

Winter Season Review

Although the Winter season can seem quiet in relation to the work we can do on our trees, there are in fact a few tasks that can be done at this time of year while we eagerly anticipate the onset of Spring. Here is a list of some of these tasks, which is not exhaustive and deliberately tries to remain general in nature. As always, it is always wise to know your genus and species and work to their individual needs where appropriate.

- Give your trees a Winter wash. The lime sulphur we use to whiten the jins and sharis on our trees can also be used as a winter wash to kill off any overwintering pests and prevent the growth of moulds and fungi. This is mostly done on deciduous trees after the leaves have dropped and the tree has gone fully dormant. The lime sulphur is diluted to a ratio of between 1:20 (50ml in 1 litre of water) to 1:40. (25ml in 1 litre of water). This depends on the strength of your neat lime sulphur solution. Try a weaker mix the first time you do this and increase the strength as required based on the experience you attain. A good visual guide that you have got the ratio correct is that the bark will take on a slightly whitened and ghostly appearance, but this is best being more subtle than very obvious. You don't want a bright white tree as the effect will last many months. Treat your trees again towards the end of January, but again, keep the dilution on the weaker side.
- Provide Winter protection. Protect vulnerable species from freezing conditions and especially freezing winds. This can be a cold greenhouse, polytunnel, cold-frames or simply by moving your trees to a more sheltered and partly covered area of the garden. A lot of species we use as Bonsai are fully hardy and can remain outside all winter, however our bonsai are kept in small pots and are usually in an elevated position on our display benches. A freezing wind can often be the more dangerous threat to our trees. Trees with a very delicate and refined branch structure will suffer damage in freezing winds. By providing some winter protection we can also be in control over how much water our trees receive over the winter period.
- Clean and sharpen your Bonsai tools. A sharpening stone as used for sharpening wood chisels is useful. Learn how to sharpen correctly so as not to damage your expensive tools. WD40 is useful for cleaning up the polished surfaces and lubricating the pivot. Remove all traces of oil from the business end of the tools before use and regularly disinfect the blades with 70-80% ethanol or other horticultural disinfectants.
- Prepare or purchase your potting mixes ready for repotting in Spring. If you sieve and grade your chosen mediums into varying particle sizes for use with different size

trees, rainy winter days are perfect for doing this in your garage or shed. A large garden trug is useful for sieving into, keeping the medium contained.

- Wire your trees. Winter is the perfect time for wiring trees. Deciduous species have dropped their leaves, making wiring a much easier task. Also, as growth has stopped, the wire can remain on the tree for much longer without the risk of cutting in, giving the branches a longer time to set into the desired position.
- Select pots. If you have trees which are ready to be re-potted into bonsai pots in spring, have these chosen and ready to go with mesh secured over the drainage holes. Your bonsai ideally want to stay in your chosen pot for at least two years so choose wisely at this stage. Spend some time considering the best style and colour of pot for your tree. You may consider when your tree is looking at it's best, for example, when it is in flower or berry and base your pot choice to compliment this.