

Bonsai Creation

By Bob

There are a number of opinions on creating a Bonsai collection. Many of us will start by buying a small specimen (often at a "Box Store" or Nursery). These "so called Bonsai" may have been in stock for some time and be suffering from neglect or improper care and most often are "*Tropical*" specimens and only suitable for indoor display. Maybe with a lot of luck we might buy a specimen that is relatively healthy and, with even greater luck, keep it alive.

The real joy of Bonsai comes from creating your own and styling it. Some of us will start with indigenous plants collected from the wild while most are created from "Garden Centre" stock. There is, however, a bewildering range of stock to choose from when you visit the nursery. This only compounds your decisions. What species, what size, deciduous or conifer, indoor or outdoor? We all have our own preferences.

Most of us tend to prefer the traditional conifers and indeed they can be styled and grown somewhat faster than deciduous, however, the latter come in many species and will often (depending on the species) reward you with more colour in the form of flowers and/or coloured foliage.

Once you have decided on your species you need to make some additional choices. It should be one with smallish leaves or needles so that it retains a proportional appearance as it develops. It should also be a species which will readily produce buds on the older wood. If you choose a flowering type, try to choose a species that flowers on the previous year's wood. The reason being that on those plants that flower on this year's wood require the shoots have to grow disproportionately long before flowering.

Having selected your final choice, now the real work begins so as to assure that out of the many trees available you select "*The*" tree - the one with the most potential. Take the time to contemplate its design so you can develop and expose its real soul.

Examine each plant carefully. Starting at the soil, scrape the soil back exposing the surface of the roots to see if they look natural as they radiate from the trunk. I usually scratch the bark with my nail to expose the underneath layer and make sure it is a healthy green. There should be plenty of lower branches distributed evenly around the trunk and which are bearing foliage close to the trunk. Branches should be progressively thinner towards the apex. Check if the trunk has natural taper with no unsightly scars or grafts showing. Don't assume that the existing trunk line will be the final one but it should conform to the style you want to create. Check that the tree is firmly rooted in the pot by holding the trunk and gently rocking it. If it rocks, pass it by and continue with your selection process. Avoid plants with die back and with withered or brown leaves which may be symptoms of disease or other problems.

Now that you have selected and purchased your plant (with the guarantee) bring it home and observe it for some time, carefully considering and possibly making photos or drawings to select the various style options open to this potential Bonsai. Consider the options at your leisure. Mark the branches that are to be removed, wired or shortened so that you can reach this tree's full potential and thus reveal its "*Hidden Soul*"