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Rocky Mountain Douglas Fir
Psuedotsuga Menziesii v. glauca

General

Douglas fir is the most valuable timber species, in total volume, in the United States. This species is naturalized in South Dakotas

Black Hills and is native in every state west of there, as well as British Columbia and parts of Mexico. The tree has dense, small needles that are a rich green to blue-green color and very attractive. Doug fir prefers a bright location and moist, well-draining soil. They are generally found from about 3,000 ft to 9,000 ft in elevation. They do best in acidic soils and are extremely cold hardy. They can be among the most beautiful of coniferous trees for bonsai.

Light

Doug Fir prefers bright sun for the majority of the day. The roots should be protected from overheating during the summer.

Water

Douglas fir should be watered regularly. This species can be found growing on both upland and wet sites and is not as susceptible to overwatering as western pines or junipers. Although it is drought resistant and tolerates dry conditions well, it prefers soil that is moist and cool. In the summer I usually water lightly every morning and more thoroughly in the evening. A small pot will require more frequent watering than a large one. Even so, missing a watering or two under most conditions is no cause for concern.

Winter

Douglas fir are winter hardy and can easily tolerate temperatures below zero when precautions are taken. They can be wintered outside on the ground in a shaded area out of the wind with the pot covered in mulch to the rim. They can be kept in an unheated garage or greenhouse. They should probably freeze at least once or twice per winter to ensure dormancy and can stay frozen for the whole winter without harm. In their native environment they may have occasional nighttime freezes during almost any month of the year. The root

system can be damaged by periods of warmer winter weather followed by sudden, intense cold snaps however, so it is best if they are kept in a spot where temperatures will remain relatively cool and stable.

Fertilizer

A mild fertilizer of almost any kind will work well. A slow-release fertilizer like Osmocote, or Bio-gold works well. Doug fir should be fertilized regularly.

Training

The younger branches on Douglas fir are very flexible and easy to train with wire. Older branches may not be as flexible though and care and expert technique should be used when bending old wood. I have found that older branches can be somewhat brittle and prone to snap if handled carelessly.

The foliage on Doug fir is dense and perfectly proportioned for bonsai. To increase branching and ramification pinch or trim strong terminal and lateral shoots in the spring while they are still soft and green. Let smaller inner buds develop.

Repotting

Generally a newly collected tree takes about three years to re-establish its root system in its new container. At this time there is usually a noticeable increase in vigor and this is a good sign that the tree is ready for repotting. The best time for this is in the spring, after all danger of freezing is past. At this time dead roots can be removed, excessively long roots can be trimmed and more of the remaining original soil can be washed off. The planting angle can be adjusted to fit the new container.

There may be good reasons to repot before three years; a tree may already be strong and vigorous, a pot may have cracked or other reasons. In this case it is usually better to just move the tree into its new pot while trying to disturb the root system as little as possible. A newly repotted tree should always be protected from freezing.