cloud-like crown of foliage on top. It is important to remember that during periods of vigorous growth when the bonsai is producing a lot of new growth, pruning and pinching can be done safely. The key is to prune enough to maintain the desired shape without weakening the bonsai. Proper pruning and shaping techniques involve more detailed considerations, and we are here to assist you with this. It is also beneficial to refer to a good bonsai book and seek advice from experienced bonsai enthusiasts for additional guidance.



Desing & Styling

The finest and most exquisite bonsai trees exude a natural appearance. By studying mature trees in their natural habitats, one can sense their unique character and resilience. This authenticity is the ultimate goal we aim for in bonsai cultivation. According to John Naka, all Junipers should exhibit jin and shari – a technique involving carving the wood to simulate a weathered driftwood

effect on the branches or trunk. Given their low growth habit, Junipers are well-suited for styles such as informal upright, windswept, semi-cascade, and cascade. Additionally, it is customary to plant Junipers in unglazed containers for a traditional touch.