

Pines

Pines suitable for bonsai, are a very difficult subjects in Gauteng. This is because their natural environment is cold mountains and not hot savannahs. Pines do well in the southern, coastal, wetter climates. Pine bonsai are happiest living in open shade during winter and full shade during summer. Direct sun is too hot even in temperate latitudes because it causes yellowing of the needles. Black Pines are most successful, with the other species having close to a nil survival rate in Gauteng. They are prone to get a white powdery disease that invariably kills them unless treated.

Black Pine (*Pinus thunbergii*)

Grows easily from seed. Black, thick, rough bark, with vivid dark green foliage. The bark looks like scales. The branches remain flexible for a long time.

Branch length is controlled by terminal bud or candle removal. The pines carry two needles per fascicle. Their normal length is about 8 cm. Shorter needles are produced by regularly reducing candle length. Cutting the needle, results in a brown tip.

Pine bonsai are repotted in early spring just before the buds swell into candles. It is good practice to incorporate some composted pine litter in the soil. If it is available, collect it some 20 cm. below ground level under a stand of pines. The litter provides the mycorrhizae fungi so beneficial for pines health and vigour.

Wiring is only done during late summer, before the dormant season begins. The reason for this is that conifer bark slips easily when the trees are in sap. Therefore, remove all wiring before the spring flush occurs.

The Scots Pine (*P. sylvestris*) and the Mountain Pine (*P. mughus mugo*)

In nature the needles of these pines persist up to 5 years or more. They have well-defined resting buds. When pruning back branches always sever them just in front one of these buds. They are easily spotted because of each one is marked by a single, long needle. These pines can be styled in all bonsai styles, except the broom style.

Japanese White or Five-needle Pine (*Pinus parviflora* or *Pinus pentaphylla*;))

The Japanese White Pine is a famous bonsai subject with, as its name indicates, five bluish-green needles per bundle. Its short needles tend to live for three to four seasons. Pinching back the candles is done at the beginning of summer. It stops the lengthening of the shoots, induces the emergence of back buds and arouses any adventitious shoots thereby forcing the horizontal growth that increases the density of the foliage pads. Selecting needles and any buds to be removed is done towards the end of summer and comprises the elimination of third year needles. These are easily identified because they have two to three needles per sheath instead of the usual five needles and are situated on the back part of the branches. These redundant needles are cut short with scissors in order not to damage their fascicles.