

Wintercare by Jonathan Cain

The season is turning, it is getting colder, the rain has stopped. The trees are reacting and adapting by changing their foliage colours and shredding their leaves, in the case of deciduous trees and will slow down in the case of evergreen trees.

Feeding

While there is still green leaves your feeding routine must change to fertilizer with a low, or zero Nitrogen (N) component and higher Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K) components. Although the leaves may be gone the root system is still active.

Species

Different species will require different levels of care. So group similar species together, such as Baobab and Coral trees, the figs, acacia, etc. Those that are more tropical will need higher protection. The protection is not only from frost but also cold winds, cold from the ground and hibernating insects.

Frost requires that you cover the tree with frost cloth, plastic, straw or a roof. Make sure that the cover does not lie on the tree and that there is a layer of air between the cover and the tree.

Wind can be broken by walls and shade netting. Wind is often neglected, and causes the most damage.

It is often colder at ground level than a meter above the ground, so try and leave the trees on tables or stands.

Remove all fallen leaves where insects, fungi and eggs may be hibernating waiting to feed on new leaves or bore into the trunk. Moss is also a hiding place for insects, so remove it. Any leaves that have not naturally fallen must be removed. By doing this and forcing the tree into hibernation, you will get a better flush of new leaves in the spring.

As leaves fall the water requirements must also be reduced to as little as every 3rd day. Cold nights will freeze water, so it is better to water mid morning and if possible protect the roots by moving trees into deeper pots.

Remove any leaves that are on the top of shelves and pots to reduce chance of funguses developing. Any leaves still on the trees should be plucked off. Now is the time to get good books and freshen up on bonsai techniques and new species available.

Pruning

Winter pruning can be done for deciduous trees especially once the leaves have dropped off. Make sure that you protect the wound with cut paste or wood glue to stop the rapid drying out of the wound and scarring, which will take a longer time to heal.

One can start with Celtis, maples, elms, and swamp cypress. Winter pruning has the benefit of being able to see the 'naked' branch structure and especially the finer branches.

It is an ideal time to do carving and cleaning up Jins and Shari. It is important to treat the carved areas with pure lime sulphur in the case of Junipers, or wood glue in the case of all other species.

Potting

You can start at the end of June with the early deciduous trees. Celtis, elms and swamp cypresses, can be done at this time. Acacia's and acer can be left for July. Not the best time but emergency potting can be done as long as the roots are not pruned i.e. potting up is fine.

Wiring

All wire can now be removed.

This is not a good time to wire, as the sap has stopped flowing and the branches are brittle. A cold spell also will cool the wire on the branch and may kill the branch. However in late winter – August is a good time to wire, as the sap starts to flow and buds appear.

WINTER JOBS

Sharp tools are essential for efficient working and for the health cuts of your trees. Take some time out to sharpen all your tools carefully.

Inspect your display stands and benches and repair or replace any rotten or broken slats.

Weeding

Remove all weeds and dead leaves from your pots.

Pots

Have you noticed that you never seem to have the right pot for the tree when you need it? This is the time of year when decisions like that are made, so prepare for next year by deciding on what pots you really need and order them now.