

Bonsai and the Four Seasons

Sensitivity to the changing seasons is deeply embedded in the Japanese way of life. The country's traditional calendar, used from ancient times up until the late nineteenth century, contained not only the familiar "four seasons" but a remarkable 72 "micro-seasons," each subtly different from those preceding and following it. Awareness of such micro-seasons has for centuries manifested itself in a range of customs, cultural practices, and artistic forms. The arts of bonsai are very much a part of this tradition.

Bonsai artisans will often make use of seasonally shedding *zoki* trees or *kusamono* (lit., grass trees) when they wish to express something relating to the passing of the seasons, or a particular point in the year (such as New Year's). To demonstrate just how dramatically the impression given by a *zoki* bonsai can change with the season, the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum's Collection Gallery features an interactive display. By touching or swiping, the screen reveals how trees from a variety of popular species take on different guises through the year.