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ITOIGAWA JUNIPER

Japan is home to some of the best Juniper bonsai in the world. The most famous variety is the Itoigawa Shimpaku (*Juniperus chinensis* var. *Itoigawa*) found in the Niigata Prefecture. Other varieties used for bonsai in Japan include the Kishu, Shimpaku from Wakayama, the Tohoku Shimpaku from Tohoku Prefecture and the Hokkaido Shimpaku from northern Hokkaido, Japan. These juniper species with scale-like foliage are all referred to as Shimpaku.

Itoigawa is the finest juniper variety for bonsai. The very compact fine deep green foliage makes for an especially fine and refined tree when mature. But, in spite of the trees very compact appearance it still grows very quickly and develops great bonsai in a relatively quick time. They are very easy to keep and fully hardy in all areas of the U.K. This variety appreciates a little protection on the hottest of summer days and a little shelter from drying winds.

This tree was imported from Japan 2020. A exceptionally beautiful and refined juniper with mature branch structure and exceptional dense foliage. Incredible movement in its trunk. Junipers like this take decades to produce and are becoming rare and increasingly expensive as demand dramatically outstrips supply. This stunning tree has it all including superb trunk shape and branch placement. It's been years since I saw such a beautiful small compact juniper of this quality. Good management will see this beautiful tree exhibition ready in a short time.

Position, Light Levels & Temperature:

Place Itoigawa juniper bonsai outdoors in full sun year-round. Itoigawa **will not** survive being indoors and will not tolerate even short periods inside so **don't** be tempted to display it in the front room at all. If you happen to live in a very hot, dry climate, though, consider placing them in some afternoon shade. I place many of my juniper bonsai under 30% shade cloth during the hottest summer months. You might notice that your junipers become slightly greener under shade cloth, this is normal.

Watering:

Itoigawa juniper bonsai do well if kept slightly moist. As a general guideline, check the water twice per day during the growing season from early Spring through late autumn. Most juniper bonsai will need to be watered at least once per day, and sometimes twice per day, during this period. Water thoroughly using a watering can or hose with a fine spray nozzle, with lots of water as the soil surface becomes dry and mist the foliage when watering in the morning. If you think the tree is not absorbing water you can water it by placing it in a bucket of water that is deep enough to submerge the entire root mass. Remove from the water when the bubbles have stopped.

In the winter, check once per day and water as needed, which could be as little as once every 3-5 days depending on the climate and the individual tree.

Fertilizing:

Fertilizing Itoigawa juniper bonsai will be dependent on the stage of development of the tree. For example, younger junipers are best fertilized with a high-nitrogen synthetic fertilizer to rapidly increase their size and vigour. Older, more refined trees like this one should be fertilized with a milder organic fertilizer with a lower nitrogen value.

All junipers, regardless of development, should be fertilized from the early growing season through late Autumn.

Pruning / Training:

Pruning Itoigawa Juniper is a relatively easy process and is best done at two or three optimal times throughout the growing season. First, in early Spring, allow your Juniper bonsai to grow freely and do not prune the new shoots as they emerge. Allowing the growth to elongate will assist with growth hormone transport throughout the tree, producing more vigorous root growth and subsequent shoot growth.

Once the new shoots have fully elongated, typically by early summer, prune each shoot back using scissors. Be sure to cut the shoot itself and **not** the foliage tips.

After the first pruning, Junipers will flush a second time. Allow this secondary flush to elongate again for six to eight weeks, then prune again. Repeat this process throughout the growing season as needed. By pruning Itoigawa juniper bonsai in this way, you can easily create a full, well-developed bonsai in a short period of time.

Additionally, juniper bonsai will shed interior foliage as the temperatures start to heat up in summer. This yellowing interior growth is perfectly normal so don't panic. This is a normal process, the tree is shedding weaker foliage in favour of stronger external foliage to help offset over-transpiration.

In order to limit the amount of yellowing foliage produced by a juniper, you can consider removing some growth from the tree earlier in the Spring season.

For example, remove foliage on the undersides of pads, as well as crotch growth and unnecessary branches in the tree's design. Be sure to leave the extending shoots intact and uncut at this point in Spring.

Wiring and styling of Japanese juniper bonsai can be done at any time throughout the year. However, keep in mind that the more invasive the work, the more you will want to avoid the hottest and coldest times of year to perform the work.

For example, if you plan to split branches, apply raffia and heavily bend branches into place, this work is best done in the autumn.

If, on the other hand, you are simply detail wiring a juniper bonsai, this can be done at any time throughout the year, including mid-summer and deep winter.

Creating shari on junipers can also be done at any point during the year; however, the optimal time to perform this bonsai technique is in early to mid-summer. At that time of year, juniper vascular tissue can be easily peeled and will immediately begin to callous along the edges of the newly created shari deadwood. Avoid winter for this type of work if possible, as callous formation does not happen when junipers are dormant.

Repotting:

Repotting juniper bonsai is best done in early Spring just as the foliage begins to return to a normal green colour. This usually happens sometime in March in the northern hemisphere. When repotting, do not remove all of the original soil, but rather leave a core of older soil beneath the trunk to preserve the health of the bonsai.

Avoid cutting too many roots as well, as this can often cause the juniper to revert to juvenile foliage in the subsequent growing season. This is particularly true with Itoigawa Shimpaku.

Use a free-draining soil medium, such as a mixture of akadama, lava rock and pumice in a ratio of 1:1:1. 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.

Insects / Pests:

Juniper bonsai are susceptible to a number of pests including aphids, borers, scale and spider mites. The most common diseases that affect junipers are tip blight and cedar-apple rust.

Treat the tree for these at the first sign of confirmed attack or maintain a proactive spraying regime.

Propagation:

Junipers are easily propagated using several methods. To obtain thick trunks, air-layer branches from mature ground-growing specimens from May to the end of June when the new buds start to extend. Junipers are one of the easiest conifers to air-layer and having rooted, can often be separated from the parent tree by Autumn.

Cuttings are best taken in September and will root from 'heel' cuttings. Use one year old shoots (shoots that appeared in the previous year) and pull away the shoot from the tree leaving a 'heel' of old wood at its base. Once potted up, cuttings can exist for up to 2 years on their own sap without rooting; however new extending foliage and shoots from the cuttings will be indicative of the cutting having new roots.

Recommended Reading / Watching

<https://www.bjornbjorholm.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/c/EiseienBonsai>

<https://www.youtube.com/c/Bonsaify/featured>

Happy bonsaiing!!

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