Plant Profile - Corokia & Serissa

Fig 17.0 Corokia

Corokia (Wire Netting Bush)

There are approximately ten species of Corokia, native to New Zealand. The most common one used for Bonsai in Australia is *Corokia cotoneaster*. It is a small evergreen shrub growing unusual zigzag branches. It can grow in quite a twisted way naturally. Foliage is very small and green and the branches and trunk are dark grey and very thin and wire-like. Foliage is quite sparsely spaced on the tree. The trunk takes quite a bit of time to thicken up, so trees are kept small. Mature specimens grown in gardens for some time will develop reasonably large size trunks.

They enjoy a full sun position most times of the year, preferring some protection from summer afternoon sun. They enjoy regular watering in the warmer months but it's best not to overwater in winter as they can rot. Potting mix should be quite free-draining. They don't need to be re-potted on a yearly basis; every two years is sufficient, the best time for doing so being in winter/early spring. They will produce clusters of small star-shaped yellow flowers in spring; a tiny red berry can develop afterwards from the flower.

Shaping can be a bit tricky but fun. A clip and grow approach is recommended, trimming branches to maintain some of the natural movement. Because of this individuality, it is quite hard to follow traditional Japanese styling and branch selection, but an aesthetically pleasing shape can still be achieved. The most popular styles for this plant are Informal Upright and Semi Cascade and they can also be used in a landscape setting. Utmost care should be taken if wishing to wire a Corokia as the thin branches can be easily crushed, killing branches. Do not wire too tightly around the branch. Foliage density can increase over time with regular pruning but full foliage pads should not be expected on a Corokia. Given the thin trunk, it is probably best not encourage this feature.

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Serissa foetida (Snow Rose) or (Tree of a Thousand Stars)

Fig 18.0 Serissa

Serissa is a small shrub native to South East Asia from India, China & Japan. There are five different varieties which are all suitable for Bonsai culture. They are characterised by tiny oval deep green foliage with a white or pink flower of different variants on each variety. They flower nearly all year long apart from the cooler winter months. They will grow steadily and naturally compact but the foliage can become extremely dense when trimmed regularly. A suckering growth habit is common which suits the development of multi-trunk or clump styles, however, a small or medium single-trunk Informal or Cascading style can also result by removing the suckers. They can also make ideal Bonsai landscape material because of their very small leaves and flowers and compact growing habit.

Serissa can be tricky to keep happy. They enjoy moderate sun but will appreciate some protection from the afternoon summer sun. They are not very forgiving if allowed to dry out so must be kept moist at all times. However, keeping them standing in a tray of water will result in their dropping a lot of foliage and eventually rot. They will also drop foliage if left to dry out. They can even be sensitive to a positional change in your backyard whether it's too hot, too cold etc. So if you find a place that it likes, leave it there. (Some might say, it's the Goldilocks of the Bonsai world!).

They should be re-potted regularly as they produce a lot of roots rapidly and can become easily pot-bound. Not being forgiving of drying out also makes re-potting more of a necessity. Re-pot at least once a year and if in small shallow pots, every six months if possible. The best time of the year to re-pot them is in the milder months of late winter/ early spring and early autumn. They can have quite a pungent smell when pruning either the root system or branches. Be sure to liquid feed them on a regular basis as they do use quite a bit of energy with their prolific flowering and root and foliage growth.

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Serissa can be wired to hold their shape and will respond well. However, care should be taken when placing wire on branches, paying particular attention to where the join of the branch meets the trunk which is especially weak and if not well supported, can easily snap off.

The five different varieties are as follows;

- *Serissa foetida 'Variegated White"* – Variegated foliage with a pink bud opening to a single white star-shape flower;
- *Serissa foetida "Variegated Pink*"- Variegated foliage with deep pink buds opening to a single pink star-shape flower;
- *Serissa foetida "Double White"*- Deep oval green leaves with light pink buds opening up to a double white flower;
- *Serissa Serissaoides* – Mid-green leaves with a small tubular star-shaped flower. This particular variety grows the strongest and can develop a rough bark & reasonably thick trunk at a greater rate than others. This characteristic allows it to be developed to larger specimens;
- *Kyoto Serissa* - This variety has the smallest foliage and flower. Very tiny mid to dark green oval leaves with a tiny pink bud opening to white single flower. Can be grown to a compact size very easily with regular trimming.

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QUESTIONS

How often should Corokia be re-potted? _____

When can Corokia be re-potted? _____

Which styles are best suited to Serissas? _____

Can Serissas be wired? _____

How often should they be re-potted? _____

NOTES

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Raffia

Fig 19.0
(from https://www.quora.com/How-is-Raffia-used-for-bending-thick-branches)

Raffia is a very useful material used for bending trunks into tight curves or movements, for aiding movement with bending large trunks and branches and helping to bend old branches or trees with brittle wood. It can also be used as an aid on trees such as Cedars in setting trunks and branches which need to be wired for a longer period to allow the branches to set. Raffia is the dried foliage of the Raffia Palm and can be purchased in art and craft shops. It can also be found in the garden materials section of nurseries and garden centres.

To work effectively, raffia should be wet. Prior to use, it should be soaked in a bucket of water for a few hours to soften up. When ready for use, pull the raffia out of the water and separate it from the bundle into single strands, running your fingers along the strand of raffia to remove excess moisture. Gather four or five strands and tie a knot at one end. Then cut the other end so all strands are level with each other. Repeat the process to cater for the job at hand.

To apply, start with one tied end twisted diagonally around the branch and then overlap it to anchor it. Continue to go over the previously rolled raffia by half, making sure it is pulled tightly around the branch or trunk. When one lot strands are finished, use another to overlap the end of the previous. Once at the end of the branch or trunk, separate the end of the raffia into two and tie it in a knot at the end to secure it to the tree.

Wire can now be applied over the top of the raffia, using a slightly larger gauge than usual for the size branch or trunk to be bent. It is also advisable to double-wire for extra support, leaving a slightly larger space than for the first wire.

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Raffia is not foolproof; it won't guarantee that a branch or trunk won't crack or break when bent, however, it will provide more support throughout the branch or trunk than just wiring. **Note**: Some cracking when bending is not an issue as the raffia will hold everything together. What you don't want to hear is a snap! That will most likely be a severed branch or trunk.

Any bending you do can be supported by guy wires. Simply placing some 1.5mm wire over the top of a branch and then pulling it down to another branch or other suitable anchor point will hold that bend with more strength and tension. To increase the tension get a thicker piece of wire around 5mm long and place it in between the two wires and twist to tension as much as needed.

The other benefit of raffia is that it allows the wire to stay on longer around the branch or trunk as it acts as a buffer between the wire and bark. It is possible to keep raffia in place for 18 to 24 months.

Some other important points when using raffia:

1. When placing the raffia on a tree where there are bare areas of wood without bark, mark the spot on the raffia as a reminder not to bend it at that point. It will be a weakness for bending and even with raffia, there is a high chance of cracking or snapping the branch or trunk;

2. Where there is a side branch to the branch being wrapped, wrap the raffia on both sides of the branch as possible as close to it as possible; never wrap over the branch and cover it;

3. Never braid raffia when placing it on a branch or trunk as this will cause extra tension, making it extremely difficult to bend the branch or trunk.

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QUESTIONS

Describe one use for raffia _____

What should be done to raffia before using it ? _____

Does applying raffia to a tree prevent cracks? _____

What should be done when raffia covers a bare spot on a branch?_____

_____

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Clump Style

Fig 20.0 Clump Style

A clump style is classified as three or more odd number of trunks growing from a common root system. There are several ways this could occur in nature:

- It is the natural growth habit of the tree. Some trees have a suckering growth habit and as the tree matures, these suckers develop into a clump of trunks. This is typical of a Japanese Flowering Quince;
- When a tree has been cut or disturbed near the base, it responds by sending out suckers from the damaged base. This is typical of a Liquidambar;
- A group of seeds germinate very close together and fuse to a common root base. This could occur with any tree which seeds;
- A clump style can be produced artificially by air layering a tree with a whorled branch arrangement (multiple branches occurring at the same point of the branch or trunk). An example of this is an Azalea.

Although suckering shoots are the key to developing a clump style composition, ensure that they don't become too vigorous, to the detriment of the already-existing mature trunks. Young suckering shoots can have more vigour than the original established trunks at times.

The clump style arrangement is similar to other multiple trunk compositions such as the raft style or forest planting as far as proportions go. The thickest trunk should be the tallest and the thinnest trunk, the shortest. All trunks should be visible. The overall image should be of an asymmetrical triangle or broad asymmetrical semi-circled shape. Trunks should be at varying distances from each other to make the arrangement as natural as possible.

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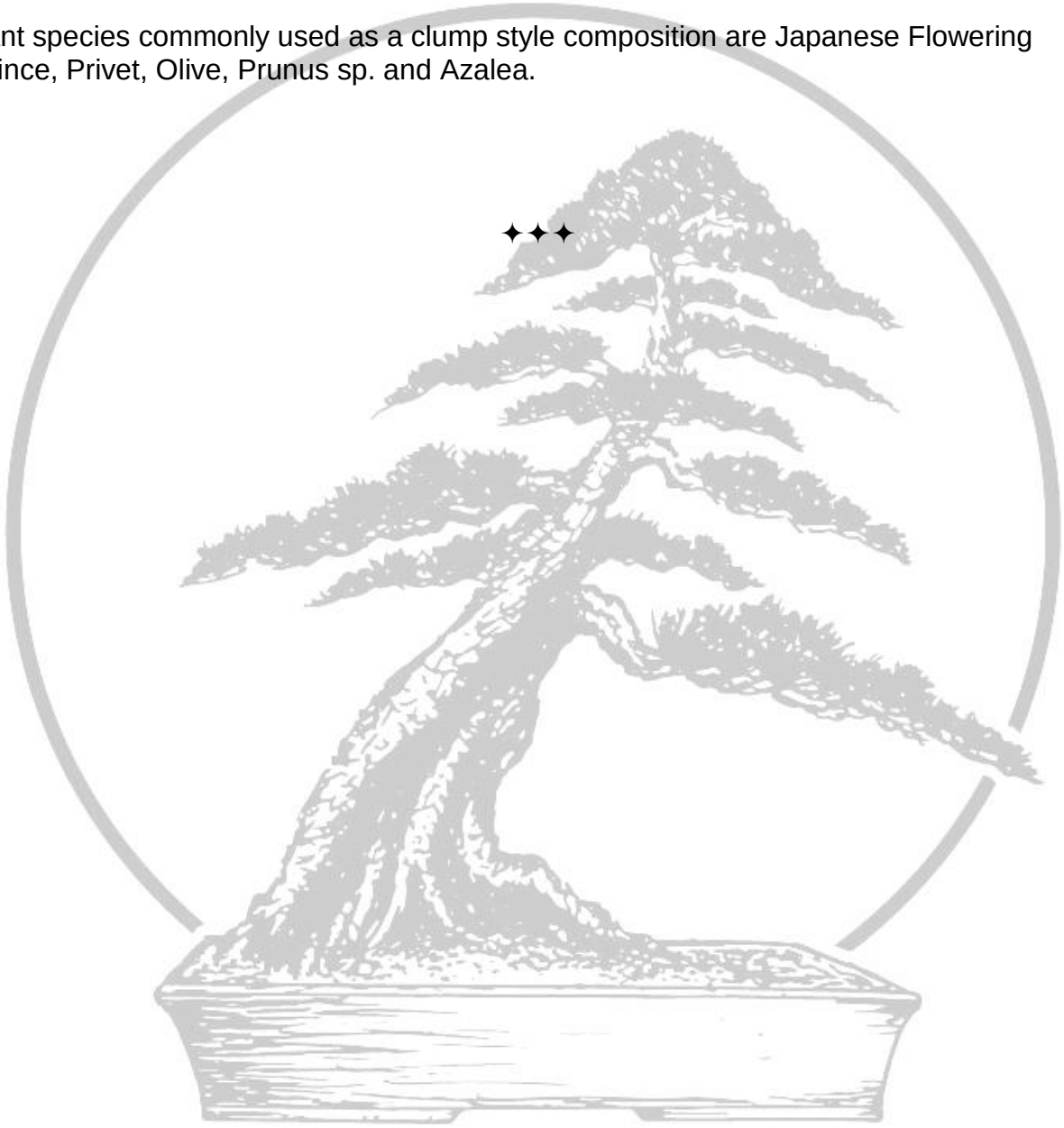
The clump composition should also be three dimensional and not flat (not in a straight line). Suckers should be developed behind existing trunks and not just to the sides of them. Suckers can be added continually as the composition matures. However, if a sucker is not growing in a desired area, it can also be removed. Branching, for the most part, should be encouraged to grow out from the clump and not inward.

Plant species commonly used as a clump style composition are Japanese Flowering Quince, Privet, Olive, Prunus sp. and Azalea.



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QUESTIONS

Name one way to develop a clump style _____

_____

Should trunks be the same size? _____

Why?_____

Name two plants suitable for this style_____

NOTES

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Plant Profile - Japanese Quince & Chinese Quince

Japanese Flowering Quince - Chaenomeles japonica

Fig 21.0 Japanese Quince

This is a small to medium-sized deciduous flowering and fruiting shrub with a suckering growth habit. Some varieties will sucker more than others, so choose a species accordingly. Although tending to grow with multiple trunks, it is possible to remove all the suckers, choosing one to develop as a single trunk. They have moderate growth and can develop excellent branch ramification if pruned regularly.

Leaves are oval and matt green and on the slightly larger side for Bonsai but they are grown for their flowers and fruit. Flowers are single or double and come in white, orange, red and pink and some variations in between. Flowering occurs in mid to late winter when the tree is without foliage and can really put on a spectacular show when there isn't a lot happening with other plants. Fruit will form on some of the branches after flowering, varying from round to oval and of differing size. The side facing the sun will tend to colour a rosy pink, slightly red colour and the underside will vary from light green to yellow.

They will tolerate a full sun position but will appreciate some protection from the summer sun. They are not very forgiving when allowed to dry out and should be kept moist at all times.

They should be re-potted each year because of their vigorous root system, preferably in early winter before flowers emerge.

Young shoots are fairly pliable and easily bent and shaped with wire but older branches can be more difficult and will crack quite easily. Wiring is best done mid to late autumn to avoid destroying flower buds.

The most popular styles are Clump, Informal Upright, Semi-cascade and Cascade.

There is a more miniature version of the plant called Chaenomeles japonica ,Chojubai.

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Chinese Quince - Pseudocydonia sinensis

Fig 22.0 Chinese Quince

This is a deciduous medium size flowering and fruiting tree. It enjoys a full-sun position most times of the year but will appreciate some protection from afternoon summer sun.

It is a strong, vigorous growing tree with a wonderful growth habit branching out consistently as it matures. Trunks can develop quite quickly to a reasonable size developing strong prominent surface roots.

As the tree matures, bark will peel off in patches leaving a beautiful pattern of mottled colours.

In spring, it produces a large, pretty pink flower which is followed by an even larger yellow fruit. The fruit starts off green and matures to yellow when ripe. It should be removed once it gets too heavy for a branch.

Leaves are a rounded oval shape and quite thick, which appears to give them a bit of protection from burning too easily. Depending on how low the temperature drops in autumn, foliage can turn from bronze coloured tones to a strong scarlet or crimson.

Branches can develop with some interesting deviation or movement and if regularly trimmed, can result in excellent ramification with some twisting branches. They can be wired once the foliage drops off late winter. Young branches can be bent fairly easily but branches thicker than pen size will be less likely to achieve any movement.

Re-potting should be done at least every two years during winter. Re-potting young plants annually can help them to develop more quickly. Upright images are most common; particularly Informal Upright and Slanting Style. Full bun shape silhouettes look best.

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QUESTIONS

When do Japanese Quince flower? _____

Which position suits Japanese Quince in summer? _____

Is the Chinese Quince a slow grower? _____

When should a Chinese Quince be re-potted?_____

_____

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Problem Trees

Whether it is an inherited tree or one that's been worked on for some time, everyone has a tree they could refer to as a "Problem Child".

Whilst there's usually a solution, it may not be as obvious to its owner as to someone seeing it for the first time. An extra pair of eyes should always be called upon when all else fails. It may result in a short-term solution or it could mean a complete re-think leading to a long-term project. Either way, it will be a positive step towards a tree's progress as a stagnant tree costs valuable development time and frustration. If left as is, it will become neglected and the opportunity for it to reach its potential as a Bonsai will be lost.

Points to consider?

Below is a checklist of points to consider when trying to reach a design change decision:

1. Is the problem with the tree in its current state and style a fault one that could be corrected?

   If the answer is no, then look at the tree from scratch as you would a new one from a nursery.

2. What is the surface root system and angle of the trunk from the ground saying about how the rest of the tree should be growing? Perhaps the original style chosen for the tree was not appropriate.

3. Can a change of angle, by tilting the tree, give it a more dynamic look?

4. What possible alternative trunk lines are available for the tree?

5. Does the tree's size need to be modified?

6. Can the particular species of tree be cut back hard to bare wood to re-shoot?

7. Is the only alternative the possibility of making one or more air layers from the tree to start something completely new?

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QUESTIONS

Why should a second opinion be sought for an ongoing problem with a tree?

_____

What are two things to consider prior to making a decision about a problem tree ?

_____

_____

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VIDEO NIGHT

Kevin Willson, European Bonsai Artist (60 minute duration)

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Critiquing a Tree

Just the mention of the word “critique” sends a shiver up the spine of some Bonsai enthusiasts, be it beginner or experienced.

Not to be confused with criticising, a critique in Bonsai is a **constructive discussion** about the perceived strengths and weaknesses of a tree and possibilities of its future development based on those observations. A formal critique is conducted by an experienced Bonsai enthusiast, usually at a club meeting or seminar. He or she will analyse the structure of the Bonsai in great detail from the nebari to the apex. They will then form an opinion on how the Bonsai appears to them and discuss aspects they feel need to be brought to the owner’s attention. These could be perceived faults in the design of the Bonsai such as adjusting or removing certain branches, foliage imbalances, pot suitability etc. It is conducted with honesty, giving a summary of positives and negatives about the tree.

The owner of the tree may already be familiar with the identified flaws but may lack the knowledge to correct them. It is the responsibility of the person conducting the critique to outline possible solutions, which may be short or long-term; the owner decides the way forward. On the other hand, the person conducting the critique may not find any problems and just wish the marvellous specimen was in their personal collection!

Why do some people have their heart in their mouth when asked if they would like their Bonsai critiqued?

Many people misunderstand the purpose of a critique. It is not about making disparaging remarks about a tree or its owner’s artistic skill. It may also be that as the critique is usually done in front of an audience, making some people feel intimidated and embarrassed about comments regarding their tree being made in public, while others may even feel failures amongst their peers if they don’t get a good report. Be assured that there won’t be many (if any) people in any audience with absolutely perfect trees in their personal collection. The critique is for everyone’s benefit. Unfortunately, there will always be people with an unrealistic view of their Bonsai who will take any advice as a negative, letting their ego get in the way of healthy debate.

One of the main reasons to ask other Bonsai enthusiasts for a critique is to have it looked at with new eyes as anyone can become blasé about a tree they see everyday; becoming comfortable with its look and less analytical. As well as possible faults, others may be able to visualise a better way to style the tree bringing its strengths to the fore and make it even more appealing.

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However, a critique should not be taken as gospel; it is an opinion which can be taken on board or dismissed. Surrendering a strongly-held personal opinion should not be done on someone's say-so. If not comfortable about the suggestions, then an informed decision can be made by the owner to either accept some, all or none of them; beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Although there are rules applicable to each Bonsai style, it is still a matter of personal taste as to how a tree is presented.

All Bonsai enthusiasts develop an opinion as to how certain trees should be styled; some like jins and sharis, others don't, some people like aerial roots on Ficus, others don't, etc.

There can also be a cultural bias as to how a tree should be styled; a Japanese Master may design a tree to suit his traditional cultural philosophies; a European Master may style a Bonsai according to his contemporary cultural philosophies. It was interesting to view such a cultural bias at a recent convention. Two well-known respected Bonsai Masters from different parts of the world conducted a critique on the same Bonsai. In most cases they differed in opinion on each Bonsai. Many people in the audience wondered who was right; Why didn't they agree? It's interesting to note that when there is one Bonsai Master conducting a critique, the audience is comfortable with what is being said, in most cases, not questioning their opinions. We accept their thinking as the only way to style a tree. It is only when there is a difference of opinion from two different Bonsai Masters that people start questioning. In this case, the audience had to think about which view had more merit, perhaps which one was more aligned to their own way of thinking; again, a matter of opinion.

In summing up, do participate in critiques with an open mind and a willingness for discussion. Analyse the findings and take time to think through a possible new image of your tree. Most importantly, enjoy your Bonsai hobby and don't lose your personal style. Bonsai is not black and white; there are many shades of grey. The trick is to work out which shade applies to you.

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QUESTIONS

Who usually carries out a critique of a tree? _____

Should a critique provide solutions?

_____

What is one reason to take part in a critique?_____ _____

Is it compulsory to accept a critique recommendation?_____

Should all Bonsai rules be followed? _____

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Plant Profile - Taxodium distichum & Metasequoia glyptostroboides

Taxodium distichium (Swamp Cypress)

Fig 23.0 Swamp Cypress

A large robust deciduous tree found naturally growing in the swamps of the USA. The tree is distinguished by its buttressing upright tapering trunk with rough brown bark and fern-like foliage. The foliage can look very similar to the Metasequioa . The difference is three-fold.

1. The leaflets in the leaf of a Taxodium will be alternate to one another. In a Metasequioa, the leaflets are opposite to each other;

2. The leaflets are finer in a Taxodium and coarser in a Metasequioa;

3. Generally the Metasequioa leaf has larger spacing in the leaflets and generally it has a larger leaf than the Taxodium.

Swamp Cypress like a full-sun position and to be kept moist at all times. They can be left to sit in a water tray in the warmer months. Water the tree and fill up the tray with water and by the end of the day all the water will have been consumed by the plant.

They are best re-potted every year in winter because of their vigorous root system and to prevent them becoming pot-bound. As they're one of the last species to come out of dormancy, re-potting can be delayed until late-winter. Grown in a climate with extremes between day and night temperatures, the foliage will turn from bronze to pink in autumn.

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The best way to develop a Swamp Cypress as a Bonsai is to let the tree grow with a sacrifice leader for a number of years, letting the trunk thicken to between three to five centimetres. A cut can then be made where the first branch will appear. This will result in a lot of new growth, particularly around the top third of where the cut was made. Choose one branch as the first branch and another to continue as the leader of the trunk-line.

Let that new leader grow until it is about two-thirds the girth of the trunk and then cut it back hard to allowing for taper some deviation in the trunk. Although Swamp Cypress grow predominately straight, a telegraph-pole straight trunk without taper is not desirable. Then continue to repeat this exercise to develop both a tapering trunk and prominent side branches. The bottom branches in particular can be developed as elongated sacrifice branches to thicken up and cut back to develop taper.

The most popular styles for Bonsai are Informal Upright, Formal Upright, Forest Planting and Slanting Style. Most trees are developed to be a large specimen. Branches wire well with best results obtained at one to two years. The older the branches become, the more difficult it will be to achieve angles and bends. Alternatively, avoid wiring branches that have green stems and haven't developed bark as they will likely be crushed and die.

There is also an evergreen Taxodium called Taxodium macronatum . It has the same growth habit as the deciduous version but drops its leaves as the new spring ones emerge, whereas the deciduous one will be totally bare throughout winter. They can also get some autumn foliage colour but normally not as intense as the deciduous version.

Metasequioa glyptostroboides (Dawn Redwood)

Fig 24.0 Dawn Redwood

As with the Swamp Cypress, Dawn Redwood can also grow and develop a large trunk quickly. The trunk will have a bit of a reddish-brown look to the bark. They are very similar to a Swamp Cypress and can be developed in much the same way. One large big difference is that it should never be left in water, however, they will enjoy being kept moist at all times.

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They will like to grow in full sun but will appreciate protection from afternoon summer sun. They are also deciduous and their foliage will develop similar colour tones to that of a Swamp Cypress if, like them, they are grown in an environment with extremes of temperature between night and day. Also like the Swamp Cypress, they come out of dormancy in very late winter or early spring so can be re-potted late in the season.

Metasequioa is also mainly developed into large specimens and into all the styles mentioned for the Swamp Cypress. Both the Dawn Redwood and Swamp Cypress can have a shari carved into the trunk as the wood will preserve if painted with lime sulphur once a year. Normally this is done on large trunks to give the appearance of having been hit by lightning.

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QUESTIONS

Where should a Swamp Cypress be positioned?

_____

How often should a Swamp Cypress be re-potted?

_____

Is a Dawn Redwood a vigorous grower? _____

Is a Dawn Redwood deciduous or evergreen?_____

_____

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Plant Profile - Ginkgo biloba

Ginkgo biloba (Maidenhair Tree)

Fig 25.0 Ginkgo biloba

This is a very slow-growing deciduous tree which can develop a large trunk over time. Growing it in the ground can result in a thicker trunk. It is a prehistoric tree native to China with unusual bi-lobed leaves, that if folded, would match the other.

They can be a tree that requires patience to cultivate as they are not known for their rapid branch development. The tree needs to be pruned back hard constantly to generate branches and those branches need to be regularly pruned hard to develop further branching. However, avoid large scars on the plant as they are very slow and poor healers and the wood is very soft and prone to rotting.

They should be grown in very well-drained potting mix and kept on the dry side during winter or rotting roots may result. Alternately, they will enjoy being kept moist during the warmer months. They will do well in full sun except in summer where they will appreciate growing with some protection from the afternoon sun.

Wiring a Ginkgo can be a little tricky because of its soft bark, any force from the wire will cut through the bark leaving a scar. So it is best to wrap branches with raffia prior to wiring. Branches are usually fairly flexible. Wire is best applied in winter when the tree is without foliage.

The most common image of the Ginkgo Bonsai is the Flame Style where with upright angled branching and in the silhouette of a flame. They can also be trained in other variations of Informal Upright, Formal Upright, Slanting Style and Forest Plantings.

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As they do not have a vigorous root system, they should need re-potting every couple of years in winter.

A cultivar with better branching is *Sasatoga*. Another interesting Ginkgo cultivar is a dwarf called *Mariken*. It grows very compact with very small foliage at close internodes and has more branching.

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Striking Plants from Large Cuttings

It is surprising how many plants can be struck from large cuttings. Provided the type of plant allows large cuttings, there is no limit to the size of the cutting and the success of the resulting plant.

When preparing a large cutting, it is important to remove all foliage from the cutting to prevent moisture being lost through the leaves. Secondly, the top cut should be sealed with a cut paste or Japanese putty to reduce moisture loss. The cutting should be at least ten centimetres long; the width, as long as you dare. A potentially interesting bend can be achieved by cutting both the top and bottom on an angle. This is generally more desirable than a straight up and down trunk. Rooting hormone can be applied to the bottom of the cutting to encourage new roots. It is important to also place the cutting one third of its length into the soil or even up to half, for very large cuttings. This will also reduce moisture loss. The best time to do a hardwood cutting is during the best time for re-potting of the particular tree to be struck.

Plants known to have struck from large hardwood cuttings are:

Bougainvillea
Clerodendron
Crepe Myrtles
Elms
Figs
Gardenia jasminoides
Olive
Privet
Trident Maples
Wisteria

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QUESTIONS

What's one way to achieve a thicker trunk on a ginkgo? _____

_____

Where is the best position for a ginkgo in summer? _____

What must be done when taking a large cutting?_____

_____

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