

# Re-potting and Root Pruning

## by Bob

One of the most consuming jobs which Bonsai hobbyists need to do, is the periodic re-potting of their trees. This also includes root pruning. The time frame will vary by species and plant vigour, but will likely be every one to five years.

As you remove your plants from winter storage, it is likely several will require this procedure.

It is to be hoped when you put them away in the early winter that you placed any maples in such a position that they would be removed first. It is **essential** that any transplanting of Maples be done while they are still dormant! While it is preferable to re-pot all trees before bud break, with maples it is essential.

Set up your work area in a sheltered area out of the direct sun and wind. Have readily at hand the premixed bonsai soil, an old dampened towel, a water misting bottle and your transplanting tools, eg. chopsticks, soil, scoops, root rake (or bent kitchen fork), an old knife or a putty knife and pruners. If possible have a good size but shallow plastic tub or an old plastic shower curtain to work on.

1. Take the plant you plan on re-potting and, using the knife blade or putty knife, run it completely around the edge of the pot. Undo or cut the wires anchoring the tree, then, holding the trunk gently, tilt the tree. Circling roots around the periphery indicate the need to undertake root pruning and re-potting. If these are present continue to ease the tree from the current pot, if not, replace the tree back in the pot.

2. Utilizing a chopstick or knitting needle, slowly untangle the long roots. Next, take a soil rake or root hook and begin combing the roots slowly and carefully, to prevent damaging them. Start on the surface at the trunk base and comb outward. As you continue raking you will be removing the soil and clearing the root ball. Comb out from under the root mass as well.

3. When you have finished, inspect under the base of the tree and see if you need to use a knob cutter on the trunk base, to improve how the re-potted tree will sit in the pot and, if necessary, trim it carefully.

4. Lift the tree and, using your pruners or scissors, remove about 1/3 of the hanging root cluster; the large circling roots may be totally removed. After you have completed this, cut pie shaped wedges from the root ball to encourage more fibrous root growth close to the trunk. At this stage you may want to use your misting bottle to lightly spray the roots to prevent them from getting too dry. (Repeat as often as necessary).

5. You can now return the tree to its current pot (after it has been cleaned), or, if you wish, select another one to improve the style and visual presentation. However, it's not usually necessary to increase the pot size.

6. Install the mesh screens over the drainage hole or holes. Some pots come with both drainage holes and wiring holes. Locate the position within the pot where you will place your tree and push up through the holes at least two ends of a length of wire so as to secure the tree until the roots become established.

7. Depending on the depth of the pot (with anything deeper than 1") you may want to lay down a layer of straight grit to facilitate drainage. Next, make a mound of your pre-prepared bonsai soil mixture where you wish to place the tree (usually 1/3 from the rear and 1/3 from the end of your pot). Place your tree on top of the mound and twist the trunk back and forth while setting it down. Then pull the wires tight and wire it in position. Continue adding more and more mixture with your scoop (it will settle around the roots if added as a dry blend). Using your chopstick work the soil down among the roots. It is important to wiggle the stick back and forth all around the roots to eliminate any damaging air pockets. Continue this process until you have filled the pot to the desired level. Make sure to leave a portion of the brace roots exposed.

Finally, water using a fine nose nozzle, so as not to wash away the new soil when watering the newly potted tree. Later the same day repeat the watering again so as to thoroughly water the tree in well. Then place in a shady, well protected area. When the soil has visually dried out, water as necessary and after several weeks it will be safe to fertilize with a 10-52-10 or other transplanting grade fertilizer. *Do not fertilize as soon as its been transplanted so as to prevent shocking the tree further.* After a couple of weeks, if the weather is suitable, you may move your tree to its final location.