



GROWING A CRAB APPLE

Bonsai
Trees

Soils
Fertilizer
Sundries

Bonsai Southwest

Pots
Tools

Pre-Bonsai
Suiseki

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Position

The crab apple needs a lot of sunlight and aeration, so place the tree outside in full sun. On the other hand it does not like strong heat, so don't place it in front of a wall or on paving slabs which heat up during the day. The tree is frost hardy but crab apples planted in bonsai containers should be protected from strong frosts for safety. 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.

The crab apple needs a lot of water during the growing season and must not dry out, especially when it flowers or produces fruit. Those will be dropped if sufficient water is not provided in time. In winter the apple must be kept slightly moist. Apples don't like acidic water and soil, so in most cases tap water is just fine for watering. 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

Apply solid organic fertilizer every four weeks or use a balanced liquid fertilizer every week during the growing season. Take care not to use a very nitrogen-rich fertilizer while the tree flowers or develops fruit because this would encourage the tree to grow strongly instead of producing fruit. Always apply the liquid fertilizer on moist soil.

Pruning & Wiring

Prune the crab apple in late autumn, after the leaves have fallen. Then flower buds and leaf buds are easily identified and you can take care not to cut off all flower buds. During the growing season trim back new shoots to one or two leaves when they grow overly long and thicken too much. If the tree produces a great number of fruit, remove all but one from each cluster in order not to weaken the tree. Younger branches and twigs can be wired but older ones are quite brittle and you better shape them with guy wires.

Repotting

Young crabapple trees should be repotted every two or three years in spring, older ones every four or five years. When the trees get weaker it is important to repot and prune the roots. As the apple bonsai tree needs a lot of water and nutrients, choose a slightly larger pot and use a soil mix which can retain enough water but is still well-draining. Use a free-draining soil medium, such as a mixture of akadama, lava rock and pumice in a ratio of 5:1:1. 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

Unfortunately the crab apple, like most members of the Rosaceae family, is attacked by a wide range of pests and diseases. Aphids, scale, mealybugs and caterpillars can be removed manually and / or controlled with a specific insecticide. Red spider mites require an acaricide. If mildew or rust occurs, a special fungicide is needed. Apple bonsai trees are also often infected by canker. The tree parts with ulcerations should be cut off, wounds must be sealed carefully and tools disinfected. A winter wash with lime sulphur will eradicate overwintering pests and help to control fungal problems..

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