

# Buddleja by Jonathan Cain

It belongs to the [Scrophulariaceae](#) family which is characterised by simple opposite leaves. The leaves are narrow and oblong. It is a shrub or small tree, 2-10m in height.

There are about 100 species world wide.

The flowers are bisexual occurring at the end of the branches.

## **Buddleja in Bonsai**

The best recognised species for bonsai is Buddleja Saligna (saligna meaning willow)

Common name False Olive, White Olive and Butterfly Bush.

Buddleja Saligna is endemic to SA and occurs all over SA with the exception of Lesotho, Kwa Zulu Natal Coastal belt and the arid western half of SA.

## **Appearance**

Bark is fissured and flakey with branches at 4 angles. It is more grey than brown.

The old trunks are fluted appearing muscular due to its vertical sap flow. The stems can also be twisted with damage caused by termites.

Leaves are oblong, green on top with pale grey below.

Flowers are clustered white to cream producing a fruit of about 2mm.

The wood is tough and hard making it good for jins and sharis.

## **Propagation**

Propagation is easily done through seed and cuttings.

Seed will germinate in about 4 weeks, although erratic.

Cuttings need to be hormone treated.

## **Why is buddleja used?**

1. They have a high survival rate after being removed from the wild.
2. They bud everywhere allowing good branch placement.
3. The branches growth is fast.
4. The leaves reduce to about 5mm.
5. The branches can be bent with wire.
6. The bark can be carved with an interesting grain and texture.
7. It is evergreen

## **Pruning**

Constant leaf removal is essential for small leaves and ramification. There is very little die back, so tight pruning is possible. Foliage may become very dense leaving a hiding place for pests.

It is apical dominant, so the growth on top will always be strongest.

Because of the alternating pairs of leaves it is a good species for Clip and Grow

The tree has a vertical sap flow. Two branches may be living on the same vein. By removing a lower branch too close to the trunk may stop the flow to the upper branch. A lower thick branch must be removed in stages.

Due to vertical sap flow each branch will have a specific root. The idea is not to have two or more branches developing on the same vein being fed by the same root. Otherwise growth rate on the branches will be slower than other branches which have one root.

In order to thicken the branch allow it to grow, and then later cut back and style.

Large wounds will not heal easily so when removing a large branch rather make a feature like a jin or a shari. The wood is extremely hard and rigid with a dry weight 1100kg/m<sup>3</sup>. (Natal Mahogany 600kg/m<sup>3</sup>, Hardekool 1200kg/m<sup>3</sup>). Idea for carving. The bonsais are watered regularly which causes rot. So sealing dead wood is very important. Lime sulphur is sometimes used. This looks white and if spilled onto the live wood can kill a vein.

A better solution is wood glue, which gives a good brown aesthetic appeal to the dead wood This needs to be reapplied every 2 years.

## **Wiring**

The branches are brittle and break easily, so be careful.

When wiring on regular pruned, the growth rate is slower, so wire can be removed after 3 to 5 months. Where the tree grows fast the shape should be retained after 2 to 3 months from wiring.



## **Repotting**

Any time of year, if the roots are not being cut, but best from May to September. Be careful of removing roots as the root is feeding a specific branch. You may lose an important branch.

Deep pot is best otherwise branches tend to die.

Natural coloured pots suite the best. Where the tree displays muscles a fluted pot is complementary.

Repot young trees every 2 years and up to every seven years for old trees.



## **Feeding**

Throughout the year with a general fertilizer.

## **Pests**

A grey caterpillar that eats the leaves, often spotted hanging by a thread of silk.

Aphids and Red Spider. Concentrate on the underside of the leaf when spraying.

Mites that are invisible, identified by the leaf curling sideways. Here a systemic insecticide is called for over two or three seasons. Contact

poisons do not kill the eggs.

Earthworms feed on the humus of the soil. They should be removed. Their droppings also cause the soil to clog up and compact.

## **Soil**

Grows any most mixtures of soil in the wild . In bonsai it likes well drained soil. Suggested mix 70% inert stone or washed sharp river sand. 30% fine sifted compost, pine bark or seedling mix.

## **Watering**

Can withstand long periods of drought in the wild. In a pot you will lose branches.

## **Collected trees.**

The best time for digging is late August. Try not to damage the bark when digging as no future. Growth will occur above the damaged area.

Cut off all damage to the roots, ie where the roots are cracked and damaged. Do not leave any long roots that are going to be cut later on in order to fit the tree into a bonsai container. Use a horizontal cut as this is where the new roots will re-emerge.

Once collected budding can start within a week but the roots have not as yet established themselves. The tree is simply using its internal stored energy. Resist the temptation to style with wire or carve. Leave the tree for a year allowing the root system to re-establish itself. The buddleja has a vertical sap flow and any damage to a root will directly affect one of the top branches. Where a lot of branches form in one area remove the unwanted branches by pulling them off. Cutting will produce more branches.

## **Climate/placement**

Love full sun. Leaving them in full sun miniaturise and thickens the leaf compared to trees in full shade.

Are frost hardy.

They do not tolerate indoors.

## **Styles**

Informal and slanting with jins and dead wood – most popular  
Broom style.

Group planting and forest – popular due to their dense crowns.

Root over rock – no as the tree tends to lose branching and ramification.

Formal upright – yes

Cascade – seldom as the tree is apical dominant.

