
EVERYTHING YOU
WANTED TO KNOW
ABOUT BONSAI IN 30
MINUTES.

BUT WERE AFRAID TO
ASK.

BY

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IS BONSAI A TYPE OF TREE?

- **Not a species:** Bonsai is a technique, not a species.
- **Almost any tree works:** Juniper, maple, pine, elm, ficus—nearly any woody plant qualifies.
- **Centuries of history:** Originated in China 2,000+ years ago; some specimens exceed 1,000 years old.



BEST TREES FOR BONSAI



Juniper

Hardy and forgiving; the most popular beginner species with classic windswept forms



Japanese Maple

Stunning seasonal color; leaves naturally miniaturize in shallow pots



Ficus

Thrives indoors; fast-growing with aerial roots that add visual character

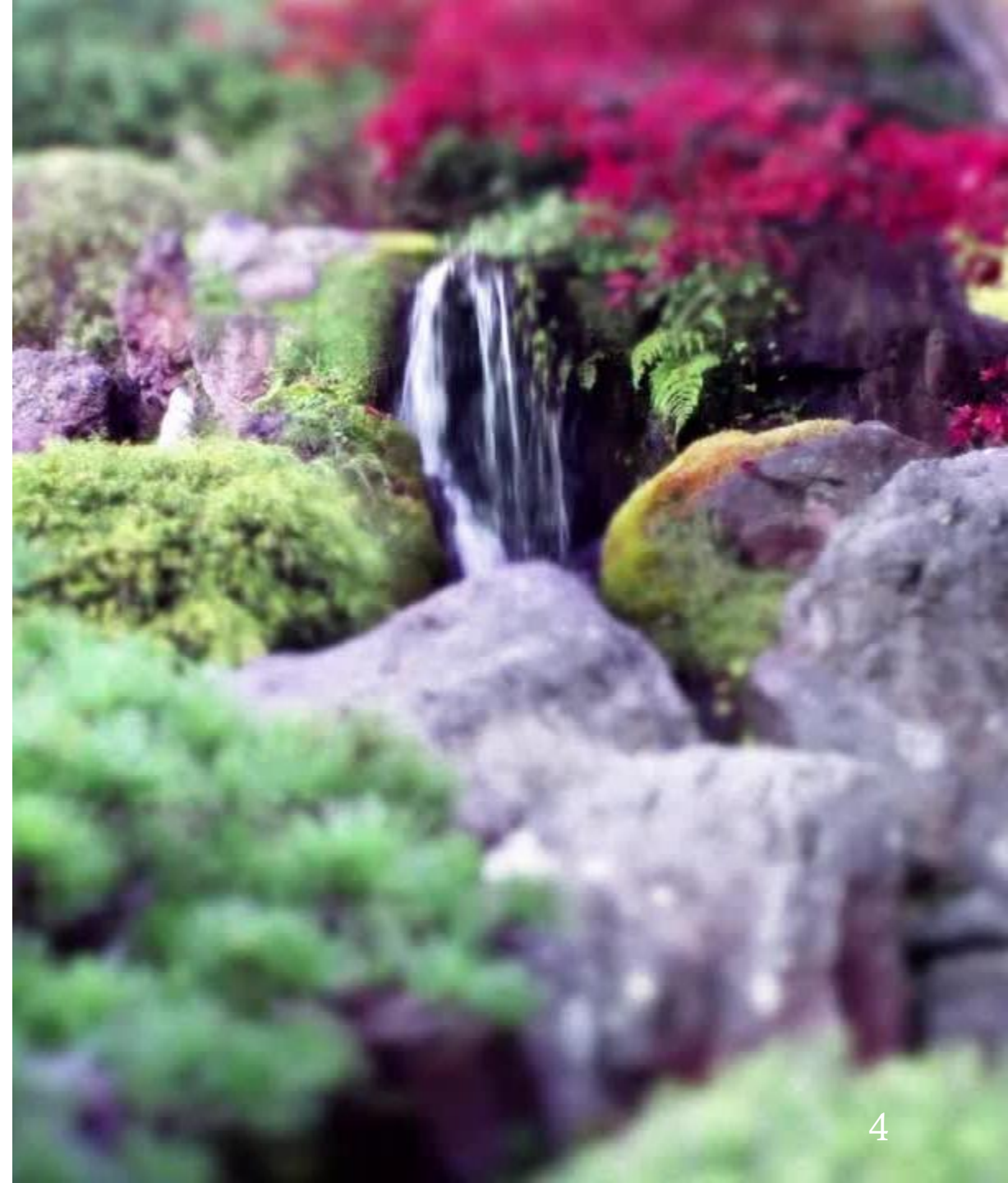


Chinese Elm

Tolerant and adaptable; fine branching and small leaves ideal for shaping

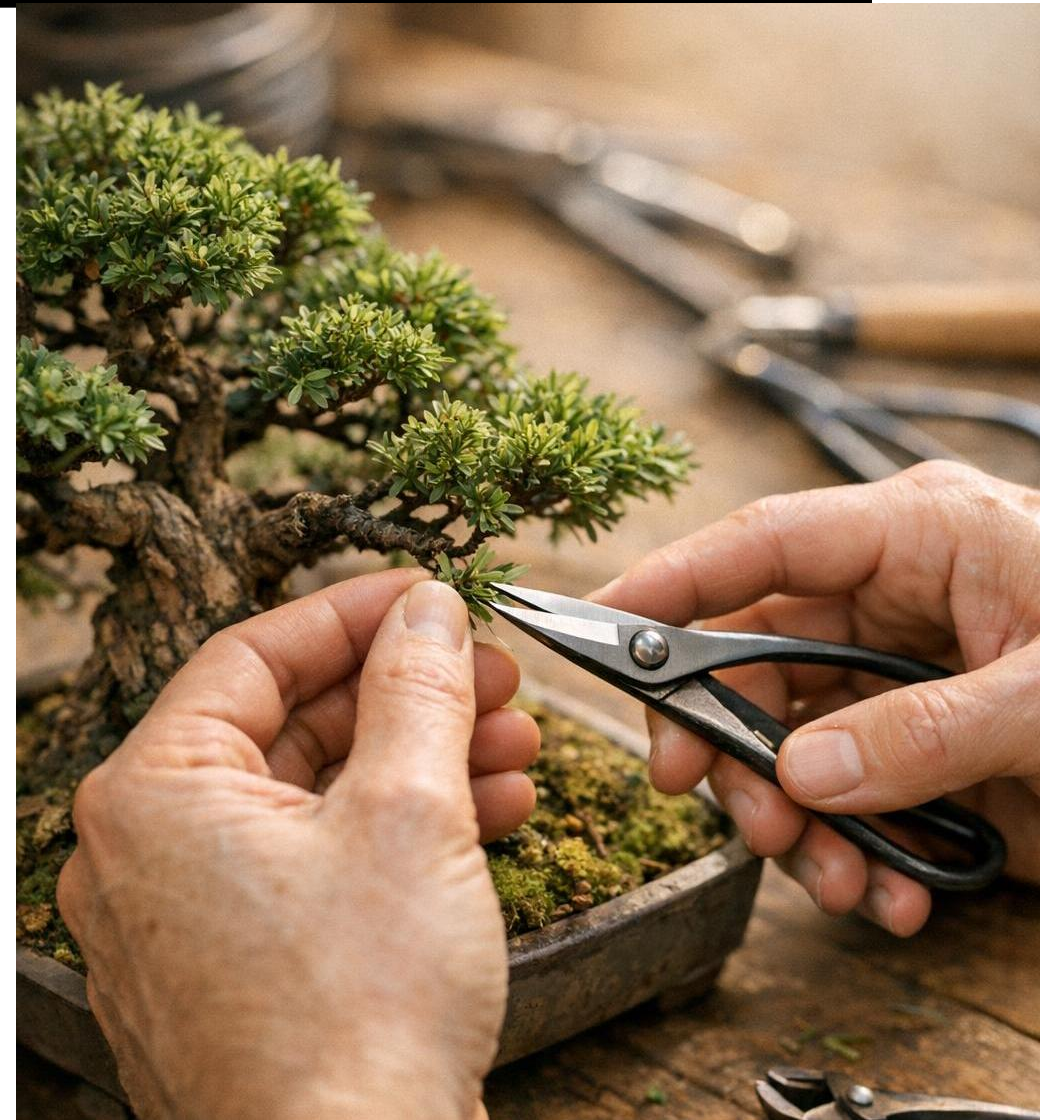
WHERE TO GET BONSAI TREES

- **Local nurseries:** garden centers and specialty nurseries often carry pre-bonsai stock ready for training
- **Online retailers:** dedicated bonsai shops ship starter trees, tools, and soil directly to your door
- **Wild collecting (yamadori):** naturally dwarfed trees from mountains or rocky areas make dramatic specimens
- **Growing from seed:** the slowest route but gives full control over the tree from its earliest stages
- **Cuttings and air layers:** propagate from an existing tree to clone its traits and get a head start on growth



HOW TO MINIATURIZE A TREE

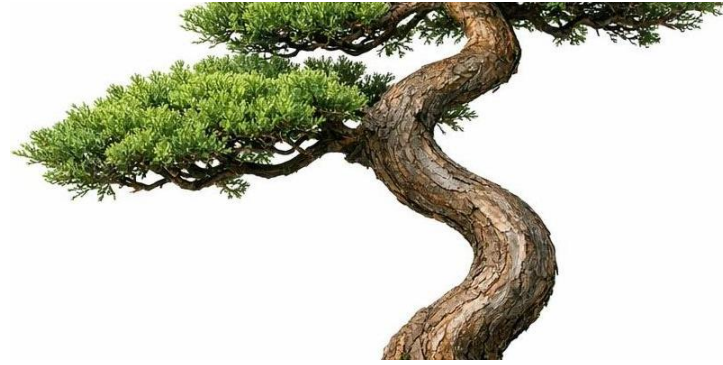
- **Step 1 — Choose your tree:** pick a young specimen with an interesting trunk
- **Step 2 — Prune the canopy:** cut back branches and foliage to control size and shape
- **Step 3 — Trim the roots:** shorten thick roots during repotting to restrict growth
- **Step 4 — Wire the branches:** wrap wire around limbs to guide their direction



COMMON BONSAI STYLES



Formal Upright (Chokkan)



Informal Upright (Moyogi)



Slanting (Shakan)



Cascade (Kengai)



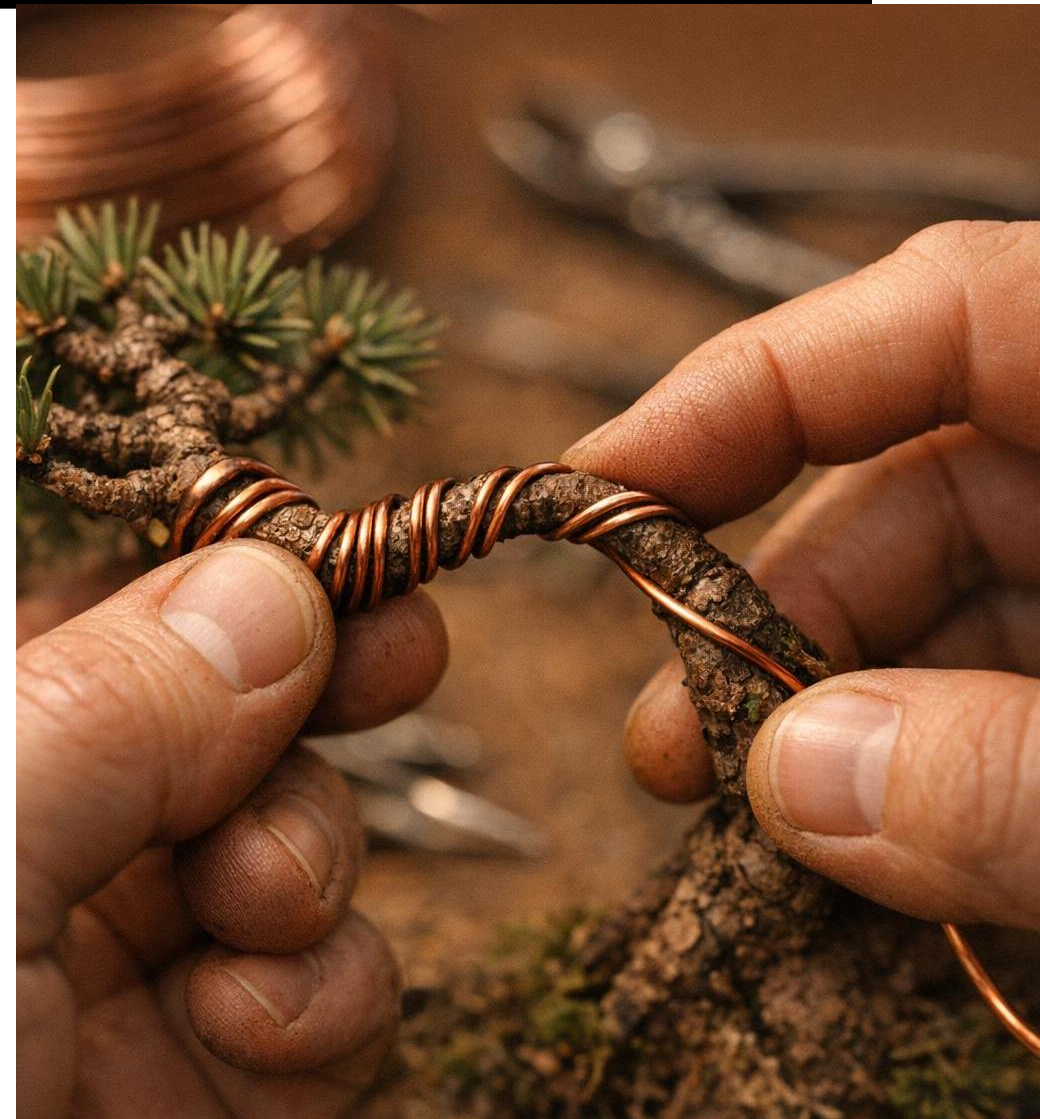
Windswept (Fukinagashi)



Literati (Bunjin)

TRAINING AND SHAPING TECHNIQUES

- **Wiring:** copper or aluminum wire sets branch angles; remove after 3–6 months before it scars the bark
- **Directional pruning:** cut above an outward-facing bud to steer new growth and build taper
- **Pinching:** removing tips of shoots forces a second flush of smaller foliage in some species and defoliation or partial defoliation in others.
- **Jin and shari:** stripping bark from branches or trunk creates aged deadwood effects



CARE AND MAINTENANCE

- **Watering:** water when the top layer of soil feels dry; soak thoroughly until it drains from the bottom
- **Sunlight:** most species need 5–6 hours of direct light; rotate the pot for even growth
- **Soil:** use a fast-draining mix of akadama, pumice, and lava rock to prevent root rot



COMMON BEGINNER MISTAKES



Overwatering: soggy soil causes root rot; let the top dry before watering again



Keeping trees indoors: most species are outdoor plants that need direct sun and seasonal temps



Pruning too aggressively: removing too much at once weakens the tree; trim no more than a third



Using regular potting soil: standard soil holds too much water; switch to a gritty bonsai mix



Neglecting repotting: root-bound trees decline; repot every 3-5 years to refresh soil

WHERE TO PLACE YOUR BONSAI

- **Outdoors is best:** a sunny patio, balcony, or garden gives the light and airflow most species need
- **Indoor exceptions:** tropical species like ficus thrive indoors near a bright south-facing window
- **Avoid extremes:** keep away from radiators, A/C vents, and drafty doorways that dry out foliage



BONSAI SOIL COMPONENTS



- **Akadama:** a fired Japanese clay that retains moisture while allowing air to reach the roots
- **Pumice:** lightweight volcanic rock that improves drainage and prevents compaction
- **Lava rock:** adds structure and aeration; holds some water without getting soggy
- **Organic matter:** composted bark or peat provides nutrients; use sparingly to avoid waterlogging
- **Mixing ratio:** a common starter blend is equal parts akadama, pumice, and lava rock

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I WATER MY BONSAI



Bonsai trees need to be checked on a daily basis for moisture content of the soil during the growing months.



The soil can be checked by way of a moisture meter or by checking just below the surface of the soil.



If the soil is dry just below the surface it should be watered until it drains through the holes in the bottom of the pot.



ARE THERE SPECIAL TOOLS NEEDED FOR BONSAI

- Yes, there are special tools that bonsai enthusiasts use for bonsai. These include tools such as:
 - Concave Cutters
 - Wire Cutters
 - Knob Cutters
 - Trunk Splitters
 - Root Rake
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- To begin with all you need to get started on your bonsai journey is a simple pair of sharp scissors.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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For more information about the art of bonsai consider joining the Greater Louisville Bonsai Society.

2

Find us on Facebook.

3

Check out our website.
louisvillebonsai.org