

Bonsai Pomegranate Care

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General Information:

Punica granatum is a deciduous subtropical that is native to areas throughout Iran and India. It has also been widely cultivated in China and Japan, having reportedly arrived there via the Silk Road, as well as the Mediterranean and tropical areas of Africa. Some cultivars may grow as tall as 20-30 feet in their ideal natural habitat, however most only reach 12-16 feet.

This showy tree is a popular choice for bonsai due to its visual attractiveness and ability to bear fruit (the seeds are the edible part of this unusual fruit).

Tree's Attributes:

The Pomegranate tree (sometimes considered a shrub, depending upon how it's grown) has opposite or sub-opposite foliage made up of narrow, glossy green leaves. The trunk is thick and sturdy, gray to brown in color, and furrowed and naturally twisting which makes it fascinating as a bonsai. The flowers may be a variety of colors depending on cultivar but red and orange are the most common. The fruits are anywhere from green to yellowish to deep scarlet or orange.

Temperature/Lighting/Location:

Surprisingly, this subtropical is actually quite hardy and can withstand temperatures down to about 14 degrees Fahrenheit. The best bet if you live in a temperate climate, however, is to keep this bonsai outdoors in the warm weather and bring it in once the air hits 41 degrees or so. Pomegranate loves full sun, so when indoors make sure it is either given a position in a sunny window or given artificial light. It can tolerate a little less light in winter.

Watering:

Punica granatum is fairly average in terms of water needs. It should be kept moist but not saturated as it can be vulnerable to root rot. Do not allow the soil to completely dry out. The task of regulating the watering schedule for this species can be made easier with the use of a moisture meter. Even though Pomegranate is accustomed to dry weather, it could still benefit from an occasional misting – once a week or so.

Fertilizing:

From the time new growth appears in spring through the end of summer, feed the Pomegranate bonsai bi-weekly. Use a liquid bonsai formula or an all-purpose plant fertilizer diluted to half-strength. For vigorous bloom and fruit growth use a blend with high levels of potassium and phosphorus. In mid-spring this tree can be given a dose of pulverized organic feed on top of its normal feeding schedule. Refrain from fertilizing for three months after repotting.

Pruning/Training:

Style – the most flattering styles for the Pomegranate bonsai are informal upright, semi-cascade, multi-trunks, slanting, and twisted trunk.

New shoots may be pinched back to one to three leaf sets. This should be done by hand rather than with clippers. To stimulate new growth, allow branches to grow longer than you ultimately want them to be, then prune. If you want the tree to flower and fruit, wait until after it has bloomed to do any pruning.

Larger varieties of Pomegranate bonsai can be wired using the thinnest appropriate wire for the branch. Take care not to wrap too tightly or bend too drastically at once as this species tends to have brittle branches. Dwarf Pomegranate cultivars can typically be shaped using only the clip and grow method.

Propagation:

Pomegranate bonsai are relatively easy to propagate by seeds. Simply rinse the seeds, rub them in paper toweling to remove the pulpy coating, and allow to dry for a few days. Plant in a starter soil – you can put the whole seedling pot into a plastic bag to increase humidity – and keep moist until germination. This tree is also easy to propagate by cuttings, layering, and division.

Repotting:

This can be carried out in the spring, just before or as the new buds are developing. Younger trees can be repotted every one to two years, older trees should be repotted every two to three years or when the root system outgrows the soil. Pomegranate flowers best when slightly root-bound so do not use a shallow pot for this tree. Prune up to a third of the root ball including no more than half of the fine roots. Transplant into well-draining soil such as Fujiyama bonsai soil mix.

Insects/Pests & Diseases:

This bonsai species may be attacked by aphids, whitefly, or pomegranate butterfly caterpillars.

Aphids can usually be rinsed off with a jet of water.

Whitefly is more of a problem with indoor trees, and may be controlled by spraying the tree with water, particularly underneath the leaves. Good ventilation can help keep whiteflies away.

Spray the tree every few months with a non-toxic insecticide and inspect often for any signs of pests. Do not spray the tree with insecticide when the soil is dry.

Mold can also be an issue for this tree, particularly in the wet months. Good ventilation and treatment with a fungicide will help control a mold problem.