

Subtropical Bonsai

The subtropical regions around the globe provide a wide range of exceptional tree and plant species suitable for bonsai cultivation. Examples include Serissa, Podocarpus, Olive, Pomegranate, Brush Cherry, select Azalea varieties, Myrtle, and numerous others. Certain of these arboreal species exhibit intricate, vibrant leaves, fruits, and flowers. While many can thrive indoors throughout the year, they generally thrive best outdoors during the summer months, when temperatures exceed 50°F.



There is no universal watering schedule that can be universally applied to bonsai trees. Bonsai trees can quickly become dehydrated due to their planting in coarse soil and shallow containers. Depending on factors such as the tree species, pot size, soil type, climate conditions, and more, watering frequency can vary. The most effective method to determine if a bonsai tree requires watering is to assess the soil moisture level. By inserting your finger about half an inch into the soil, you can gauge the moisture content. If the top half inch of soil feels dry, it is time to water the bonsai thoroughly.

When watering, it is important to ensure the bonsai is sufficiently soaked. This can be achieved by either allowing the bonsai to sit in water for a few minutes until it absorbs water through the drainage holes, or by showering water from above and allowing it to drain through multiple times. It is crucial to avoid letting the soil completely dry out, yet it is equally important not to keep it excessively wet. The key is to adjust your watering based on the moisture content of the soil. If uncertain about the soil's moisture level, it is advisable to soak the bonsai and monitor how the soil dries over time.

Regularly check the bonsai tree's moisture level, especially in conditions such as hot weather, high winds, or if the bonsai is root-bound or planted in a small pot. If any part of the soil feels dry, that specific area needs watering. Consistently monitoring and adjusting the watering routine is essential to prevent the bonsai from becoming too dry.



Light

To mimic a subtropical setting for your bonsai, place it in a well-lit window. While certain bonsai varieties can manage lower light levels, most can thrive in abundant sunlight, whether indoors or outdoors, once they have adjusted. When transitioning an indoor bonsai to outdoor sunlight, it is important to gradually acclimate it to the sun to prevent leaf burn. Avoid exposing an indoor tree directly to sunlight when first moving it outside; instead, introduce it gradually to sunlight to prevent leaf damage.



Air

In fair weather, when your indoor subtropical bonsai is inside, consider opening a window, and during winter, using a fan can be beneficial. Adequate air circulation promotes cell growth and contributes to the overall health of the tree.



Fertilizing

When your indoor or subtropical bonsai is in its active growth phase, typically during spring to early fall, it is time to provide it with nutrients. If the bonsai is situated outdoors, consider using Green King® or similar organic pellets, or opt for a liquid mix of fish and seaweed. For indoor bonsai, utilize a balanced, diluted bonsai-specific solution like Pokon® or a half-strength mixture of any 10-10-10 fertilizer. It is important to avoid over-fertilizing and refrain from feeding a weakened or stressed tree.



Location

Subtropical bonsai thrive when placed outdoors throughout the summer when temperatures exceed 50°F. As summer draws to a close and nighttime temperatures dip below 50°F, it is advisable to bring the subtropical bonsai indoors. To combat the dry winter conditions, utilizing a humidity tray can be beneficial, ensuring it is not positioned near a source of heat. Many varieties can also be successfully grown indoors throughout the year. Position your subtropical bonsai on trays near a window for optimal light exposure. Consider using a small fan to promote air circulation and regular misting to maintain adequate humidity levels.



Cleanliness

As your bonsai matures, it will naturally shed some leaves. Regularly remove any dead leaves from both the tree and the topsoil, and gently shower the foliage once a week. This practice can help deter pests and diseases from affecting your bonsai.



Pests & Diseases

Just like children can catch a cold, bonsai trees are prone to common houseplant pests and diseases. The key defense is to maintain cleanliness and ensure the tree's overall health. Regularly monitor your bonsai for any signs of abnormal leaf shedding, sticky foliage, or visible insects. If any issues are detected, it is important to address them promptly. Begin by rinsing the tree with lukewarm water to eliminate any insects, followed by applying a mild insecticidal soap (always adhering to the product instructions). Typically, a single application may not suffice, so you may need to repeat the treatment weekly for two to three weeks. While the insects may initially recede, they could reappear within a few weeks or months. Stay vigilant and diligent in addressing pest issues.

Contrary to popular belief, indoor bonsai trees are more susceptible to insect infestations compared to outdoor bonsai. Allowing your bonsai to spend time outdoors during the summer can enhance its resilience and resistance against pests. Indoor trees are also prone to fungal infections and other diseases, so it is important to learn how to identify and treat such issues. If more robust measures are required, feel free to seek guidance from us.



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

The frequency of trimming your tree will be determined by its growth rate. Similar to getting a haircut, you should trim the foliage when it begins to lose its desired shape. It is crucial not to trim excessively, as this could weaken the tree, but rather trim enough to maintain its well-defined shape. Any unwanted sucker growth emerging at the base of the trunk or in the tree's bends can be removed unless you intend to develop a branch or trunk in that specific area. Significant pruning is typically conducted when the bonsai is at its peak strength, typically from early spring to early summer. If you require assistance with trimming, feel free to visit us or reach out for guidance.



Design & Styling

The most exceptional and visually appealing bonsai trees are those that exhibit a natural appearance. By studying mature trees in their original habitats, you can perceive their unique character and resilience. This natural aesthetic is the ultimate goal in bonsai cultivation. Numerous subtropical bonsai varieties boast features such as flowers, fruits, or vibrant foliage, which complement beautifully with colorful or glazed containers. While subtropical bonsai trees can be trained in assorted styles, they are often shaped into informal upright and semi-cascade styles, as these reflect their natural growth patterns. The broom-style training is also a popular choice for these varieties.