

Andrew Smith
Golden Arrow Bonsai
22473 Alpine Acres Dr
Deadwood, SD
57732
605-342-4467
goldenarrowbonsai@gmail.com
www.goldenarrowbonsai.com



Common juniper
Juniperus communis

General

Common juniper is the most widely distributed coniferous plant in the world and are found around the globe in many different habitats and temperature zones. The tree has dense, small needles that are a rich green color and very attractive. The bright blue berries, actually cones, are edible and are used to season foods and give gin its pleasant flavor. In the Black Hills common juniper are found in all habitats but seem to do best at slightly higher elevations with limestone bedrock. They seem to thrive in a slightly more humid, partially shaded environment and often cover the ground underneath a pine/spruce forest for hundreds of acres at a time.

Light

Common juniper will thrive in full sun, or even a bright location with partial shade. They should not be kept in full shade during the growing season for long periods.

Water

Common juniper should be watered regularly. Although very drought tolerant, this species is not as susceptible to overwatering as many western pines or junipers. 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

Common juniper are extremely winter hardy and can easily tolerate temperatures well 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.

In their native environment common juniper on dry sites often undergo dramatic “bronzing” of the foliage in winter.

Fertilizer

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

Training

Common juniper are fairly flexible and can be given dramatic bends with copper wire. The tree will hold its shape well after the wire has been on about two years. The upper branches are prone to grow around the wire quickly and create scars though, so they should be watched and the wire cut off at the first sign of scarring.

Old specimens of common juniper can have beautiful, sinuous trunks with spiraling jins and shari that are contorted into fantastic and graceful shapes. Specimens like that are difficult to collect and probably will always be somewhat rare.

The foliage on common juniper is dense and perfectly proportioned for bonsai. To increase branching and ramification pluck or trim the strong terminal and lateral shoots to length in the spring while they are still soft and green. Allow the smaller inner shoots to grow. Once the tree is established growth is usually quite vigorous.

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.