

## REPOTTING: by Jonathan Cain

There should be a reason why you need to repot. Some reasons may be...

1. The tree needs to change its pot, for aesthetic reasons or the pot is broken. In this case the roots do not necessarily need to be trimmed and it may just be a simple case of transferring the existing soil and rootball from one pot to another. This process can be done throughout the year.
2. The tree has out grown its container and needs a change of pot. This is the most common reason for repotting and you will be replacing the tree into the same pot. Deciduous trees like ligustrum and acer benefit from regular repotting each year or once every two years. Before you start, ensure that you have the tools required.
  1. Enough replacement soil.
  2. A root hook.



3. A root scissor or secateurs
4. Gauze to cover the hole.
5. A backup pot (plastic) should the existing pot break.
6. Water spray bottle to keep the roots moist.

You will only need to trim the roots, due to the limited amount of soil being depleted, as the tree may become pot bound within 2 to 5 years and the nutrients in the soil depleted. This time frame that the tree takes to become root bound will depend on the species, the scale/size of the pot to the tree and age of the tree. (Younger trees grow more vigorously



than older trees). The nutrients in the soil need to be replaced, or your bonsai will deteriorate and may die. One can check whether the tree is root bound by watching whether the drainage has slowed down or stopped. You may also notice a lack in vigor and health of the tree. Also you can gently tug on the tree to see if it is stuck to the pot. If the surface soil starts to break, the tree is not root bound. If the tree lifts out with all the soil intact, the tree is root bound. The roots will also now be clearly visible with the entanglement of roots.

3. The soil is a bad mix for the tree and needs to be replaced. In this case you will need to replace most of the soil and the health and timing of doing this can be critical.



By trimming the roots below the soil, the balance of growth and foliage above the ground needs to be maintained and kept in balance. Should 20% of the roots be trimmed, it is important that 20% or more of the foliage is also removed. It is best to repot with the intention of trimming roots in spring, by gently remove the bonsai from its container. Uncoil the roots by raking out the roots with a root hook or rake. Remove about 10-20% of outer soil and roots. Cut off all dangling roots.



You should have a nice un messy root system. Place fresh soil underneath. Replace the bonsai and fill in the gaps with fresh bonsai soil mix. Press the soil nice and firmly around the roots. Dunk the bonsai in a bowl of water to expel all trapped air. Remove 10-20% of the foliage as well, which will give the roots time to settle. Place in a shady spot until new growth emerges.

Should your tree not stabilize within 7 days, remove all leaves on deciduous trees, and leave two or three on EACH BRANCH TIP on evergreen trees.

You may need help the first time around, but following this routine should make it successful. Repotting is best started in late winter, until mid summer.

Do not wire after repotting. You may stress out the tree and branches may die or even worse the tree may die.

If you are working with trees that are sensitive to their roots being disturbed, such as pyracantha – fire thorn, then you can remove a wedge each year on rotation. This way you only disturb a small portion of the roots each year, not enough to distress the tree.

