

TOM'S GARDEN

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BONSAI

The History of Bonsai

The very first examples of Bonsai (Japanese) and Penjing (Chinese) were made from trees and plants that had been collected from the wild mountainous areas of China and Japan. Naturally stunted trees were arranged and planted in ceramic pots and kept in the collectors' homes and regarded as natural works of art. These trees and plants would have been formed by nature's elements, often contorted and very interesting in shape. People would risk their lives to collect very old, gnarled trees from high mountain areas such as sheer rock faces, cliffs, and other dangerous terrain. This fascinating art form is believed to have originated in China 1,500-2,000 years ago. In Japan there are records that go back as far as 1,200 years. It is not uncommon to find specimens hundreds of years old that have been passed down through families. Today, bonsai remains a very popular art form around the world. This interest means that there are many bonsai societies operating

locally and worldwide. Now there are many nurseries that specialize in growing bonsai plants for wholesale and retail markets. Most of the world's growers operate in Japan, China, and Korea.

Purchasing a finished bonsai can be very expensive because it can take years to produce a good-quality tree. It is better to begin with an inexpensive tree that you can learn from. Start with something easy to look after such as a Japanese maple or Chinese elm. Remember, almost any plant can be turned into a bonsai art form.



This is a succulent that obviously needs much work but has great potential.



Succulent form of geranium in a training pot

Many large nurseries have a section where they offer beginner bonsai plants and some even hold classes. These nurseries will also sell tools, pots, and soil.

To get you started, here are some organizations and retail companies:

Akron Canton Bonsai Society—Facebook

Clevelandbonsaiclub.org

bonsaiempire.com

bonsaioutlet.com

Don't get out those jigsaw puzzles yet for the winter. Try something new and create some art indoors with plants.

This is a great idea for those who have downsized into apartments or condos.

Why You Should Plant in Autumn

While it doesn't seem as if you should be planting plants in autumn, there are many reasons why you should.

The cooler temperatures and moist soil are good for the roots of newly planted shrubs, trees, and perennials. The roots will become established and continue to grow although the above ground growth will stop. Roots will still have about 6 weeks of growing time after the above ground part of the plant goes dormant. These roots will grow in early spring before the top part of the plant emerges. The soil stays moist in autumn, so you don't have to water as you would in summer.

There is less competition from weeds and garden pests in the fall and there is less damage from rabbits and deer as the plant goes dormant. If you do need a little protection, liquid fence can be applied once or twice before winter sets in.

Plants at nurseries are marked down 50-75 percent as they are looking to eliminate inventory.

Autumn is a great time to divide and replant your perennials as well. Give some to friends and neighbors!

Apply chopped leaves or compost to your flowers, trees, and shrubs. They will gradually decompose over winter, attract earthworms, and give plants a boost in spring.

And lastly, it is much more comfortable and enjoyable to work in the cool fall weather.

The Wonderful World of Houseplants

Houseplants can create a mood, reduce stress, and even clean the air. A well-placed plant can brighten the mood of a room considerably. Many people will say "give me a houseplant and I can kill it!" Developing a "green thumb" is something that can be learned. You can not only help a plant live, but make it thrive indoors. All it takes is a little patience and some knowledge about what a plant wants and needs.

You have the advantage in the houseplant world because your plant is in a container and can be moved to different places in the home until the right spot is found. Do some research by entering the name of your plant in your search engine and bring up the requirements for each plant. You will find lighting, watering, temperature, and humidity requirements. Don't try to force a plant to live in the wrong place just because you want it to be there.

Remember, just as outdoors: "Right plant in the right place."

Watering

Most houseplants die from overwatering. Overwatering causes leaves to turn yellow and even sometimes wilt, making you think more water is needed. Roots will rot and fungus gnats will thrive on the damp soil. Use the best tool you have for checking to see if a plant needs water: your finger. If the soil feels damp, don't water. If the soil feels dry 1 inch deep, then go ahead and water carefully without wetting the leaves. There are a few plants that like to have constantly damp soil. Venus fly trap comes to mind along with umbrella plant and ferns.

Succulents and cacti make great houseplants and most only need watered once a month indoors and are not fussy about lighting conditions. They are good plants to have if you are a snowbird! The kind of water you use will also make a difference. "City" water and tap water that has gone through a water softening system are not ideal for plants. Fluoride is in many city water systems and salts remain in softened water.

The ideal is distilled water, water from a dehumidifier or water that has gone through a reverse-osmosis system. Rainwater and melted snow are also very good.

Plants like orchids, African violets, and bromeliads like moisture in the air. Place these on a shallow tray with pebbles and water. Don't let the pot sit in the water. A spot in the bathroom is also a humid area. Houseplants need repotting occasionally. For a plant that has been in a pot for a long time, pull the plant out and check the roots.

If the root ball seems tight, loosen it by pulling it apart and repot in a larger container with new potting soil. Your plant will love you and probably put on some new growth.

Check your plants throughout the winter for mealybugs, fungus gnats, and spider mites. Use a spray of rubbing alcohol or a good-quality houseplant insecticide if any of these problems occur. Keep the leaves of large plants clean by using a damp paper towel or a makeup brush to clear away any dust.

Many houseplants enjoy being outside in the summer in a protected area.



This is my preferred method for overwintering geraniums. I take cuttings from the mother plant in October or November. You really don't need rooting hormone, but if you have it, use it. Cut off a stem and be sure to have a leaf node in the soil. Use potting soil and keep it moist but not too wet. A bright window or grow lights work well. These are scented geraniums and I will have plenty to give as gifts to friends, relatives and neighbors in spring.

