

A Bonsai Close Up on Needled Juniper

Juniperus rigida, conferta and communis...various varieties

By Pauline Muth

Description

The genus *Juniperus* belongs to the cypress family *Cupressaceae*. They are evergreen trees and shrubs often with thin, shreddy bark. They usually have two types of leaves:

- Juvenile foliage which has thin needlelike leaves
- Adult foliage which has scale like leaves

The type of foliage varies with the species of juniper and does not necessarily denote youth or old age. Some junipers show both types during their lives. Others like the needled juniper show only one.

The cones of junipers are soft and scale like appearing as berry like fruits.

J. rigida is a native of Japan. It shows juvenile foliage as long drooping needles that can be stiff. *Communis* is softer and often shows a silver upper surface. *Conferta* is even softer and grows densely. This is an ideal needled juniper for bonsai purposes. Its main draw back in the northeast is its lack of full hardiness. Both *communis* and *conferta* are closely related to *rigida* but have denser needles.

The bark of the juniper is often shaggy but for bonsai we usually carefully brush off the loose bark to expose the reddish bark underneath. This is important to prevent insect infestations under the shaggy bark.

Growing Conditions

This juniper is only hardy to -10 degrees F so it needs winter protection in the northeast. Leave them outdoors until winter and then move to a protected location. They do extremely well placed in a cool greenhouse for December through mid April.

In the yard they prefer full sun and need daily watering and misting with the hose or watering can.

Junipers prefer well-drained soil mixes. They transplant well in spring. Roots can be halved in volume in the spring. When transplanting during other times of the year, try not to cut roots. Usually transplanting is only needed every other year. Add organic fertilizer and iron to the soil when transplanting.

When kept in a greenhouse, begin fertilizing after winter solace. A good organic fertilizer such as Bio Gold works well in combination with added iron.

Fertilize until about August 15. Then allow a rest period until late December. If kept outdoors and then stored in a cold frame or garage, begin fertilizing when they bud swell after being put outside in spring.

Pruning and styling

Severe cuts can be made early spring. Pruning must be carried out throughout the growing season to reduce the length of the branches and form pads. Needled junipers tend to form long drooping branches. If compact branches are desired, pruning must be vigorous and often. Budding occurs on the needled branches. Pruning back to new buds is very effective. Junipers are very sensitive to light and air circulation so design to allow maximum exposure to the sun to prevent die back of branches. Never cut all the foliage from a branch, as it will die. The branches of this juniper are VERY delicate so take care when pruning and wiring as over-bending will kill off the tender branches.

Wiring can be done year round but be careful to not wire over the needles as they will die. Copper is recommended for these species.

Propagation

Propagation is by cuttings and seeds. Air layering from larger specimens also works well.

Bonsai Styles

The plant does well in all bonsai styles. Driftwood holds up well on junipers.

Diseases and Pests

Rusts and spider mites are the chief problems with these species.

Comment or questions to

Pauline F Muth

Pauline@pfmbonsai.com

518 882 1039