

Bonsai Techniques

These common bonsai cultivation techniques, which have been developed over centuries and passed down through generations, can be observed at the Omiya Bonsai Village's seven nurseries.

Pruning

Pruning, which means removing superfluous or overgrown branches, is key to achieving the desired shape of a bonsai. Imagination contributes to this skill as much as dexterity: since anything cut away can never be restored, the artisan must visualize the result before snipping.

Wiring

Metal wire may be wrapped around branches in order to direct their growth. Success requires that a highly skilled artisan apply this wiring without causing harm, and also that this is done at the most opportune time in the tree's development.

Creating deadwood: *jin* and *shari*

This advanced technique, applied to evergreen *shohaku* trees, involves creating naked deadwood on branches and trunks (*jin* and *shari*, respectively) to mimic the effects of a tree exposed to elements such as wind, snow, and lightning. The bark is stripped off and special *jin* pliers and engraving tools or sandpaper are used to create the effect. Lime sulfur is applied finally as a preservative to prevent rot.

Defoliating

Seasonally shedding bonsai are sometimes shorn of leaves in early summer, in order to force the tree to grow new, smaller leaves before winter sets in. This can also be done to only select parts of a bonsai to restore balance.

Repotting

All bonsai need periodic repotting, with the frequency depending on the tree species.

Overgrown and possibly congested roots are pruned before repotting in fresh soil, which also deals with blocked air circulation inside the pot.

Watering

Watering is the most basic, yet essential, of cultivation practices. Trees generally need watering daily, and a healthy specimen will absorb its water well. The artisan must exercise good judgment in assessing the dryness of soil, since over-watering a weaker tree can accelerate the decay of its roots.