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JAPANESE BLACK PINE CARE GUIDE

One of the two well-known pine species which produce two flushes of growth per year are both from Japan and grow near the shores. Storms often break off their new candles in June and the trees are well adapted to producing a second flush afterwards. The Japanese Black Pine is a strong tree with long, dark green, hard needles in clusters of two. It grows more or less by the sea.

It is important to understand where our pine species live in nature and which characteristics they have, in order to know how to treat them correctly as a Bonsai tree. The Japanese Black and Red pines can lose their first flush of growth and some of their foliage due to storms which often occur in early or mid summer in Japan. Afterwards they can produce a second flush of growth quite quickly which matures until autumn. This incident can be copied by the Bonsai artist in order to achieve shorter needles on more compact shoots and extra ramification. But it is necessary that the growing season is long enough for the second flush to fully develop.

Position, Light Levels & Temperature:

Place the pine Bonsai outside in full sun. This helps the first and second flush of growth develop and adds to decreasing the needle size (needles grow longer if the tree doesn't get enough sunlight). Pine trees are very hardy, but still need to be protected during the winter when they are planted in containers.

Watering:

Be careful not to over-water, as pines dislike permanent moisture. Good drainage is required. Protect the trees from excess rain while the second flush is developing because too much water will make the needles grow longer than necessary.

Repotting:

Every year or two years in a free draining soil mix in Spring. Repot with care just as leaf-buds swell and show signs of growth.. (Pine soil mix. 1 part Akadama : 2 or 3 parts Pumice or Leca)

Fertilizing:

Fertilize weak trees all year round, as long as the temperatures do not drop too low. Fertilize healthy trees from early spring (March) to early summer until the candles are cut. Solid organic fertilizer should be applied at least three times at intervals of 4 weeks before decandling. Then stop fertilizing until the secondary candle growth has hardened. Fertilize again from early to late autumn.

Pruning / Training:

Remove the candles in early to mid summer on healthy trees, leaving only a small stub of about 1/4" (6mm) with a few pairs of needles. Cut off the tip of dormant buds to activate their growth. In autumn, after the second growth has matured, remove surplus shoots. Where more than two are growing from the same point, select two which are growing lateral and in the desired direction, form a v-shape and are of the same strength. Remove the others. In strong parts of the tree pluck excess old needles to balance the growth of the tree.

Wire the pines from early autumn to early spring, or just after candle pruning in early to mid summer.

Pests and Diseases:

Pines can be affected by aphids, spider mites, scale or caterpillars. Sometimes they are also attacked by fungal diseases and root rot. Specific pesticides must be used in that case and it is recommended to get help from an expert in this situation, because pines can die quickly from the moment the first sign of disease gets visible. But if pines are placed in a sunny position and are cared for properly they tend to be very healthy. Spray proactively for pest and fungus problems. Prevention is better than cure. Use diluted lime sulphur as a winter wash in December and January.

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