



GROWING A JAPANESE MAPLE

Bonsai
Trees

Soils
Fertilizer
Sundries

Bonsai Southwest

Pots
Tools

Pre-Bonsai
Suiseki

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Position

Japanese Maple Bonsai do really well in sunny and airy locations, but when temperatures rise to 85 °F (30 °C) or above, it should be placed somewhere with indirect sunlight to prevent the sun from damaging the leaves. The Japanese Maple is frost hardy, even when trained as a Bonsai, but when temperatures drop below 15 °F (-10 °C), it should be protected, for example by being placed in a coldframe. DO NOT GROW INDOORS.

Watering

Never allow compost to dry out, keep the compost evenly moist. Check the compost daily but only water when necessary. Water thoroughly with plenty of water allowing it to flow through the soil and flush out stale air and any built up chemical salt deposits.

A Japanese Maple Bonsai must be watered daily during the growing season. During the hotter days in the growing season, it's sometimes necessary to water your tree several times, if the soil is well-drained and the tree is healthy and vigorous. As with all Bonsai, make sure to water on observation and not on a fixed schedule; the soil should never dry out completely. Avoid watering with calcareous water as the Japanese Maple prefers a neutral or slightly acid pH-value.

Watering daily as a routine when it is not required, results in soggy compost which will lead to lack of vigour, root rot and eventually death.

Feeding

Solid, organic fertilizers contain all the required micronutrients, and they take effect slowly and gently. They are very well-proven, especially for more mature Japanese Maple Bonsai. If you'd like a stronger growth on young plants or raw material, you can combine your regular dosage with a liquid fertilizer once a week. Avoid fertilizers with high nitrogen.

Pruning & Wiring

Trimming shoots and twigs can be done year-round. Strong branches should be pruned in autumn or summer, when callus growth is quick, to prevent excessive bleeding. When pruning thick branches use a cut paste product to prevent fungal diseases that can enter through pruning wounds. New growth should be pruned back to one or two pairs of leaves. Mature Bonsai with a delicate ramification can be pinched in order to keep the twigs thin. After the first leaf pair has unfolded, remove the soft little tip of the shoot between them to prevent the twigs from thickening. This method weakens the tree in the long run and should be applied specifically and thoughtfully.

Leaf pruning is the removal of all leaves during the growing season to encourage a second and often finer flush of growth. I do not recommend it because it puts quite a bit of stress on the tree. Partial leaf pruning is a more gentle and less stressful pruning method, so it can be done every year. As the name suggests, partial pruning does not require you to remove all the leaves. Remove the largest leaves, closely spaced leaves, or the leaves in the strongest areas of the tree.

Repotting

The Japanese Maple Bonsai should be repotted every two years. It has strong roots that grow quickly and usually fill the pot in a short time, so be sure to prune the roots efficiently as per the instructions in the repotting Bonsai section. Use a well-drained soil mixture, like Akadama mixed with Pumice and lava rock. Use a free-draining soil medium, such as a mixture of akadama, lava rock and pumice in a ratio of 3:1:1. The soil particle size should be approximately 2mm—6mm for medium and large trees, and slightly small for shohin size bonsai. If in any doubt please seek professional help or advice.

Don't repot for the sake of it. Repot when the tree has obviously filled the pot with roots or when water will not percolate into the soil and drain freely.

Pests and diseases

The Japanese Maple is a very sturdy tree species, but it can be affected by sap-sucking insects known as aphids in spring. Get rid of aphids with a standard insecticide spray, and follow the direction on the label. Verticillium wilt is a fungal disease that can cause the Japanese Maple Bonsai to partially or completely die. This disease is not treatable and can be transmitted to other trees via your Bonsai tools. You can identify it on fresh cuts as black spots in the wood. If you suspect Verticillium is present in your tree(s) be sure to thoroughly clean and disinfect your tools.

A winter wash with lime sulphur will eradicate overwintering pests and help to control fungal problems..

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If you have any worries or questions please don't hesitate to contact me or seek more local professional help and advice.