

## **Miniature jade plant a quick-fix bonsai**

Normally it takes five to ten years and a lot of patience to make a reasonably good bonsai depending upon the species. *Portulacaria afra* is a great option for those who have neither the time nor the patience, but would like to experiment to create an aged looking bonsai in just two growing seasons. To keep a good bonsai shape, frequent pruning (and/or pinching) is necessary.

A member of the family *Portulacaceae*, *Portulacaria afra*, popularly known as miniature jade plant is native to South Africa. It is an evergreen succulent found all over the world.



The small, roundish and fleshy leaves placed very close together help in the formation of a good foliage pad. It is a suitable plant material for bonsai novices due its perennial nature and ease in styling.

It is a fast-growing plant species and is suitable for several bonsai styles. Cascade and semi-cascade styles are its natural forms as its branches tend to droop due to their weight. However, formal upright, informal upright, slanting and group planting are other suitable styles. The trunk and branches of this species are flexible and readily accept wiring to be positioned in the right direction. Because of plants heavy weight due to its foliage, it is always better to place it in a comparatively deeper container to accommodate and balance the plant properly.

Many residents in the tricity are having up to 15-year-old mature miniature jade plants grown as normal plants without any one even noticing them. These plants have survived several years without re-potting and are mostly overgrown. To give a conspicuous look to the garden these plants can be trained into good-looking aged bonsai in just two growing seasons.

### **Create your own bonsai**

Take an aged *Portulacaria afra* plant in whatever form it is available.

- Create space for working by clipping small branches which are on the trunk-line and up to 2 cm away from the base of each branch.
- While keeping the plant at an eye-level height, view it from all angles possible. Decide on the style of bonsai to be created, keeping in mind the basic requirements of various styles. It may be ensured that the front of the bonsai chosen is the best for the style.
- Clip all other long branches to size which go beyond the dimensions of the bonsai to be created.
- Clip other small branches which are of no use in styling the structure of bonsai

- Wire the main trunk-line with a wire of reasonable thickness and bring it to the desired position keeping in line with the style. It should be ensured that wire is removed before it cuts into the trunk and branches, normally after 2-3 months.
- Wire the branches in order to position them in the right angle and direction so that the plant gives a look of a bonsai. Finally pinch to refine the shape.
- The success of the whole project lies in weekly pinching of the branches to help in creating better pads and to progressively improve the shape of the bonsai.
- It normally takes about a month's time for the plant to adjust to the new wiring after which, it should be re-potted in a bonsai pot using cactus compost along with the necessary root pruning. Place the pot in a shaded area for about two weeks and water only when top 2 cm of soil becomes dry. Gradually bring the plant to full sun. The plant is forgiving and tolerates under watering and over watering, but it is always better to allow the plant to dry before watering it.

— The writer is the President of the National Cactus and Succulent Society of India.

### **Tending tips**

- As it is a fast growing species, weekly pinching during growth period should be carried out regularly to accelerate the growth and improve the shape of the pads.
- For the leaves to remain small and compact, the bonsai should be placed in full sun. Water when the top soil becomes dry, but under watering will help in reducing the size of leaves and making them compact.
- Re-pot once in three years, preferably in spring.
  - Take atleast a 3-4 years old bushy *Portulacaria* plant.
  - Visualize the shape and design of the finished bonsai tree as per the style you are creating; pinch undesired branches and leaves that do not follow the form.
  - For the bonsai to look aesthetic, the cuts made while cutting the branches should flush along the main trunk or branch.
  - Pinch undesired terminal buds from over-sized branches to give the best possible shape and also to encourage side branching for the plant to become bushy.
  - Repetitive pinching of the bonsai periodically reduces the size of leaves and helps to maintain shape and develop denser leaf buds over time for a more tree-like appearance.
  - If required, light wiring of the plant is done to give a better shape to the tree.
  - keep the plant in a sunny location for the thick elliptical leaves to turn red around the outside edges

*Young branches and trunk are reddish brown, when they mature they become grayish in color.*

*The leaves are very close together, obovate, opposite and just under 1/2 " long -- when grown in the sun.*

*In the summer it is not unusual to 'pinch' or prune twice a week to maintain a well-styled tree.*

*At first glance it may be difficult to recognize this plant as a good bonsai subject, take a second look. Scrutinize the trunk.*

#### *Finding Subjects*

*Portulacaria afra is commonly used in hanging baskets and for potted house plants. You may find them overgrown in garden centers.*

*In some climates, good subjects may be found in the ground.*

*Guy Dunan pointed out some beauties in the landscape in Hawaii. The trunks were several inches in diameter!*

*For most of us, the best place for finding a starter or even specimens, is in bonsai nurseries.*

*Water storing plants such as Portulacaria use their fleshy leaves and branches as reservoirs.*

*They can survive in relatively small amounts of soil and like to almost dry out between waterings.*

*During the rainy season in Miami, I always moved my 'tiny leaf jades' under the eaves of the house and hand watered them as needed.*

*They did not need the daily rains, especially when recently potted.*

*Watering (or not) is the trickiest part of growing this plant*

There are many reasons why succulents make ideal subjects for bonsai. Native to tropical and semitropical arid regions around the globe, many species are naturally small or undergo "dwarfing" in the wild due to harsh conditions. Growing slowly from crevices and rocky ground and enduring abrasive winds, erratic water supply, dramatic fluctuations in daily temperature, browsing by animals, bright sunlight, and thin, fast-draining soil, mature succulents can actually end up looking like bonsai.

Succulents also have unique morphological features that make them appealing to bonsai artists, namely their fleshy leaves, swollen trunks, and thickened bases—adaptations that enable the plants to store excess water for

use during dry periods. What's more, many have interesting leaves, wonderful bark texture and color, beautiful flower displays, or dramatic shapes when dormant and leafless. Some succulents are pleasantly aromatic.

Root pruning may not be needed and is generally not recommended for succulents. Succulent roots are rarely vigorous when pruned, so the less disruption the better. If roots must be trimmed for aesthetic reasons, remove all soil, keep the wounds dry until they are completely scarred over, and then replant. Moisture on open wounds almost certainly invites rot. Very large cuts may require several weeks to heal.

Succulents can be carefully wired using aluminum wire, which is more pliable than copper. Wire may need to be left on for long periods of time because succulents are generally slow growing.

*Read more:*

[ml#ixzz3OP3ZUVsd/insaimary.com/Jade-Bonsai.html#ixzz3OP3PmQCV](http://www.bonsaimary.com/Jade-Bonsai.html#ixzz3OP3PmQCV)

**http://www.bo A jade bonsai created from *Portulacaria afra* is much easier to develop as a good bonsai than the larger leaf plant, *Crassula argentea*.**

Portulacaria afra is also known as elephant grass, small leaf jade and dwarf jade.

It has shorter internodes and much smaller leaves than *Crassula* varieties.

However, both species are often referred to by the common name of jade.

**Read more: [ttp://www.bonsaimary.com/Jade-Bonsai.html#ixzz3OP3UmZI](http://www.bonsaimary.com/Jade-Bonsai.html#ixzz3OP3UmZI) Finding Subjects**

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**Read more: <http://www.bonsaimary.com/Jade-Bo> f you are keen to have a bonsai why not consider a succulent bonsai, they are easy to grow, can be grown indoors in the UK as they require**

warmth and they require less watering and can still produce the iconic shapes of bonsai trees as demonstrated by the Jade plant (*Portulacaria*) in the leading image.

Here is a list with links to a range of succulents species that make good bonsai but the list is endless so give one a try:-

While you may think bonsai is limited to needled evergreens or maples in trays, this look can be created using virtually any kind of plant. What matters most is the composition, which is carefully created with three primary elements: pot, plant and rock. In Japan, succulent plant lovers began applying bonsai aesthetic to their specimens. With succulents, they are trending toward handmade pots in the ancient tradition of wabi sabi, which is beauty derived from imperfection of nature. These one of a kind pots are more coveted than mass produced bonsai pots due to the fresh exotic looks of succulent based compositions. These are not true bonsais but quasi bonsai that extends the art outside the box.



Adult *Moringa ovalifolia* tree in the wild, Namibia.

Bonsai is an ancient art form that seeks to re-create nature in miniature. It was born out of a deep appreciation for the natural world and a desire to convey the spiritual power and beauty of the larger landscape to more confined domestic spaces. Its practitioners developed proven methods for pruning and shaping plant specimens to exhibit the forms of adult trees molded by their natural environments.

*Adenium obesum* (Desert rose)



This 20-year-old 22-inch-high succulent was grown from seed in a nursery in a 10-gallon tub. Over a period of several years the tree was groomed and its roots were slowly raised in a training container. Branches were pruned to create Y-formation growth and rebranching, and they were carefully bent using aluminum bonsai wire. It is currently staged in a 16- by 14-inch glazed olive-green bonsai container. The plant receives full sun, and when it's not dormant, it is watered so that the soil is evenly and moderately moist.

### *Bursera microphylla*



This 30-year-old, 24-inch-wide succulent has been in training as a bonsai for five years. Its trunk was elevated to partially expose the root, and it was leaned to the left. The branching was then wired in the opposite direction to create a dramatic, windblown style.

## Creating a Succulent Bonsai

There are roughly 10,000 succulent species altogether, distributed through 60 different plant families. Their diversity of form offers an abundance of interesting bonsai options. In nature, succulents follow such bonsai styles as broom, informal upright, slanted, prostrate, semicascade, windswept, literati, and grotesque. Bonsai artists are also creating new interpretations of these traditional stylistic models based on the growth habits of succulent species.

Prune according to established bonsai recommendations to encourage Y-shaped branching and proportionately smaller internodes. (For information on basic pruning techniques, as well as other general information on bonsai growing, consult the publications and web sites listed in "General Bonsai Information.") Pruning may prevent flowering the following season or until new growth has been established.

Follow the same recommendations for selecting containers as with traditional and tropical bonsai. Above all, ensure good drainage. Drill additional holes, if necessary, and cover holes with open, nonclogging screens.

Succulents may be staged as individual bonsai, forests, companion plants, or in landscape trays. Avoid planting species with different growing requirements together in the same container. Use rocks for propping and stabilizing, and use wire ties to secure plants to the container. As a top covering, use crushed rock, haydite (a shale/clay aggregate), or gravel; moss should not be used because it does not typically grow with desert plants and thus presents an unnatural setting

## Tiny Versions of Nature



We recently started adding several [succulent bonsai products](#) to our store, so we're excited to tell you a little more about our fascination with Bonsai. In Japanese, the word *bon* means "tray", and the word *sai* means "to plant", and that is exactly what practitioners of bonsai do; plant trees in trays, or shallow pots. Most people probably associate bonsai with small, or even teeny tiny plants. Traditional bonsai trees range from 6 inches to 4 feet tall. The bonsai artists use techniques to keep their plants small, while mimicking the natural growth patterns of larger trees. It's very possible that you've been fascinated by these little trees enough to buy a tiny one from the mall only to have it die a couple weeks later. While the tradition of bonsai has a very robust set of principles to follow, our succulent bonsai projects only loosely mimic the basic bonsai aesthetics so that they are much easier to create and to care for. And because succulents usually start pretty small, they're perfect for bonsai projects. We like to call our succulent bonsai projects "bonsai for black thumbs."

The unusual root-over-rock bonsai style suits the succulent jade plant. Although succulents and bonsai may seem a strange partnership, succulents, like the jade plant (*Crassula ovata*), actually feature unique morphological traits that make them excellent bonsai subjects. The jade plant's fleshy leaves and swollen trunk lend interest to a miniaturized display and can be adapted even by a beginner bonsai hobbyist. Guided by the plant's natural structure, ideal styles for the jade plant include informal upright, slanting and root-over-rock.

## Jade Plant as Bonsai

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Pear-shaped, glossy green leaves that are flattened, yet succulent, characterize the jade plant. On some varieties, leaves have red-tinged edges. Slowly, over two or three years, the plant develops a thick, gnarled, light-tan trunk. New plants can be easily started from a leaf cutting. From fall into spring, clusters of pink, star-shaped blossoms appear on the plant in profusion. Jade plants should only be set outside in their containers in U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zones 8 to 10. Even then, bring them inside if the temperature falls below 50 degree Fahrenheit. Plant in well-draining potting mix, and repot every three to four years in spring. Do not prune the roots very aggressively; it can weaken the plant. If your bonsai needs wiring to achieve the desired shape, use aluminum wire, which is more pliable than copper