

# HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET

CORNELL Cooperative Extension  
Nassau County



Nassau County  
Horticulture Program  
Eisenhower Park  
East Meadow, NY 11554  
516 228-0426

## Bonsai Culture

Many Americans are becoming interested in bonsai, the Japanese art of growing dwarf plants in containers. Contrary to popular belief, bonsai is not a tree nor is it the product of special seeds.

A presentable bonsai specimen can be grown from a fairly large number of woody landscape plants as well as some houseplants. Through proper pruning of roots and branches, shaping and shallow potting, the illusion of a miniature plant can be created in a few seasons.

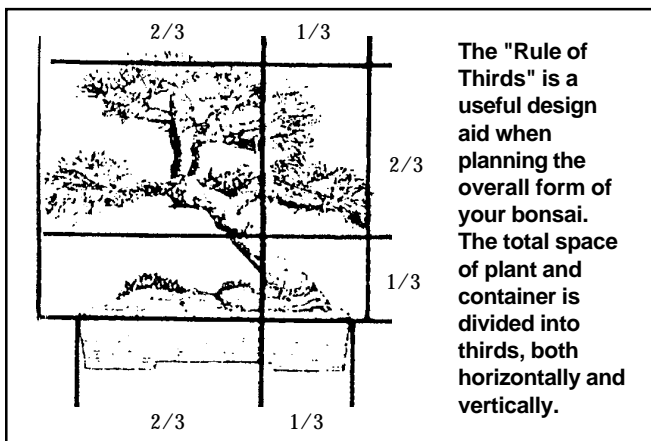
### Selecting your plant

When choosing the type of plant to work with, consider the following characteristics:

- Small leaves or needles
- Short spaces between leaves
- Attractive bark and branching pattern

The easiest method for beginners is to purchase a plant that already shows bonsai potential. Look for plants with good root and branch systems because they will have to withstand severe initial pruning. Do not buy a plant that can't be transplanted easily.

Once you have selected the proper plant, proceed with training it. Decide which overall form and style best fits your plant - slanted, upright, cascade, etc.



### Creating your bonsai

Excess foliage that detracts from the plant's overall appearance should be removed.

After the top is pruned, trim the roots. By thinning the roots gradually over a few years, the plant will be more adaptable to growth in a small container. Leave surface roots intact as they will add to the "age" and appearance of your bonsai.

### Wiring

This is the technique that will shape your plant. It is done after pruning.

Flexible rubber coated copper wire is used, with sizes 10, 12, 14 and 16 being the most common. Wire as light as No. 16 is for very thin branches. Wiring is always done from the trunk upwards and never too tightly. Remove the wire before it constricts the bark.

### Choosing a container

Bonsai containers are available at most large nurseries or specialty shops.

At the end of one year of training, move the plant to its final container, trimming whatever roots are necessary. The container you choose should enhance the overall appearance of your plant.

### Seasonal care

Bonsai created from outdoor plants must be kept outdoors most of the year.

#### a. Summer

Give your bonsai about 3-5 hours a day of direct sun outdoors. Screening protects it from drying winds and excess sun. Usually daily watering is necessary - sometimes twice a day.

A-1-18 AG-DWM revised RT 1/03

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**b. Fall**

Prepare your plant for the oncoming cold weather; water less, reduce fertilization and don't prune after mid-July.

**c. Winter**

Bonsai cannot tolerate below freezing temperatures, so a greenhouse, cold frame or cool indoor location must be utilized to house your bonsai. Water if needed.

**d. Spring**

Resume normal fertilization and watering practices. A good time to begin a new bonsai and for training last season's plants.

Before purchasing or starting bonsai, become familiar with some of the references listed or become affiliated with a bonsai society.

***References***

1. Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1953. "Bonsai: The Dwarfed Potted Trees of Japan." Handbook No. 13, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1000 Washington Avenue, Brooklyn NY 11225
2. Brooklyn Botanic Garden. 166. "Bonsai: Special Techniques." Handbook No. 51.
3. H. M. Cathey, 1973. "Growing Bonsai," U. S. Dept. of Agriculture and Home and Garden Bulletin 206, for sale by Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 20402.
4. G. G. Hull, 1964. "Bonsai for Americans," Doubleday & Co. Inc., 501 Franklin Avenue, Garden City NY 11530.