

# IEBS Annual Bonsai Care Calendar

A guide for the Inland NW of the USA

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*The dates below are a general guide and must be adjusted for your micro-climate, growing conditions, and conditions during a particular year. These were developed, based upon experience, in the Spokane, WA - Coeur d'Alene, ID corridor of the Inland NW. Locations 50 – 100 miles away are known to shift the dates by 2 to 4 weeks so use this as a guide.*

## Winter – December to February

- Protect your trees from the harshest weather. For most of our hardy trees, this means when the temperatures drop below about 15°F (-10°C). Make sure to give them some water a couple times during the winter, particularly when the weather starts to get warmer.
- Make sure you have appropriate pots and soil mix for transplanting in the Spring.
- Develop plans for your trees during the next growing season. Pictures taken after they have dropped their leaves are very beneficial.
- Tag branches for pruning on Deciduous trees with a wire loop or latex paint so they can be pruned in Late Winter as the temperatures start to increase.
- Order seedlings that will be used for root grafts, group plantings, or similar uses.

## Early Spring – February and March

- Clean pots and prepare them for use – install drainage covers and tie down wires.
- Watch for early 'bud break' and protect those trees that have started to grow from hard frosts (below 28°F). Spraying with water as the temperature drops may save you from having to haul everything into the garage.
- Re-pot early budding species like Larch, Elm, and some of the Maples but be prepared to protect them from frost.
- Prune Deciduous trees to avoid further die-back but avoid excessive bleeding. Ideally, this is after the hard freezes are over and before the sap starts to rise. This is a good time to wire as well.
- Prepare for root and thread grafts. The timing of thread grafts in the Spring is particularly critical – the buds need to be closed, but the sap needs to be rising.
- First fertilization. Use a low nitrogen fertilizer for most bonsai to promote good root growth. You can use a nitrogen rich fertilizer for trees where you want to develop trunk size and are not worried about ramification or leaf size.
- Water as needed.

### Spring – April into early May

- This is the primary time for re-potting. Pines are, generally, fairly early as the candles start to turn green; Junipers start to turn green a little later.
- Deciduous trees will bud throughout the period, but, since it is frequently cool throughout this period, they can often be re-potted in fairly full leaf, if needed, as long as they are given some protection from drying out too much.
- The last average frost date is in early May.
- Urban collecting (Yamadori)– watch for neighbors taking out overgrown shrubs that would make nice bonsais and offer to assist with removal. Plant in the ground or in an over-sized box to stabilize for a year or two.
- This is the time for thread grafts to improve main branch placement.
- Continue to fertilize. Don't use much nitrogen unless the goal is to develop mass.
- Watering becomes more frequent and may go from every couple of days to daily at the end of this period.

### Late Spring – May into early June

- Finish re-potting. Protect freshly re-potted trees from the hot afternoon sun. In cold years, re-potting can be done all the way into June.
- Defoliate strongly growing Maples to promote ramification.
- Use approach grafts to improve branch placement.
- Pinch back growth on Deciduous trees. For most Maples, this means pinching out the central bud with fine tipped tweezers just after the first set of leaves start to open to force short internodes and ramification.
- Continue to fertilize. Start adding nitrogen once the first flush of growth hardens off.
- Once temperatures are over 55 degrees F., bring Tropical and Sub-Tropical trees outside to get more sun and to reduce your electric power bill. Make sure to shade them at first unless you want to de-foliate them, due to sun scorch of the leaves.

### Early Summer – June into early July (in a cold year)

- De-candle Pines.
  - Start with the weaker zones on strong Pines like Japanese Black Pine and do the moderate and strong zones one and two weeks later.
  - Start with the stronger zones on weaker Pines like Japanese White Pine and do the moderate and weaker zones one and two weeks later.
- De-foliate and wire most Deciduous trees. Two to three weeks prior to the Annual Club Show in July will give a nice fresh crop of leaves. Strong trees can be de-foliated a second time at the end of this period.

## Summer – July to early September

- Continue to water and watch for both drying out and the onset of Summer dormancy. As the temperatures rise above 90° F, some trees will slow down their use of water and over-watering can result in root rot. Misting and protection from strong rays of the sun are required rather than more water in this case.
- Protect trees from the strong afternoon sun. Deciduous trees can scorch in the sun which will make the leaves look bad, but this is generally not a problem unless all of the leaves are damaged. Dark pots can overheat and kill the roots as well.
- Re-pot Tropical and Sub-Tropical trees after they have acclimatized to the sun.

## Early Fall – September

- Early Fall is still a good time for trimming back growth on Pines. Remove old needles from Pines by hand or by cutting, leaving the sheath. Remove all downward growing needles.
- Plant root-over-rock, rock plantings and Saikei. This period is a time of limited foliage growth and the beginning of a prolonged period of root growth. When creating rock plantings, the primary goal is to establish the root mass.
- This is the time (September) for the final application of fertilizer containing nitrogen. You are now anticipating the continued formation of next year's buds and Fall root growth, so the best fertilizer is a 3-10-5.
- Water selectively. Fall produces conditions which favor some plants and not others. Actively growing Conifers use moisture at a much greater rate than Deciduous trees that are just going into dormancy plus Deciduous trees that go into storage with soaking wet soil are subject to root rot.
- Excellent time to collect trees from the wild (Yamadori).
- This is the time to bring Tropical and Sub-Tropical trees indoors at night when temperatures fall into the low 40s. They should be indoors, under lights, for 16 hours a day when daytime temperatures are below the low 40s. Be sure that trees are insect-free before bringing them inside.
- Prepare Winter storage. It is much more pleasant to get things ready before the coming of low temperatures, wind and rain.
- Slugs and snails increase their presence as Fall rains arrive. Just as in Spring, place a few containers of beer in a few strategic locations around the bonsai area.

## Mid Fall – October

- After first frost (Mid Fall), apply bone meal to benefit roots and use only 0-10-10 fertilizer which will enhance root development and spring buds.
- Clean up fallen leaves and any other debris and apply a final spray of fungicide.
- By Mid Fall, water only as needed and avoid letting any soil become soaking wet. The bonsais that are still growing will show dryness, ignore the others. Use chop sticks to determine dryness.
- Mid Fall: transplant and root-prune pre-bonsai growing in the ground. Prune away heavy roots to maintain short, compact white roots. Replant the tree a little higher than it was and generously mound soil around the roots.
- Check branch wires again—there is another surge of in-branch diameter growth at this time of year. Remove the wire, if necessary.
- Continue fertilizing with no nitrogen. Flowering plants may be given a high potassium fertilizer every 2 weeks during October to set and strengthen flower buds.

## LATE FALL—NOVEMBER

- First application of lime sulfur. After cleaning the top of the soil of debris, remove the last dead leaves from the tree. When applying lime sulfur, do not allow it to drip into the pots—it is toxic.
- Take photographs of your trees. This will be the first opportunity to compare them with previous photographic records in terms of trunk development and ramification.
- Make final preparations for alternative storage. Your cold frames should be ready and your benches should be prepared so that you can place your trees under them in the event of frost. (A blue tarp works well.) Your sensitive species should all be in the house. What if there is a hail storm tonight? Have you made contingency plans for your valuable trees?
- NO WATERING, NO FERTILIZING, NO COLLECTING, NO PRUNING. This sums up Late Fall.
- Protect your trees from heavy rain and do not allow the soil to become water-logged.