

YOUR HANDY HINTS

● We can recommend this method of starting seeds, especially beans and peas, because they are easier to handle individually. It is a useful recycling tip, too. Save the cardboard centres from toilet rolls. Stand them in a trough with a little soil in the bottom, and fill each with seed raising mix, planting a seed about halfway down each tube. Once they have grown enough, each tube is easily lifted and transferred directly into the vegetable garden. There is no damage to roots, and the cardboard soon rots away, leaving a sturdier plant because the roots have been encouraged to grow deeper into the ground.

Pat Watson, Augusta

● Collect dripping water from solar pipes into an ice-cream container and use it to fill up the dog's drinking bucket or to water plants.

Pam Thwaites, Bruce Rock

TELL US YOUR HANDY HINTS
Do you have a clever planting tip or an idea to save water in the garden? Perhaps a tip for getting a stubborn plant to grow, or a secret for saving time on gardening jobs? We want to know about it.
Each week our new readers' tips brings you handy hints from the people of WA, so to see your tip published, write to us at Habitat Reader Tips, GPO Box 2935, Perth 6800, or send us an email at habitat@wanews.com.au. Please include your address and contact phone number.
All tips published will win a prize.



WIN!
Spring is just around the corner and to help you get ready for the flurry of gardening that comes with it, Habitat has three Sprout by Annabel Trends gardening packs to give away.
Each pack contains a Gardener's Hand Soap (\$9.95), Gardener's Hand Cleaner (\$15.95) and a pair of Goatskin Gloves (\$24.95), for a total value of \$50.85.
To enter, tell us in 25 words or less how you're planning to get your hands dirty in the garden this spring.
Write your answer, along with your name, address and phone number, on the back of an envelope and send it to Habitat Gardening Pack Giveaway, GPO Box 2933, Perth WA 6800. Entries close next Friday.



Shrinking passion expands
From little things, big trees grow ... as bonsai experts reveal

Although most of us probably think we have a pretty good idea of what bonsai is about, Bonsai Society of Western Australia president Dianne Boekhout said there were plenty of misconceptions, one of the most significant being that all bonsais were very small.
"There are actually different sizes and they can be up to 1.4m high, but all good bonsai replicate the best in nature in a smaller size," Ms Boekhout said.
"You've achieved that if, when you look at the tree, it's all in proportion and it looks aged — like a small copy of something you've seen in nature."
Bonsai originated in China, but it was in Japan that the style and guidelines of the art form were fully developed, Ms Boekhout said.
The main bonsai styles are formal and informal upright, off-centre slanting styles, and cascade and semi-cascade.

Other options include group planting and a windswept look.
Horticulturalist and owner of Bonsai Palace Liana Kopp said the distinctive bonsai styles were achieved by trimming the plant's branches, leaves and roots.
"Part of establishing a beautiful bonsai is the need to trim and wire the trunk and branches — roots are trimmed less often," she said.
Bonsai has been popular for a number of decades in WA and many local enthusiasts are members of one or both of the two main clubs, the Bonsai Society of WA and the smaller Bonsai Workshop.
Ms Boekhout estimated the two clubs had about 140 members between them but said there were plenty of people "that do bonsai who we don't see until we have a show".
In the past 12 years, Ms Kopp has sold more than 4200 bonsai around Perth, suggestive of the discipline's local popularity.
She said that with its Mediterranean climate, Perth was ideal for growing bonsai.
"Believe it or not, most trees are suitable for bonsai," she said, adding that figs — including climbing, fruiting, Moreton Bay, Port Jackson and weeping species — were particularly good candidates.
"Avoid plants with large leaves like frangipani, plants with short life spans like lavender and hot-house trees like boabs and fruit trees, as they need a lot of care."
Ms Boekhout said other species that could work well in Perth included olives, junipers, azaleas, maples and conifers, as well as natives such as bottlebrushes, myrtles in the baeckea family and even weeping peppermint trees.
"It really depends on the climate of each particular house more than each particular suburb," she said.
The best position for your bonsai will be determined by the species you choose, but Ms Boekhout said bonsais were overwhelmingly outdoor plants, despite a public perception to the contrary.
"Some trees might tolerate being inside for a day or

Looking after your bonsai

- **Sunshine:** This is the most important because no sunshine means no photosynthesis without which the bonsai can't transpire, grow, metabolise or synthesise its everyday nutrition.
- **Water:** The amount of water needed is dependent upon the amount of sunshine — winter means less sun, so less water is needed, and summer means lots of sun, so more water is needed.
- **Trimming:** If the bonsai is allowed to grow without trimming its branches and leaves, it will outgrow its pot and become sick. But, if it is trimmed regularly, it will put all its energy into growing new leaves and will stop growing roots.
- **Feeding:** Application of fertiliser to the soil will supply necessary nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and trace elements to keep the bonsai healthy.
- **Re-potting:** A bonsai can remain in the same pot and soil for up to 10 years and thrive with regular maintenance — but eventually the quality of the soil will become degraded because of natural erosion so a new mix will be necessary to avoid clay-like soil which suffocates the roots.

Information supplied by Liana Kopp, of Bonsai Palace

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A fine art: Tools of the bonsai trade.



Paperbark

two, but most won't last much longer than that and still be healthy," she said.

To get started, you could either buy an established bonsai plant or start from scratch, designing your own plant.

"It really depends on how much people want to spend and what you want to do," Ms Boekhout said.

Regardless of which option gardeners choose, she recommended seeking some form of expert advice by joining a club, getting lessons at a nursery or

simply researching online or at the local library. The Bonsai Society of WA runs public exhibitions, with the next one to be held on October 30-31 at the Fremantle Town Hall.

Ms Kopp said it would generally take a year and the full cycle of seasons to become knowledgeable about the basics of bonsai.

"You'll need to learn to water, and know how much sun the plant likes, how much to trim it and how much to fertilise it. It takes 12 months with summer, autumn, winter and spring weather."



Above: Japanese box. Above far right: Ficus.



Remove from bag or pot.



Brush off excess dirt.



Use mesh to keep soil in pot.

HOW TO RE-POT A BONSAI

You will need to re-pot your bonsai every two to four years, depending on its size, according to Peter Odin, of Bonsai Emporium.

Mr Odin recommended re-potting deciduous plants in August or September; evergreens such as pines — and this 12-year-old shimpaku juniper (*Juniperus segentii*) specimen — in spring; and tropical varieties such as ficus over summer.

1. Adjust the plant's shape with aluminium wire in a suitable gauge according to the plant's size.

2. Remove the plant from the pot or bag. Brush off excess dirt from the root ball and

trim excess roots using custom bonsai scissors.

3. Select a pot which fits the root ball easily. Turn the pot upside down and feed wire through the drainage holes. Cover with mesh to keep the soil in and the bugs out.

4. Half-fill the pot with fresh specialist bonsai soil, which is coarse for correct drainage.

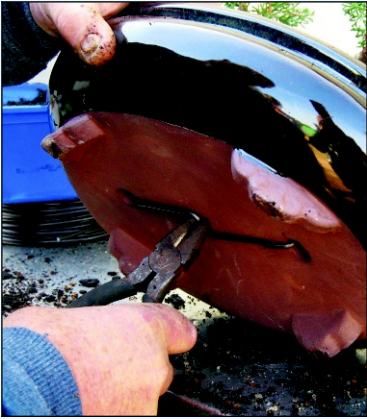
5. Place the plant in the pot off-centre. Anchor the tree by wrapping the wires around the trunk and pinching the wire tight on the pot's underside with pliers.

6. Give the tree a light trim, trying to achieve a triangular shape. Stand back periodically so you don't take too much off.

7. Pat down the soil and top up. Use a chopstick to get rid of air bubbles before smoothing the soil surface with a brush.

8. Decorate with small rocks, moss and a sprinkling of gravel. The look should be natural and to scale. "Nothing should overpower the plant," Mr Odin said.

9. To help the plant handle the shock of the trimming, place it in a bucket filled to the lip of the pot with a diluted seaweed tonic such as Seasol. Soak for 10 minutes. To avoid root burn, don't fertilise for six weeks. Use a seaweed tonic weekly and water frequently.



Pinch wire tight on pot's underside.



Use chopsticks to get rid of air bubbles.



Decorate with small rocks.



Bonsai contacts:

- Bonsai Emporium, West Swan, www.bonsai-emporium.com 9374 0555.
 - Bonsai Palace, Fremantle, www.bonsaipalace.net.au 0419 047 244.
 - Lee's Bonsai World, Bedford, www.leesbonsaiworld.com 9370 5915.
- Clubs/societies:
- Bonsai Society of WA, www.bonsaisocietywa.com 9362 6996.
 - The Bonsai Workshop, www.bonsaiworkshopwa.com 9405 4456 or 9246 0284.
 - Satsuki Society of Australasia, www.satsukisociety.com 9572 3295.

'It take 12 months with summer, autumn, winter and spring weather.'

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