

### 3. SHAPING.

It would be rare to find a tree that is just the right shape, and has no need for any styling or pruning. It is for this reason that the need arises to shape the tree to give it its desired shape. I suppose it is ironic that we do so much to a tree to make it look natural!!! In this section we will cover issues such as wiring, pruning, defoliating and creating "jin" This is the aspect that causes most people to shy away from bonsai. The fear of doing something wrong, like cutting off the wrong branch! It is for this reason that it is good to start with some inexpensive trees that you can afford to kill, break, muck up and so on. You will not be an expert from the beginning, but you will have fun while you learn!

#### A. Wiring

Wiring is perhaps the best method to bend branches to their desired shape. The wire that is used is "annealed " aluminium wire. This wire comes in many different gauges (thickness).

##### i. When to begin.

Training with wire should begin as soon as possible. You will soon find out how difficult it can be to wire and bend on an old branch. Often in the procedure, because of the stiffness of the branch, they are more prone to snapping. Obviously the tree needs to be old enough to have started to develop "old" wood. This is noticeable when a branch or trunk begins to lose its 'greenness' and starts to appear brown or just darken. If you try and wire a young green branch, you are likely to damage the outer layer, and lessen the chance of branchlets growing later.

##### ii. Wire thickness.

A general rule of thumb in selecting what gauge of wire to use, is it should be about 1/3rd that of the branch being wired. If the degree of bending is to be quite severe, then a thicker gauge should be used. Again this is something that is only learned with practice, and more practice. The length of the wire needed will be about 1/3 longer than the section you are going to wire.

##### iii. When to wire.

Wiring can be done at any time. For some trees it is easier to wire in winter when all its leaves have dropped, leaving a clear skeleton to work with. It is at this time that you can really move freely around the tree and see what you are doing. It is probably best to wire a tree when it is on the dry side.

There are pros and cons for wiring in each season:

In spring there are young buds to avoid, the bark is softer and therefore marks easier, the tree is growing quickly and wire will tend to cut in, yet this is the time when the tree is most pliable and the desired shape is more easily obtained.

In summer, wiring starts to become a little difficult because of the increased foliage. It is vital to make sure that no foliage is trapped under the wire, as rotting leaves or needles will attract insects and also mark the bark. One of the advantages in summer is that the tree is still quite pliable to shape, and some of the younger growth is now starting to harden off.

In autumn the tree is growing very quickly, so wire needs to be applied with caution, so as not to cut into the tree as it's expanding

In winter wiring is easier for deciduous trees as the limbs are more visible because of the lack of leaves. This makes it so much easier to see where the branches are growing, and the direction that they need to be shaped in. The tree is not thickening as it is the dormant season, scarring is less likely and the branch will usually set to shape by spring.

##### iii. How to wire.

The first thing to remember is that all your wire should be at a 45 degree angle to the trunk or branch. It is better to bend a branch a little less than required than break it! You can always increase the bend over a period of time. Remember PATIENCE at all times. Bonsais take years to create, don't be tempted to do it all in one year! Always have in mind which way you desire the branch before attempting to wire. Don't put the wire on and start to experiment with which way it would look better. This will scar and substantially weaken the branch.

It is best to start by wiring the trunk first. The wire should be pushed into the ground as deep as possible, and then begin to wire up the trunk, being careful of new growth as you go.

The wire should be placed reasonably tight, but not too tight. If it is too tight it will cut into the branch, if it is too loose it will not be effective in holding the required shape. It is most important that the wire is anchored properly. Without this you will not be able to hold the shape you require. This is done by using an opposite branch, or branch above the one being wired. When wiring a branch downwards the wire should pass over the top of the branch for the first turn. Likewise when wiring upwards, the wire should pass under the branch for the first turn.

## C. Cutting and shaping techniques.

### 1. Tools

It is crucial in the shaping of a tree, the way that it is cut.

The most important thing is like all jobs Use the right tool!

Many tools are available that are designed specifically for bonsai. They are not cheap, but are paramount to obtaining the desired result. Some of the tools are

Pruning hook

Side cutters

Knob cutters

Trimming shears

Scissors (for small branchlets)

Scissors (for root cutting)

Wire cutters

Jinnyng pliers (ordinary pliers will do)

A chop stick

Sharp knife