

# COLD CLIMATE CARE

For Outdoor Bonsai

If you live in a cold climate, your bonsai will need winter protection. Though practices may vary from person to person, tree to tree and location to location, what follows are some guidelines that you may find useful.

## WHERE TO OVER-WINTER?

Some favorite locations for wintering are: a cold frame, garage or outbuilding, bulkhead, cold basement, cold attic, closed in porch, or unheated room in the house. It is important that your choice be cold enough to keep your bonsai dormant. This is particularly true with deciduous trees as you do not want them leafing out mid or late winter.

## WHEN TO PUT YOUR BONSAI AWAY?

How soon you need to put your bonsai away depends upon the type of tree, its health, how well protected its outdoor location is and other factors. A conservative approach would be to put your trees away when night temperatures are consistently falling into the low thirties.

## LIGHT

If your trees are dormant, they don't need light. When they are active they need light. The more active they are (the warmer it is) the more light they need.

## WATER

Check the soil regularly. Even in dormancy there is some evaporation and water use. You may not have to water often, but you will have to water. If the soil is frozen you have to wait for it to thaw before you can water. Water early in the day to allow excess water to drain before the soil freezes. An interesting technique that some people use is to put snow or ice on the surface for the soil. When the temperature warms up the ice or snow melts and waters the soil.

## FRESH AIR

On nice days open up and let the fresh breezes in. This can be critical in preventing fungus. Fungus like dark, stagnant, wet, dirty places; so keep your trees clean and the space dry, clean and fresh.

## HOW COLD?

Know the winter hardiness of your trees. If you have doubts check with a bonsai professional or experienced enthusiast. If you have trees that are not hardy enough to stand the lows in your cold storage area you may have to introduce some heat. A small electric heater with a thermostat might do. Make sure to keep it a safe distance from the bonsai.

## FREEZING SOLID

Though some people try to prevent freezing, most hardy bonsai can freeze solid if they; 1) are well protected from the wind, 2) are healthy and 3) have soil with excellent drainage. Good drainage prevents excess water from collecting in the soil and expanding as it freezes. This unwanted expansion can damage the roots and in some cases cause the pot to break.

## BACK OUTSIDE

Be careful. The transition from winter to spring is the most difficult time. If you move your bonsai out too soon they are exposed to harsh weather. If you wait too long they start growing inside and you can't move them out for fear of cold damage to the tender new growth. Wait until the new buds are barely beginning to swell. Then move them out to a protected place. Ideally this will happen when

night temperatures are up to at least the high twenties. If new grow forces you to move your trees out too early you may have to bring them back in or cover them on cold nights. Don't forget to check for water! Two changes cause much faster drying down outside; 1) evaporation and 2) water use due to growth.

\*These wintercare instructions apply only to winter hardy outdoor bonsai. If you have questions about wintering indoor bonsai, please see our Indoor Bonsai care sheet or give us a call.

If you have any question please call, write or drop by:

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