

Potting and Repotting

It's a straightforward process. Unless you are dealing with tropical trees, the best time to pot or re-pot a normal tree would be in the spring just before the new leaf buds form or the candles begin to swell on a needled evergreen tree. There is also some time to re-pot evergreens in the late summer.

Larch trees must be re-potted before the needles appear. This is best accomplished in early spring. Otherwise, they do not tolerate the changes and the needles will wither. Some trees will lose leaves when potted or re-potted. It's a natural happening for them. White and black pines should be potted or re-potted before the candles begin to elongate in the spring. Ginkgo like to be re-potted in early spring, i.e. February/March. When roots are removed, especially when the tree is first potted, it is a good idea to reduce the foliage comparably. Deciduous trees such as elms, maple, hornbeam, etc., can be re-potted when the leaf buds swell and even as the first leaves begin to appear.

Remove the tree from the pot that it's growing in, rake out the roots using a root rake or chopstick, and cut off the long tap-roots which don't do much feeding.. Make certain that you have a mister to keep the roots moist at all times. If you are re-potting a tree back into the same pot, usually the root ball is reduced by about a third.

Replace the screen mesh in the bottom of the bonsai pot, secure it with wire and then place a small mound of soil over where the tree is to be positioned in the pot. Then with a root rake, remove dirt from directly under the tree trunk to make a hollowed out area. Place the tree with its hollow directly on the small mound you've made. With a twist motion, settle the tree on the mound and then wire it securely into the pot. Then begin to fill the pot all around with dry bonsai soil and use a chop stick to push it down into the roots and settle the soil.

After the soil has firmed the tree in the pot, water it thoroughly. You can add a tonic such as Superthrive in the water to reduce the stress of the newly potted tree but do not fertilize for the first six weeks. Trim up the foliage if necessary and place the tree in a sheltered location for about two weeks, keeping it evenly moist the whole time. Gradually increase the tree's exposure to sunlight over a period of time. After six weeks, resume fertilizing every two weeks with a balanced fertilizer.