



GROWING A CHINESE ELM

Bonsai Southwest

Bonsai Trees

Soils
Fertilizer
Sundries

Pots
Tools

Pre-Bonsai
Suiseki

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Position

The Chinese elm thrives in either full sun and or partial shade. In temperate climates, it can be left outdoors even during winter months. If you have an indoor Chinese Elm Bonsai you can place it outside during the summer, but it's best to bring it into a cool, but frost-free, room in the winter. The Chinese Elm can usually endure some frost but it differs depending on the region it was imported from. Trees from northern Chinese regions are more frost-hardy than those coming from southern areas. Depending on winter temperatures Chinese Elms either drop their leaves or keep them until spring when the new shoots emerge. I usually grow and treat them as outdoor bonsai.

Watering

Never allow soil to dry out, keep the soil evenly moist. Check the soil 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 Chinese Elm can not endure prolonged drought or constant moisture. Ignore labels stating your Chinese elm needs watering every day, you need to water on observation. Wait until the topsoil is dry, and then water generously, making sure the entire root-mass is watered. 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. Learn to water correctly for best results.

Feeding

Apply solid organic fertilizer every four weeks or use a weak balanced liquid fertilizer every week during the growing season. Always apply the liquid fertilizer on moist soil.

Pruning, Wiring & Development

During the growing season trim back new shoots to one or two leaves when they grow overly long and thicken too much. Any that have grown too thick can be removed. Seal the wound with a suitable wound sealant.

Younger branches and twigs can be wired into shape but older ones are better shaping with guy wires. The apex on most varieties is quite dominant so you can prune that back harder than the lower branches.

Developing young trees requires that you allow the tree to grow freely without pruning until the new shoots are perhaps more than 30-50 cm long. This will thicken the trunk and help any wire marks grow out. Allowing lower branches to grow and keeping the apex under control will help to develop taper in the trunk.

Repotting

Young elm trees should be repotted every 3 or 4 years in spring, older ones every four or five years or even longer. As the elm 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 4:1:1. 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 only 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 Chinese Elm is often infested by spider mites or scale when humidity is low. Appropriate pesticides should be used, and frequent spraying with water helps to deter pests and diseases. Spraying with thinned lime-sulfur or systemic pesticides can cause the Chinese Elm to lose all its leaves, so avoid these products. 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.