

Bald Cypress (Taxodium distichum) Bonsai Care

About The Bald Cypress

Bald cypress is a native North American species that typically grows in swampy regions where freshwater is abundant for six or more months of the year.

They are an incredibly unique tree with a rare characteristic of the production of knees, which grow in wet or poor soil. The purpose of the knees is not entirely known, however, some believe they might help aerate the tree's roots and assist in anchoring the tree in muddy soil.

As the bald cypress ages and grows, the upper canopy flattens out and creates the iconic flat-top style it's so well-known for. The conical trunk narrows as it reaches the canopy, creating an impressive overall aesthetic.

Placement

Your bald cypress will appreciate full sun in the exact same way as coastal redwoods do. However, keeping the temperature in mind, you can shade your tree in high heat, low humidity areas.

Watering

When watering your bald cypress, you'll want to remember that this is a tree that can exist fully submerged when in nature, so leaning on the water-heavy side of a water/oxygen balance is okay.

While you'd never want to let your bald cypress fully dry out, you also don't want it sopping wet or submerged when in a bonsai container. When containerized, the bald cypress bonsai requires that oxygen be allowed back into the system.

When watering your bald cypress, you want to focus on the roots — there's no need to mist the foliage or water the trunk.

Fertilizing

Ideally, you want your bald cypress to produce elongated shoots capable of becoming branches, so you want to fertilize heavily once leaf production begins. As the buds begin to open up in the spring, moderate to heavy applications of fertilizer are needed until you do your partial defoliation and pruning in early summer.

Fertilizing can stop in the hottest portion of summer, usually mid-July to the end of August, and resume moderately throughout the fall.

When the foliage begins to turn its natural fall color, you can stop fertilizing your bonsai until early spring when you'll start the cycle again.

Pruning & Trimming

A bald cypress can be pruned twice a year. First, prune the tree in the spring, just as you see the buds beginning to swell. You can prune to any desired length along the woody structure. When you do this the tree will bud at the cut and behind the cut.

A second bald cypress pruning should take place in June if the tree is in the northern hemisphere, or early December in the southern hemisphere when the fronds turn a slight degree of ruby red. Prune back elongated shoots to the desired length when they begin to produce lateral ramification.

It's best to prune the areas where you do not want the foliage to grow, such as the bottom side of the branches, and to remove about fifty percent of the needle mass.

Repotting

Repotting bald cypress should occur in the spring when the buds are swelling. Bald cypress bonsai trees do well in deep and shallow pots, but, because it's a conifer, it's important to leave some portion of the root mass untouched.

Young trees can be repotted every two years, while older trees need repotting every three to five years. Your bald cypress is ready to repot if the roots circle the root system or the rootball pushes itself upward from the pot.

Diseases, Insects & Other Pests

Bald cypress notoriously suffers from root aphids and root mealybugs that feed on the sugary excrement from the abundant amount of sugars and starches generated by the tree. The sugars and starches are generally deposited into the root systems, creating a healthy environment for the proliferation of pests.

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