

Pines by Marty Weiser

Pines are one of the most classic trees for bonsai. However, they are also one of the most challenging. Bring a pine to this workshop to style, refine, or just to discuss. If you don't have a pine in your collection this is an excellent opportunity to add one. Just go to a nursery and pick one out – I suggest one in a 2 to 5 gallon pot for starters with an interesting trunk, but larger and smaller trees are fine.

There are a wide variety of pines available for bonsai. Here is a short list of some of the species along with some of their strengths and weaknesses:

P. mugo mugo (Mugho Pine)

Generally more of a bush than a tree, the Mugho Pine grows well in bonsai cultivation, has short needles, it buds back very well, and it accepts root pruning.

P. sylvestris (Scots Pine)

One of my favorite pines for bonsai. The needles are 1.5" - 3" long often with a bluish tint, it buds back very well, and takes to bonsai cultivation. However, the needles tend to be rather stiff.

P. thunbergiana (Japanese Black Pine)

The classic pine for bonsai in Japan with wonderful strong buds. This is a strong tree with 3 - 4.5" long needles in pairs which will reduce to half that or less. The challenge is to constrain the growth to develop fine branches and needles.

P. ponderosa (Ponderosa Pine)

The local pine with long (4 – 11") needles – there are at least two subgroups. The needles will reduce but this still does better as a big bonsai with literati being the favored style. Growth is not extremely strong in bonsai culture.

P. nigra (Austrian Black Pine)

Similar to *P. thunbergiana* with slightly longer needles. Restraining growth to get ramification appears to be the challenge, but I do not have information on how to best train it. For now, using the same techniques as *P. thunbergiana* seems to be the best way.

P. aristata (Bristlecone Pine)

Another good pine for bonsai that has not been used as much as it should. Needles are .75" – 2" long in fives, cover the branch so it looks like a brush, and remain on the branches longer than most pines. Buds back well, but cultivation takes a little practice.