



Growing Indoor Bonsai

Indoor bonsai are miniature versions of tropical and semitropical trees and shrubs. Unlike temperate zone trees, which require the climactic differences between summer and winter / day and night, the tropical-like varieties flourish in a near season-less environment with small variations in temperature. Homes and offices do not entirely create this environment. To grow indoor bonsai successfully, one needs to know something about their origins and life cycles in the native habitats.

Indoor bonsai, as a group, are divided into two classifications:

1) True tropical bonsai species

These have a warmth requirement that should be somewhat constant. Temperatures should not fall below 60°F and should not fluctuate more than 10°F between night and day.

2) Semi-tropical bonsai species

These varieties grow in their natural habitat further away from the equator than do their counterparts, the tropical varieties. The semi-tropical enjoy a distinctive two-season year; a nice warm, bright growing period, usually April through October, followed by a bright cooler period, usually November through March.

Sufficient light is of vital importance for both classes. Light does not mean blazing sunshine, but brightness. Indoor bonsai need to be protected from mid-summer sun coming from the south and west sources. If not enough light, like some winter weeks here in the Northwest, where extended periods of rain make for a succession of short, dull, dark days, artificial indoor lighting is a real plus.

Indoor bonsai can actually be grown in a dark corner away from windows if enough intensity is available with exposure at intervals of not less than 10 hours per day. Actual "grow light" bulbs are preferred, although incandescent or fluorescents are okay.

Humidity levels in Northwest homes in winter can be very low when central heating is in use. Dishes of water placed near the bonsai display are helpful. An alternative is to place the bonsai in humidity trays that are filled with crushed rock and kept permanently filled with water. Make certain the bottoms of bonsai containers are not touching the tray water. Regular spraying of the foliage is recommended along with soil watering.

Fertilizer in the form of water soluble mixture is easy and effective. Fertilizer should be applied at a rate that is half of what is on the label directions. A regular foliar feeding is very beneficial on a weekly basis.

Bonsai are not plants that can be neglected at any time of the year. A few minutes each day with your bonsai will ensure that all is well.

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