

# Introduction to Bonsai Terms, Tools and Tips

*Mary Morrissey ~ Baikoen Bonsai Kenkyukai - January 2012*

Japanese traditional style - we aspire to recreate what we see in nature

There is a lot to learn about Bonsai and it is very helpful to join at least one Bonsai Club AND to take classes. You will progress much faster with an instructor than self study.

What are characteristics of trees that make good bonsai material for a beginner?

- Small leaves
- Dwarf varieties
- Good bark
- Hardy (hard to kill!)

What types of one-gallon material should beginners look for?

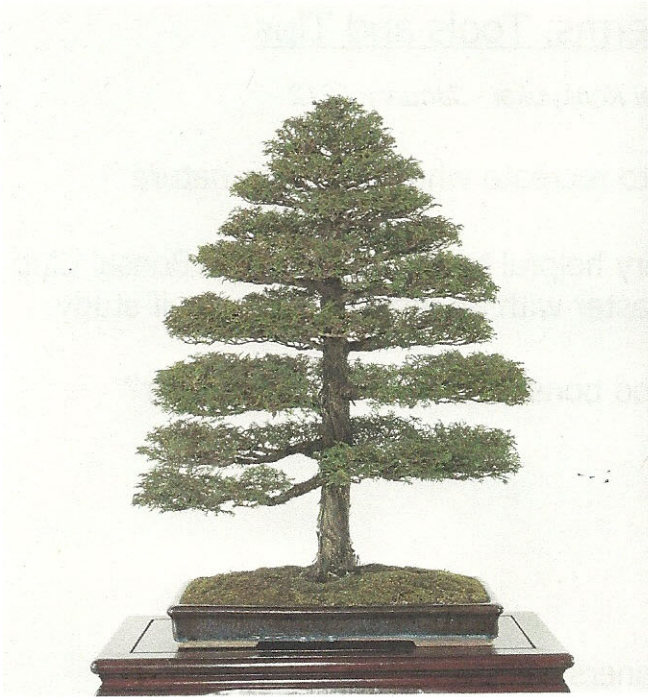
- Procumbens nana juniper
- Olive
- Caitlin elm (small leaf sport of Chinese elm)
- Ginkgo - 5 or 7 small ones make a nice group planting for beginners

What makes a good Bonsai?

- Good roots - strong, balanced
- Nice taper of trunk from roots (wider) to top (thinner)
- Good branch placement
- Branches are thicker at bottom, gradually thinner and shorter at top
- Good apex - strong or soft triangle
- Bow to the front

- No "reverse taper"
- No bar branches
- No crossing branches/trunks
- No pigeon breast
- No "eye pokers"

- Healthy!
- Well groomed
- If wired - done neatly and not too tight or too loose



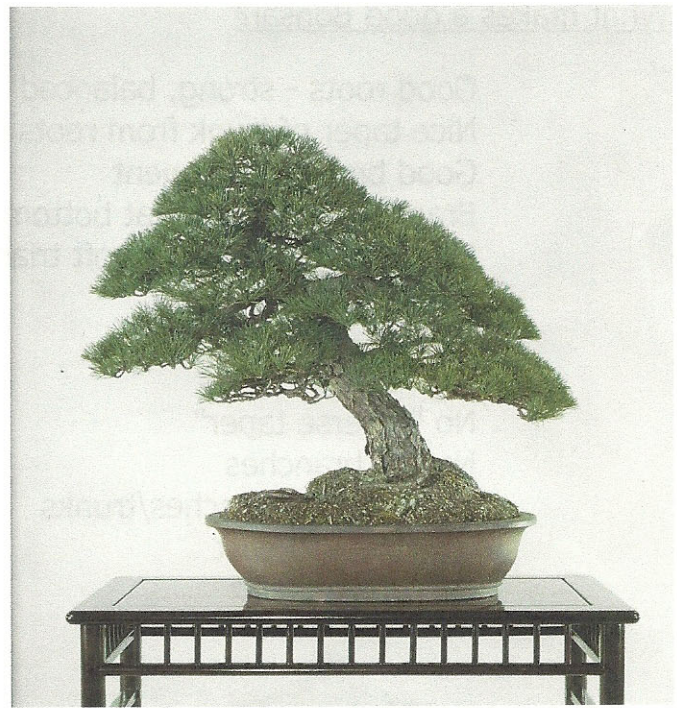
Chokkan - Formal Upright



Moyogi - Informal Upright



Sokan - Twin Trunk



Shakan - Slant



Yose-ue - Forest



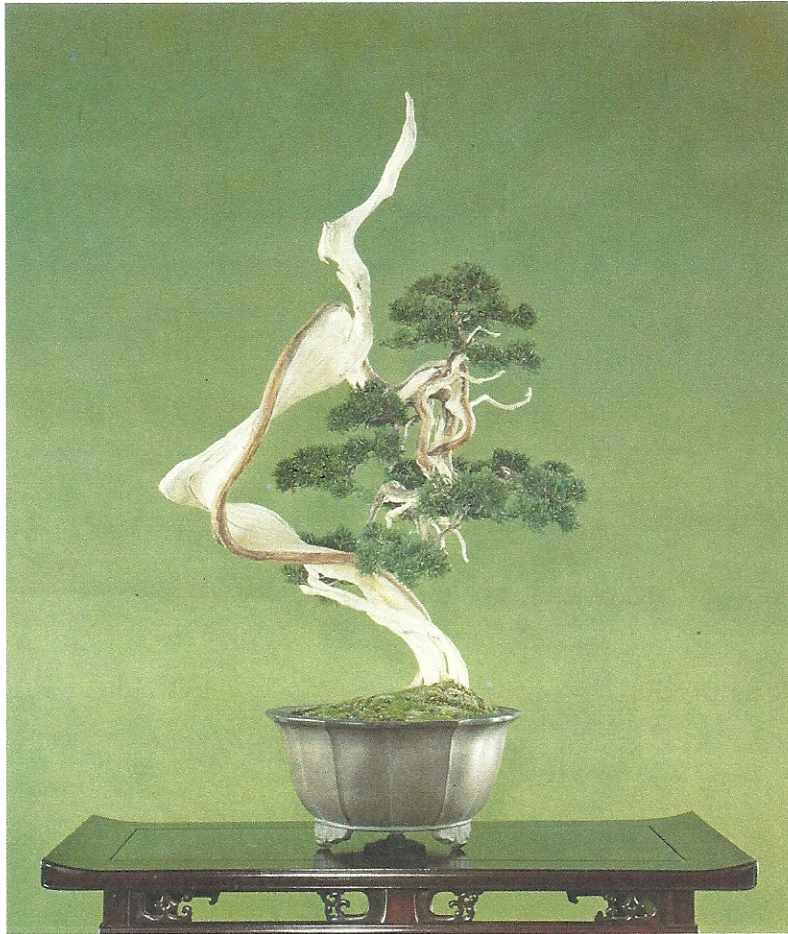
Ishizuke - Root over rock



Kengai - Cascade



Han-Kengai - Semi-Cascade



Bunjin



Shohin - Under 8" tall

## Hierarchy of Bonsai Trees

Pine  
Juniper  
Spruce  
Deciduous  
Flowering  
Fruiting

### Types of pots used:

|  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Evergreen (pine, junipers, olive, etc) | unglazed brown, tan or grey       |
| Deciduous or flowering/fruiting        | glazed blue, green, cream, etc    |
| For a strong, powerful tree            | strong, straight sided rectangle  |
| For a more feminine, graceful tree     | Softer, rounded rectangle or oval |

### Essential tools

Trimming scissors  
Concave cutter - branch cutter  
Wire cutter  
Aluminum wire  
Chopsticks!

### Other tools as you progress

Knob cutter  
Root cutter  
Tweezers  
Turn table with "stop" (6" plastic cupboard lazy susan works fine at the beginning)  
Larger sizes of basic tools

Soil Mix, Watering and Fertilizer - Your instructor will be your best resource - he or she will know your trees and your growing conditions - here are some general tips:

Use a good draining soil mix - water often - fertilize regularly

Cactus Mix is a good starter for soil - our club members can offer other suggestions

Organic fertilizers are gentle; use miracle grow or other water soluble ones at 1/2 strength.

### Where do we find our bonsai material?

Ordinary nursery stock  
Bonsai nurseries  
Air layerings from larger trees  
Digging up old yard trees and shrubs  
Going on "digs" to find mature specimens in the boondocks  
Club raffles  
Club shows often have sales tables  
Bonsai-a-thon at the Huntington in February of each year (a "mini-convention")  
Golden State Bonsai Federation Convention in late October each year  
(alternates between Southern and Northern California)  
California Bonsai Society Annual Sale on Thanksgiving weekend

### Where do we find our bonsai tools?

Vendors at club shows, Bonsai-a-thon, conventions  
Bonsai nurseries

### Where do we find our bonsai pots?

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### Recommended Books & Magazines

Bonsai Techniques I and II - John Yoshio Naka (Vendor tables, ebay?)  
Four Seasons of Bonsai - Kyuzo Murata - 1984 (bonsai nurseries, ebay)  
Masterpieces of Bonsai - Edited by Yoshio Takayanagi - 1986 (ebay)  
Bonsai in California - volumes 1 to 27 (Calif Bonsai Society show in March would have some of the recent issues, try ebay for older ones)  
International Bonsai Digest - Fall 1974 and 1976 (very few - vendors at convention?)  
Nice background on early bonsai pioneers in California  
Golden Statements Magazine- GSBF - 6 times a year (subscription)  
News about clubs, shows, conventions  
Bonsai Focus Magazine - 6 times a year (subscription about \$75/year)  
European based - articles on Japanese & American Artists, too