

Routine Maintenance – Paul Hunt

OK, you've repotted your bonsai tree in Spring if necessary (it's not necessary every year, but it is if the tree is pot-bound), and you are routinely watering. It's also necessary to weed and feed your trees.

I use a potting compost which includes an element of soil, and this brings occasional weeds with it. I check my trees as often as I can, and when I see weeds growing, I bring the tree into my work-space for routine maintenance. First, remove the weeds. After a while, a soil-including compost can easily develop a bit of a hard crust on the surface. Break this up and crumble with an implement – I use long tweezers which have a flat spatula at the other end – because the crust makes it difficult for water to penetrate the soil.

Then I leaf-prune the tree as necessary and feed it. This year (2018) I am using a fine scatter of blood, fish and bone meal, which seems to be working fine. I leave the tree in a shady zone for a few days, because it has had a bit of a shock with leaf-pruning. You can continue to leaf-prune in June-August, especially the leaves that have grown rather big, but do not feed the tree in July-August, because during the hottest months the tree goes dormant for a while.

On more thing: Pine trees, especially Scots Pines, can become infested with aphids, or creepy crawly creatures that suck the sap and produce a white, fluffy or grey, sooty deposit. This not only spoils the appearance of the tree but will harm or even kill it. Fortunately, an easy treatment for these problems is, you fill a hand-held pressure spray with clean water (I prefer rain water), pump up the volume and turn the spray down to a thin, high-pressure stream. This will blow the bugs and deposits away and freshen up the tree considerably. You need to do this away from other trees, so as to make sure that you are not blowing the bugs onto another tree.