



Daily Courier

# HOME & GARDEN

JULY 12, 2019

## TINY TREES

Bonsai offer  
a miniature  
forest

### INSIDE

- » Million dollar view home for sale
- » Gardens can memorialize a loved one
- » Local veterans helped into homes
- » Sustainable gardening lectures set
- » Tips on how to use fewer pesticides





Container gardening of edibles is just one of the subjects included in the Josephine County Master Gardener Sustainable Gardening series, which offers workshops at the Josephine County Library's main branch. This grouping includes a variety of mints grown in a clawfoot bathtub. For more, see story on Page 6. Photo by Timothy Bullard of the Daily Courier.

#### On the cover:

Rachel Winters has created hundreds of bonsai over the years and will be teaching the basics to her "sustainable bonsai" style this fall. See page 12 for more. Photo by Timothy Bullard.

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# Home & Garden

Grants Pass Daily Courier

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Rachel Winters trims a Japanese maple, *Acer palmatum*.

# The art of bonsai: Small trees, big reward

It takes some work and patience, but end result will be worth it

Story by  
Kathleen Alaks

Photos by  
Timothy Bullard

Trees don't have to be tall to be majestic. The trees in Rachel Winter's backyard — the gnarled trunk of a Port Orford cedar, the spreading branches of a Japanese maple, the twisted shape of an American hornbeam — form a veritable forest — in miniature.

Winters practices bonsai, the art of cultivating dwarf trees in containers.

And she has been doing it for decades.

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This collection of mostly Japanese maples sits underneath a series of ceramic plates that Winters made depicting different trees she has seen.



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**LEFT:** Assorted tools are shown with a dwarf *Chamaecyparis* growing in a pot that Winters made. The tools are pruning shears and clipper, root trimmers, a screen for covering holes at the bottom of pots, a hori hori knife for collecting, and chopsticks to remove air pockets when potting up.

**ABOVE:** Winters has grown “a very old grove of Englemann spruce.”

**RIGHT:** Port Orford cedar, *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*, is an Oregon native. This one was grown from a cutting from a Port Orford cedar on the Big Tree Trail at Oregon Caves.



## Some general tips for growing bonsai:

- Water daily, spring through fall, as long as the weather is dry. “Small pots can get really hot,” Rachel Winters says.
- Fertilize monthly in the growing season.
- Use a shallow container with drainage holes.
- Trim regularly to maintain shape.
- “Keep pruning and pinching (new growth) to keep them in small pots and to keep them the size that you want,” Winters says.
- Give bonsai morning sun and afternoon shade. Winters uses shade cloth to cover plants during the hottest days of summer.
- In winter, put bonsai pots on the ground — “so cold air doesn’t get underneath them and freeze the soil” — and rake leaves up to the base of the trunk.
- “Don’t treat them like special little pets and bring them indoors in winter,” she says. “They are not houseplants.”
- Use gravel or a groundcover on the top of the soil. Use any groundcover that does not develop a large root mass, such as wooly thyme, corsican mint, dwarf violets or small sedum.
- Have patience.

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“They wouldn’t let me buy Lithia Park (in Ashland) so I started doing bonsai,” she jokes. “I just sort of started collecting plants and trees.”

A walk through her yard reveals hundreds of potted trees and shrubs, none more than 2 feet tall: Japanese maple, paperbark maple, trident maple, canyon maple, vine maple, cotoneaster, yew, arctic willow, Port Orford cedar, Japanese cedar, burning bush, bristlecone pine, white fir, balsam fir, Engelmann spruce, wild azalea, beech, boxwood, mountain hemlock, hawthorne, hornbeam.

“What can I say, I really love trees,” she says.

Her property, southwest of Grants Pass, is also a home to a small nursery, Siskiyou Gardens, specializing in bonsai and unusual trees.

Although the word bonsai is Japanese, the art it describes originated in China. Thousands of years ago, Taoist monks would collect dwarf trees in the mountains then grow them in containers to mimic the shape and scale of full-size trees.

They used pruning and exposure of roots to give the trees a natural look.

When the monks took the practice to Japan, the Japanese made it their own, using wire to bind and shape trees and make them conform to a certain shape.

“In Japan, bonsai is very stylized, like many Japanese arts,” says Winters, who prefers a more natural approach.

“My style of bonsai is sustainable bonsai,” she says. “An ancient art form with

## Learn how

**WHAT:** Basic Bonsai class

**DETAILS:** Learn the art and craft of this ancient practice but with present-day sustainable methods; covers sound horticultural principles including soil health, pruning, maintenance and styling.

**WHEN:** 6-8 p.m. Tuesdays, Sept. 24-Oct. 15

**WHERE:** Rogue Community College, 3345 Redwood Highway, Grants Pass

**TUITION:** \$45; registration opens Aug. 5.

**INFORMATION:** Call 541-956-7303 or go to [roguecc.edu/ContinuingEd](http://roguecc.edu/ContinuingEd)

today’s sustainable methods. They’re just regular old trees living in a pot.”

For people who want to try their hand at bonsai, Winters suggests starting with dwarf tree varieties, ones with “compact,” “midget” or “Tom Thumb” in their name.

Pinch new growth to keep the plant at a certain height and prune leaves and branches to train the tree to grow in a certain shape

“After you’re done pruning, it’s supposed to look very natural,” she says.

More important though, is what you can’t see.

“The below ground ecology is important,” Winters says. “It’s all about the roots. You want a healthy underground ecosystem.”


That means retaining the plants’ cluster of hair roots, which feed the tree.

“It can be very easy,” Winters says, “but it’s not an instant gratification hobby. And you have to love trees.”

Winters is teaching a class on basic bonsai this fall at Rogue Community College.

More information is also available on her website, or by contacting her at 541-476-6243 or [siskiyougardens@gmail.com](mailto:siskiyougardens@gmail.com); email is preferred.

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