

English Oak Bonsai Care Guide



Please read and follow this Care Guide to grasp an understanding of basic bonsai care.

This tree is a deciduous, hardy, English Oak (botanical name, Quercus robur) that magically comes alive in the spring.

Although a fairly slow growing tree, when cared for and fed properly, the trunk of the English Oak can weather and thicken fairly quickly, and it can produce small leaves in a short amount of time. The charm of both bark and leaves are what gives the oaks such great character, which is why it makes an ideal bonsai.

Watering (General): This is where many people make the mistake with their first bonsai; either lack of, or too much water. The oak is more likely to suffer from lack of water as opposed to overwatering.

To water, use a shower or mist setting on a hose; you want to sprinkle rather than blast it. If using a watering can (kid's ones are good), make sure it has a rose head; this safeguards washing away soil from the pot's edge, exposing your tree's roots and damaging its leaves. For proper saturation, you need to make sure the water is getting right through to the bottom of the pot, and not just bouncing off the top. If the water starts to flood and run over the edge of the pot whilst you are watering, pause, let the water soak in, and water again until you are certain the water has gone right through (running out of the drainage hole/s).

The media contained in the soil are made up of different kinds, some of which aid in free drainage (course pumice, fine pumice, propagation sand). The rest is potting mix and compost. So although it contains free draining medium, you can still overwater. The roots do not like to be continuously wet, but moist is good. If your tree is left to sit in water, it may eventually suffocate, however, oaks can tolerate overwatering to some degree, but will not tolerate under watering or drowning.

Watering in the evening is best, or early morning and evening if you need to water twice a day. **DEATH = Over or under watering.**

Watering (summer): During the hottest part of summer, you will need to water every day. You can also mist your tree's foliage at the same time.

If there has been a day of cloud cover/drizzle, check with your finger to see if the soil is still moist; if it is, you can skip a day of watering and just mist the foliage instead. If you are not sure, water the soil a little anyway.

If your bonsai is in a **small pot**, and/or has poor soil, **it will dry out much quicker** than if in a large pot, so **you will need to water more often**. Intense heat and wind may possibly mean watering twice a day, plus some trees even of the same species will need more water than others. It will also depend on if your tree needs repotting, as it may not have the soil content to contain the moisture required to support the excess roots that have grown. It's a fine line with watering. The idea is to get into the habit of checking your bonsai every day to see what is required. Don't rely on the weather forecast; if it says it's meant to rain, water it anyway, if you feel it needs it.

During the hottest part of summer, if you are unable to provide enough water during the day, or you are away on holiday etc, you can use a saucer under your bonsai. However to avoid it swimming in water and assist with air flow, you will need to place some fine gravel/propagation sand in the saucer (humidity tray); you do not want it sitting in water as it will eventually suffocate. Using a saucer is not ideal, as you may come to rely on it and get out of the habit of your daily checks, but it is better than your tree drying out. Do not use a saucer during the cooler months or when you have the ability to water your tree.

As the weather turns cooler coming into autumn, water less.

Watering (winter): As required. You might find you only need to water once or twice a week, depending on the size of your pot, how much rain, wind and sun there has been, however, continuously check the moisture levels in the soil.

Increase watering as you come into spring. Spring can catch you out by sneaking up on you, hence the importance of daily checks.

Best Position: Outside in full Sun/Part shade, sheltered from strong winds:

Oaks can handle full sun, but can also tolerate part shade. Ideally full morning and early afternoon sun and part shade in the late afternoon. They can

tolerate all day sun, but you may need to give it some shade during the afternoon in the hottest part of summer to give it a break, but try **not** to keep moving it around; give it a chance to settle in its environment. Try and find one position in your garden that will suit its ideal position.

Rotate your tree in its position from time to time so it receives an even distribution of sunlight on its foliage (quarter turns every week if possible or whenever you think about it).

Make sure it is in a position where it can't get knocked over by the wind, or dogs and cats.

Wind: Protect your tree as best as you can from the wind. Whether it is wired or not, its roots and foliage will not tolerate constant bashing from the wind. If you get severe gusts, temporarily place it in a protected area, even if it means keeping it in the shade (not continuous darkness) or even inside (**as a last resort and no more than 2 days, and never in the window in the sun**).

Feeding your Tree: Fertiliser: Recommend Fish, Blood and Bone – Organic if possible- **(Never use on very dry soil, always moisten first, do not fertilise a tree that looks unwell and do not use after root trimming for approx 4-6 weeks)**

Shake well and apply the average range of suggested rate as per the individual product's instructions during the growing seasons (eg. If products suggestion states using 40-80mls of FBB use 60mls to 9 litres of water) or approx. 5mls per 750mls of water. **Feed once every 2 weeks in the growing seasons from:**

Early March – late May (early to late autumn). Then take a break over the winter, and then starting again from:

Mid August – early January (early spring/early summer). The idea is to fertilise proactively, not reactively to it growing. Gently pour on your Bonsai tree. Alternatively you can feed slow release fertiliser, but you have less control.

Be sure to store this product out of the heat (either directly or indirectly as it will go off). Dogs and cats will want to drink it, so don't leave it lying around and wash away any run-off. It shouldn't be poisonous, but just to be on the safe side.

Seaweed Tonic (Organic): **(This is a tonic not a fertiliser; store out of heat also)**

Always use the **Organic** seaweed tonic as this promotes Mycorrhiza. This is the white, stringy growth you may have seen in soil that looks like white

mould/fungus (healthy, beneficial, symbiotic fungus essential to healthy roots that act like a root extension). Do not be alarmed if you see this; this is the good stuff. If you feed **inorganic**, it tells the Mycorrhizae they are not welcome. Have a look on the internet so you know what it looks like.

Shake well and apply as per the product's instructions, every other week, **alternating weeks with the Fish Blood and Bone** (FBB one week and Seaweed tonic the next), or every week during those periods when you are not feeding FBB.

Wiring and Unwiring: (To avoid damage to its bark, do not wire your tree when it is wet.)

Wire your oak bonsai in the warmer months when it is more pliable and when new shoots have hardened. If the tree is wired for shaping, you will need to keep an eye on the wire. Usually 4-6 months is long enough for the wire to take effect (depending on the individual tree's thickness of trunk/branch and growth rate). If you get caught out and leave the wire on too long, it will bite into the tree as it grows and cause ugly, semi/permanent scarring. Remove the branch wires first before the trunk wire.

Most shaping with deciduous trees is achieved through pruning, but wiring is also practiced. Do not use copper wire, only aluminium, as copper wire is too harsh on deciduous trees. Any severe bends should be done slowly over time.

Your tree may also have been wired with an anchorage wire for stability. If it has, you will see the wire/s has been threaded through the bottom drainage holes or separate wire holes and secured near the trunk base. Look underneath the pot. If no wires are seen running under the bottom, it has no anchorage wires.

Wiring is something you will need to visually watch, and can take some time to master, so look at some videos on Google (Eastern Leaf, Bonsai Mirai, Mikbonsai or Herons Bonsai are a few good ones to follow). When wiring your tree, always support the tree with your thumb and fore finger of the other hand as you work your way along the tree's trunk and branches. Be careful not to wire over any new buds or sprouted leaves.

Remove the thin branch wire before removing the trunk wire. Cut the wire off as best as you can, squarely and using suitable wire cutters, however if the wire is too thin to cut and/or you feel you can unwind the wire successfully without harming the tree, do so carefully, but remember to support the tree.

NOTE: Try not to play around with the branches too much after wiring; wire them, then place them into shape after you have wired all the desired branches. Do not be too rough or keep changing the angle; do it gradually, possibly over a few days. Have a plan in your head before you wire. Too much bending will damage, weaken, dry and possibly even kill off branches or the tree itself.

Unless very light wiring, do not wire the tree after repotting, this is too stressful for the tree and you risk killing branches or the tree itself. Don't be tempted. You may watch internet videos of people repotting, pruning and wiring all in one day; we do not see this tree again to know if it survived, and chances are it will survive, but from experience, the tree takes an enormous hit to its health. There is no hurry; enjoy your tree and the journey.

After repotting or pruning, leave it for at least 1 month before you wire the tree and visa versa. Also, wire the trunk first, then leave it a couple of weeks or so before you wire a few branches, etc. The tree will be much happier doing it this way. Remember, **less is more**.

Decide what shape you want your tree to take on. The necessity to wire your tree can be endless, unless it is already in the shape you want. Over time the tree may try and straighten up after you remove the wire (if applicable). Give it a break for a while, then rewire if necessary, but if the tree has been 'wire bitten,' when you go to rewire the tree, wind the wire in the opposite direction from the last time it was wired, so you don't re-place the wire back into the same grooves where the wire bite site is.

General Care: The foundation of plant care is healthy roots. This is obtained by adequate routine watering, nutrition, pruning, sunlight and air flow. Healthy roots means a healthy tree.

As mentioned, get into the habit of looking at your Bonsai every day, as it may have been knocked over, be dry, or it may need attention in some way.

Trim off any dead bits and pull out all weeds; some moss is fine.

Know in advance what the wind is doing so you can protect it before leaving for the day.

If it does grow acorns (unlikely), remove them, as this can draw too much energy from the tree.

Constantly check the wire to make sure it's not biting in. Do not leave the wire on longer than 4-6 months, depending on the individual tree.

Make sure the roots have not become exposed on the top too much, and replace some soil or place moss around them to cover them if they have (if it is out of repotting season).

It is very common for oaks to get the disease **Powdery Mildew (look on the internet)**. It does **not** kill the tree as it lives on living tissue but is unsightly and can stunt the tree's growth as it coats the tree's solar panels (leaves) and reduces its ability to photosynthesise. Treat the leaves with a suitable spray (ask the staff at California Home & Garden what to use). Regularly check the underside of leaves for bugs or caterpillars and treat if present. **Unless it's for your tree, do not use other sprays near it.**

Keep a log book of when you last repotted and wired your tree, as well as a fertilising/seaweed tonic calendar. Take a photo of your tree now so you can compare in a few years time; you will be amazed how much it grows.

Repotting: Never repot on a hot day or in direct sunlight and do not be tempted to repot out of season. The instructions below may sound daunting, so watch internet videos before attempting this. Everyone is nervous on their first attempt.

To freshen soil and trim roots, you will need to repot your tree every 2 years whilst still young, or annually if it is in a very small pot (12cm or less). As your tree ages you can leave it longer (3-4 years). **Repot during the early spring. Remember to loosen any existing wire holding the tree in.**

Have your new soil ready to go before you remove the tree from its pot, and if you are changing to a new pot, have this ready too, to ensure roots are not exposed for too long. Oaks like a fairly deep pot. Feel free to place your tree into a larger training pot when repotting to enable it to grow quicker and give it a break from the small pot, but you will still need to keep the roots trimmed, otherwise it makes it tricky when you want to put it back in its bonsai pot.

If you have just the one tree, it might be easier to buy some pre bonsai soil mix from California Home & Garden (just add a little more compost), otherwise use about 60-70% Potting Mix/Compost, and 30-40% mixture of Course Pumice, Fine Pumice and Propagation Sand for drainage (do not use soil/clay from your garden). You will want to place a thin layer of the drainage mix in the base of

the pot (approx. 1cm); propagation sand will suffice. Replace or leave the drainage mesh in place. **Remember if your tree is wired in and secured at the base of the trunk; you will need to unwind this before you do anything else;** lightly dig around near the base of the trunk and you will find the ends of the wire.

After loosening the wire, either remove it from the bottom by pulling it through, or bend each end to the sides of the pot out of the way and carefully dig around the edges of the pot with a knife or suitable tool and lever your tree out of its pot. You will want to leave some of the old soil around the roots (collect some and put it to one side to use later). Untangle the roots by **combing down from the top edge** with a bent, silver fork/mini rake (California Home & Garden stock these). Gently comb the roots out as best you can. If you haven't left it too long before repotting, this should be easy enough.

Although not usually vigorous root growers, the oak roots may have got quite long, so cut off about 1/3 of the feeder roots, (as long as you feel there are enough roots to spare, otherwise just give a light trim, (but enough to fit in the pot). Also remove any hard, fibrous roots (leaving fibrous roots on discourages fine feeder roots to grow). **If any roots get ripped or damaged, cut them clean.** Try and train the roots to grow out radially rather than vertically, so they will sit flat in the pot and to achieve better root flair (Nebari).

Always make sure you have sharp shears to do this, but do not use your trimming scissors as the gritty soil will eventually make them blunt, so have one for roots and one for the foliage. Try not to remove all of the old soil around the roots when repotting, but sometimes this can't be helped.

Once you have trimmed the roots, clean out the pot if you are re-using it and make sure there is still mesh secured over the drainage holes. Then, if you removed it, replace the anchorage wire through the drainage holes of the pot or through the separate wire holes. Bend the wire away from you as you are working out the best angle to place the tree on. Don't forget to place approx. 1cm of the drainage aggregates in the bottom of the pot, then cover that with 1 cm of new bonsai mix. Before placing your tree in the pot, place a layer of the old soil for the roots to sit on.

You do **not** want your tree to be bare rooted for too long whilst you are repotting it. This is another good way to harm a tree, so if it is taking longer

than expected, you can either place it in a bucket of water or seaweed tonic, or you can keep them misted and covered with soil/wet cloth.

If the root ball has a hollow underside, mound the soil up a bit and place the tree directly over this mound so it fills up that hollow. You can also place a small amount of Sphagnum Moss around its roots for better root health.

When you are working out the best angle for the tree, make sure the tree will sit in the pot without being too high; you may need to flatten the roots off a bit more so it sits flat. Then sprinkle a mixture of old soils and new soil around the top side of the roots and gently use a chopstick to press the soil down which aids in placing the soil around the roots and removes any air pockets. Once you have the tree semi secured, replace the anchorage wire around the roots/base of the tree (not the trunk), making sure it's not too tight but enough to keep it steady. Cut off any excess wire if necessary, and poke and bury the end of the wire so it is hidden away.

Fill the pot with the remaining soils and keep going with the chopstick until you are happy with the firmness of the soil. Don't overdo this and damage the roots. The action is, gently poke with chopstick with one hand and poke finger with other hand to fill in the gap you have made with the chopstick.

Don't fill the pot right up to the brim with soil, this will make watering difficult, as water will run straight off and take the precious soil with it.

Water thoroughly with a light shower/mist setting to get the soil to fill into any air pockets you may have missed. Add extra soil if necessary to cover the roots, then give it some seaweed tonic and mist the foliage. Each time you repot you will gradually remove the old soil more and more. Give your tree a light trim only, and **do not take off all of the new spring growth.**

Do not fertilise for at least 4-6 weeks, otherwise you will burn the newly cut roots. Leave it out of direct sunlight for 2-3 weeks and just use a seaweed tonic weekly.

Pruning and Pinching: When it comes to pruning the key is to let your tree grow, without letting it overgrow. If you keep trimming away at it, it will weaken your tree and possibly kill it. You want it to develop multiple, fine, healthy branches and stimulate smaller upper trunk and branch shoots (ramification) without too many thick internodes. Thick internodes, will interfere with the taper of your tree. You also want to visually expose the

trunk's movement as much as possible without making the tree look, bare or two dimensional; to be pleasing to the eye, Bonsai needs to have good **flow, depth, movement, character, nebari, trunk thickness and taper**. Think and plan ahead what shape you want it to take on. However, over the years your ideal shape may change. Use a tree sealer on any pruning wounds.

Coming into spring, pinch off any undesired **buds**, such as any that are too low on the trunk, this will encourage energy into other buds in places you desire, and encourage new season shoots. Be careful not to peel off bark when doing this. If you feel your tree is getting too tall, prune out any undesired **new season shoots** after growth has finished in mid-summer when the shoot has **hardened off**, but after this time, make sure any branch pruning is carried out during the **following early spring**, before any growth has occurred, when the tree is dormant and its energy is still contained in its roots, but for health purposes, it is important to let your tree grow, even if it is out of shape for a while. Your tree will become weaker and weaker over the years if you constantly prune it.

You may feel that there are some superfluous branches on your tree. They have been left on as the tree is still young, and the more foliage a tree has, the more energy the tree can produce and the healthier it will be; the more 'solar panels' the better for growth, health and promotes thickening within that area it is located. These superfluous branches are known as sacrifice branches; eventually they will be sacrificed when the tree is older and taken on your ideal shape or when other desired branches have grown to enable you to remove these unwanted branches. Try to keep the foliage even on each branch. If too much foliage is at the top (the apex), the energy will be pushed into the top. Naturally the tree will push energy and grow more from the top and sides, so keeping the foliage even means the tree has a better chance of receiving close to equal shares of energy and light.

To reduce leaf side, search '**defoliation of bonsai trees**' on the internet and learn how to achieve this. **Never do this in the middle of summer as the tree will not be able to perspire.**


If your tree can spare it, prune off any branches hanging down, sticking up or ones that directly come out at you; keep everything lateral. There are certain rules in Bonsai around incorrect branches, but really it's up to you what you think looks good; it's your tree. See image on page 10.

There is a lot to learn about Bonsai, so **take it slow. It's too easy to rush in and do too much, this is a very good way of harming/killing your tree.** Give it time to recover and grow. Spend more time thinking, looking and planning than actually doing, and then regretting but at the same time be confident with your decisions. Keep reading over this document to get a full understanding.

Bonsai is ideal for people of all ages.

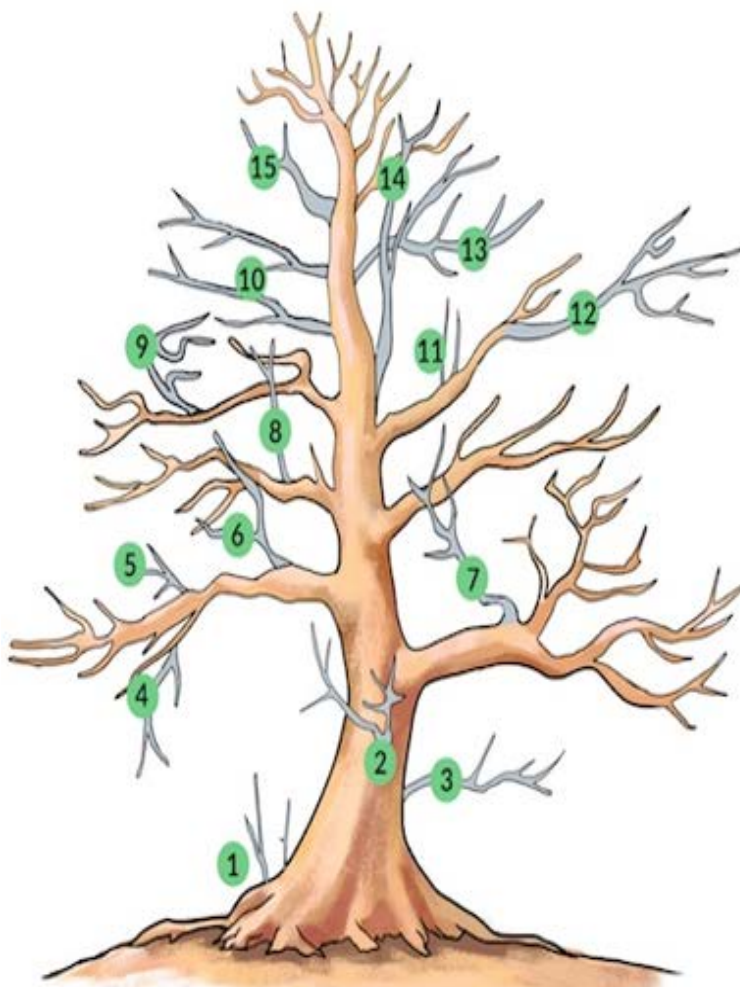
Bonsai teaches a person that less is more, and requires a person to be patient, responsible, and think about good decisions.

Bonsai is extremely therapeutic and allows a person to lose themselves in a creation.

Bonsai is a form of art; living art. You will never look at trees the same again. Look after it, and it will give you a lifetime of satisfaction 

Happy Bonsai-ing!

Undesirable Branches



1. Suckers that grow from the base of the trunk
2. Branches blocking view on the trunk
3. Limbs that grow close to the ground
4. Hanging branches
5. Dead branches
6. Crossing branches
7. Branches returning to the center of the tree
8. Upward growing interior branches
9. Branches with unnatural twists and turns
10. Parallel growing branches
11. Suckers higher on the trunk (water sprouts)
12. Branches extending beyond the tree profile
13. Branches growing from the same height on trunk
14. Branches that compete with the trunkline
15. Disproportionately thick branches at the top