

Sweet Plum Bonsai Care from BonsaiOutlet.com

General Information:

Sweet Plum is a tropical plant exported from Southern China. It has naturally small leaves of less than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch that reduce even smaller. The lightly veined, green leaves are almost bronze when they emerge. Growth habit is stiff and angular with truly prolific back budding. The Sweet Plum's bark sheds while the tree is quite young and the trunk becomes multicolored with age. The Sweet Plum is great for classical landscape or pen-jing.

Location:

Sweet Plum is a subtropical tree and indoors needs a cool period (55 to 60° F) coupled with lowered illumination for 6 to 8 weeks around the winter solstice. The best location for your Sweet Plum has full morning sun with shade in the afternoon/evening. It can take full sun all day, but watering requirements will increase dramatically. Beware of leaf burn when moving from shade to full sun. The use of a humidity tray will help to keep moisture levels up.

The Sweet Plum should be kept indoors when temperatures begin dipping and the tree loses leaves at temperatures below 55° F. It loses minor branches if the temperature dips below 25° F and may experience major die-back. The Sweet Plum can usually recover as the tree buds easily from old wood, new wood, and its roots.

Watering:

The more sunlight and warmth your Bonsai receives, the more often it will need water. The Sweet Plum will wilt and die if allowed to dry out completely. Wilting can be recovered from only by a very healthy tree. More Bonsai die due to improper watering than any other cause. Do not water the tree if the soil is damp or cool. Bonsai generally need to be watered every couple of days, but there is no set schedule. When the topsoil feels dry, water thoroughly and deeply. An old Bonsai watering trick is to place the entire pot in a sink of water an inch or two deep. Let the water absorb from the holes in the bottom of the pot. An inexpensive moisture meter takes the guesswork out of watering.

Fertilizing:

Fertilizing a Bonsai is essential to its health because nutrients in the soil are washed away with each watering. Fertilizer is like vitamins and minerals for a plant. When new growth appears in the spring, it's time to start feeding your Bonsai. Use an organic liquid fertilizer, a chemical fertilizer diluted to one half strength, or Miracid can be used. Most Bonsai should be fertilized once or twice per month during the growing season and once a month in the winter. Water your tree BEFORE fertilizing. Do not fertilize a weak or freshly repotted tree! This will cause stress to the tree by burning the roots.

Pruning:

Sweet Plum is usually trained via the clip and grow method. The angular growth and extravagant back-budding make shaping easy. Never remove all the new growth at one time. Shape is determined by the overall look that you want to achieve. The tree supports all classical styles easily. Weekly pinching of new growth is required to maintain completed form.

Wiring:

The Sweet Plum is usually trained via the clip and grow method. If you choose to use wire, use the thinnest training wire that will hold the branch in the desired position. DO NOT WIRE A BONSAI JUST AFTER REPOTTING. Wind the training wire in the direction the branch is bent in order to keep the wire from loosening. Wrapping the wire too tightly will cause scarring. Begin at the base of the Bonsai tree and slowly wrap the wire around the trunk to anchor. Continue along the branch you wish to train. Repeat the process as needed.

Wiring must be watched carefully for signs of wire cutting into the bark. Wire must be removed immediately if this happens. If necessary, the tree can be re-wired after removing the old wire.

Repotting:

Repot the Sweet Plum when fully root bound only. Typically, root pruning should be confined to 30% of root mass. Soil mixture should give a good blend of moisture retention and drainage. Repotting is necessary periodically to supply the plant with fresh soil. Prune roots moderately. After repotting, water thoroughly. DO NOT FERTILIZE FOR 3-4 WEEKS.

Insects and Diseases:

Sweet Plum are susceptible to mealy bugs underneath the shedding bark. Mealy bugs under the bark may require manual tweezer extraction to preserve the tree's appearance.

Spider mites can be a problem due to lack of circulation indoors. These can be attacked with the use of insecticides and fungicides in the form of sprays, soapy rinses, or systemic poisons. Spraying your Bonsai once every month or two with a non-toxic insect spray is recommended. Soaps should be rinsed off the next day. **DO NOT SPRAY WHEN SOIL IS DRY.**

Fungus gnats can also be a problem indoors with the constantly moist soil. Treat by spraying pyrethrin for mites and gnats but spray twice, three days part.

Mites like to infest Bonsai and can be identified by watching for small moving pinpoints of red or brown on branch tips, "spider webs" on branch tips, and yellow leaves all over the tree.

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