

Early Spring/Summer Maple Bonsai Maintenance

Summarized by Marty Weiser

Based on Bjorn BJORHOLM, *Notes from Japan – Maple Bonsai: Spring & Summer Maintenance*,
BONSAI, Journal of ABS, Vol 44 issue 2 (2010)

This is an excellent article that every grower of maples should read and study. Bjorn fills in the details for the basic methods that are described in other sources.

Repotting

- Japanese maples should be repotted once the buds start to open, but before the leaves appear. This insures that the fine branches which are prone to die back are growing strongly before the roots are cut.
- Trident maples should be repotted as the buds start to swell. However, they are very strong and can be repotted in late winter before the buds start to swell as long as they are protected from frost.

Spring pinching

- Most Japanese maples should have the second set of leaves pinched out just as they become visible unless the branch is being grown as a sacrifice. This can be done with either fingertips or tweezers. I prefer tweezers since my fingers tend to be a bit too big. This technique is described in many other sources.
- Trident maples and Japanese maple cultivars with very short internodes (such as shishigarshira) should be allowed to grow out so the shoots harden off. The long shoots will be dealt with later in the season.

Early summer/late spring trimming

- Maintaining the interior shoots in maples and other species is critical. This done by opening the canopy so that light and air can get to the interior shoots. The best time for this is during early summer/late spring trimming.
- The outer leaves of Japanese maples with medium to long internodes should be thinned. One leaf from each outer pair should be removed. This does not weaken the branch since the other leaf is still functioning. If more interior light is still needed, the remaining outer leaves should be cut in about half by gently folding it along the main vein and cutting at an angle so all of the tips are cut off and the leaf still looks like a maple leaf.
- Trident maple should be cut back to one pair of leaves once the leaves have hardened off. They should be defoliated by removing all but the smallest interior leaves by either cutting or pulling a week or two later. On strong trees this can be done more than once per season.
- Maples with short internodes like *A. platanum* 'shishigarshira' require a special technique to avoid forming knots at the end of the branches. The shoots should be cut back to two leaf pairs rather than one as is done with most maples. Then the first leaf pair should be removed by cutting off the leaves. This results in slightly longer internodes than the tree naturally produces – contrary to the approach taken with most trees.
- I imagine a variation of the last technique can be applied to other species with very short internodes like Jacqueline Hiller elms.