

# THE BONSAI SOCIETY OF SW FLORIDA

January 2023



## Happy New Year!

**We wish all our members and future members a very healthy, prosperous and blessed New Year. May green thumbs be bountiful! Your club has many events, world class speakers and one-of-a-kind experiences planned for 2023. Be sure to sign up early to hold your spot. We are encouraging members to bring a friend to see what we do and to learn more about this ancient art. Introduce someone new to Bonsai.**

## Kusamono

By Martha Goff

What is Kusamono? Literally, the word means “grass thing” in Japanese. When collecting trees, the Japanese also collected a sampling of the herbs, grasses, or flowering plants that were growing in the same place as the collected tree. This clarified and reminded them of two things: 1. The season of the dig and , 2. The geographic location of the dig. Kusamono will live on and on if properly taken care of. As it goes through the seasons, it will grow and need repotting just like the tree that was collected.

Today we don't often collect trees. Rather we buy them. However, Kusamono still holds the relative importance that it did then. It stills tells the season and geographic location of the tree.

The best example I can share is a “don't do”. If you are showing a Desert Rose, you would not use a water loving Reed planting to show the geographic location of the Desert Rose. You would use some type of succulent that might have been gathered when collecting a Desert Rose. You would also not show a spring blooming tree with a dormant, leafless planting.

There are 3 types of Kusamono. First, we use the term Kusamono when the plantings are shown by themselves. We use the term, Shitakusa, when the plantings are shown beside a tree. Another type of Kusamono is Kokedama which can be used to compliment a tree or by itself. Shitakusa means “under grass”, which makes sense as it is shown below the pot line of the tree it accompanies. Kokedama means “moss ball.”

The planting is formed without a pot with a special soil that holds together around the planting and is then covered with moss. Once made, the planting is placed on a flat or similar ceramic or wooden container.

### **WHY AM I CARRYING ON ABOUT KUSAMONO???**

**Because come February we are going to have the rare privilege of learning about Kusamono with our country's foremost Kusamono artist, Young Choe.**

“Young Choe is a Kusamono artist who studied traditional art in her native Korea before moving to the United States and earning her BS in horticulture from the University of Maryland. While volunteering at the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum, she brought her artistic talent together with her knowledge of horticulture to create Kusamono. As her interest developed, Young traveled to Japan to study the unique art form with the master Kusamono artist, Keiko Yamane, a former student of Saburo Kato. She worked for many years with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) including the U.S. National Arboretum. Young is considered a leader in the field and enjoys conducting workshops and lectures nationally as well as internationally. Young studied internationally and is renowned for her expertise both botanically and artistically in Kusamono. Young will do a Power Point presentation on the art of Kusamono and then she will create a variety of Kusamono which we will raffle off in our March meeting. This should be very exciting and will lead to a wonderful Kusamono workshop for our March meeting.”

Young will present a lecture and a demo for us at our February meeting. After her talk on Kusamono, Young will demonstrate the art by creating a few Kusamono which we will raffle. In March the entire club is invited to participate and create your own Kusamono. Many, many more details coming about this venture. See more of the work by Young Choe at [kusamonochoe.com](http://kusamonochoe.com) Here is an example of her world-class Kusamono.



# Juniper Bonsai Care

by William Smith

Juniper Bonsai is a very popular coniferous tree or shrub. It has a foliage color range from light green to dark blue-green, and it has a needle-like or scale-like appearance. Junipers are one of the most desired trees suitable for making into a Bonsai. It is also one of the tree types that is avoided due to its care requirements in our sub-tropical climate. Junipers are readily available for purchase at Lowes, Home Depot and neighborhood nurseries.

There are many types of Junipers but, for this article only, Parsoni and Procumben Nana requirements will be the subject of this article.

## **Juniper Parsoni**

Juniper Parsoni is a cold hardy salt-resistant shrub and can grow in virtually in all soil types. This evergreen shrub has numerous needle-like leaves that give it beauty through the seasons. Its botanical name is Juniperus Chinensis. USDA Hardiness Zones 4-9. Here in Fort Myers, our USDA Hardiness Zone is 10A. Soil PH Range 6.0-7.0.

Generally, Parsoni can grow in any type of soil as long as it is well-drained. It requires a sunny location for the plant to survive.

## **Juniper Procumben Nana**

The Dwarf Japanese Garden Juniper, otherwise known as the Juniperus Procumbens 'Nana' or Garden Juniper 'Nana', Japanese Garden Juniper 'Nana', or Decumbent Juniper 'Nana', is another famous shrub very suitable for bonsai. Its care requirements are the same as the Parsoni Juniper.

The difficulty in growing Junipers lies in the USDA Hardiness Zone requirement of 4-9 when our zone is 10A. For now, let's see what other requirements are necessary to care for a Juniper Bonsai.

## **Light**

Juniper Parsoni and Procumben Nana grow best in full sunlight but can thrive in partial shade. Its leaves benefit from more exposure and will appear shinier when they receive full sun than when in partial shade. For juniper leaves to remain green, there must be plenty of light to support photosynthesis. For best results, plant the shrub in an area that receives at least 8 hours of direct sunlight.

## **Water and Soil**

Junipers are tolerant of a wide range of soil compositions. Whether you plant it in loamy, sandy, or clay soil, it will still thrive. However, you need to ensure that the soil is well-draining. Junipers do not like “wet feet!”

Watering junipers is also necessary to keep the roots from drying out and dying. How often a tree needs to be watered depends on several factors such as species of the tree, size of the tree, size of the pot, time of year, soil-mixture, and climate. While watering, remember that too much water is also a problem for many trees as it can cause root rot. Wait until the top 1-2 inches of topsoil dries out before the next watering. Once or twice weekly should do it but always look at and feel the dampness of the soil. Don't water on a routine. Make sure that when you do water you water the entire root mass.

## **Fertilizer**

Fertilizing is also necessary if your juniper is to remain healthy and beautiful. Since your juniper is growing in such a small amount of soil it is necessary to replenish the soil's supply of nutrients periodically. Use normal organic fertilizer pellets every month during the growing season or a liquid fertilizer every week. The growing season is March through November. If you'd like to see strong growth you can apply some higher nitrogen levels in the spring. A higher Nitrogen level will be 18 and above. Any general-purpose liquid fertilizer will do fine and is available at most garden centers. Your bonsai will also respond well to foliar feeding, with a water-soluble fertilizer applied every other month as a spray.

## **Pruning, Trimming and Wiring**

Pruning and trimming a juniper is very much like pruning and trimming a Ficus.

You should trim growth growing straight up or down or growing at the intersection between two branches. Also, prune branches that are readily determined as unnecessary in your design. When trimming make sure your scissors are clean and cut between the needles. Cutting between needles will avoid brown tips at the end of the cut. Pinching will also avoid brown tips. Junipers are generally a strong tree that also withstands aggressive pruning very well, but it cannot bud again from bare tree parts, so take care that there is some foliage left on every branch you wish to keep alive. The foliage pads should be wired and fanned out after thinning to let light and air get in, otherwise, the inner parts of the foliage pads will die, and dense pads also increase the risk of pest infestation. Aesthetically, we want unobstructed structures that “allow birds to fly through!”

## **Repotting**

Repot the Juniper once every two years using a basic, or slightly more draining soil mixture. Very old trees can be repotted at longer intervals. Pruning the roots of a juniper is a very touchy area and must be carefully done. Junipers don't like you messing with its roots. When pruning the roots, it is better to prune no more than 1/3 or less of the root length. The best time to repot is the during dormancy (~February, March).

If you are repotting your juniper, resist at all costs the urge to trim, prune or style the tree until the tree has recovered and you see strong signs of growth. Junipers can take only one assault at a time. Growing junipers requires patience.

## **Pests**

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/juniper-diseases-insect-pests/?message=helpful&outcome=success> (resource and credit)

Junipers are a favorite victim of red spider mites. If the tree appears weak, with yellowing foliage, it may have spider mites. To check for spider mites, hold a sheet of white paper under a branch and gently shake the foliage. If the paper comes away with many small dots that move, it has spider mites. To combat spider mites, spray with insecticidal soap or a nicotine solution (which can be made by soaking tobacco in water overnight). Other pests that attack junipers are Bagworm and Juniper Scale. These pests can be controlled by using Insecticides and Fungicides.

NOTE: there is a website listed above that gives excellent information on the control and treatment of juniper pests.

## **Conclusion**

The only juniper care requirement that needs to be carefully controlled is the USDA Hardiness Zone 4-9 when we live in Zone 10A. This difference can be minimized by leaving the tree outside and adhering to the other requirements that we can control. I believe that growing a strong bonsai with proper Light, Water, Fertilizer and Soil and controlling Pests will enable us to have success in maintaining a juniper bonsai. Go for it!

## **Dates to Note**

**January 21** Monthly meeting 9:00 am to Noon

**January 9** Mike Lane's Shohin class started. There are limited spots still left. Call Sam with questions, availability and cost. Sam Wollard [sswollard4@aol.com](mailto:sswollard4@aol.com) or 239-209-3162.

**February 5** Adam Lavigne workshop. 3 openings left. Contact Sam ASAP to register or sign up at the club meeting. Sam Wollard [sswollard4@aol.com](mailto:sswollard4@aol.com) or 239-209-3162

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