

**CARE AND MAINTENANCE
OF
AMERICAN LARCH**

BOTANICAL NAME: Larix laricina

COMMON NAME(S): American larch, larch, tamarack

CHARACTERISTICS: This tree is a deciduous conifer. The green foliage of spring and summer turns a beautiful yellow and gold in late fall. Many claim larch bonsai are most attractive just when the buds open. The buds are like little shaving brushes that later develop into soft-needled rosettes. The bark is plated and grey, giving even young trees a very old appearance. Male and female flowers appear on the same tree. The silver and purple colours of the flowers, and subsequent cones, are added bonuses to this charming species. *L. laricina* is excellent bonsai material.

PRUNING, PINCHING AND WIRING: Pruning is an annual spring must and can be started when the buds start turning waxy. When it comes to wiring, **LARCHES DO NOT LIKE BEING WIRED WHEN DORMANT.** If they are wired when dormant, there is a good chance that a portion, or all of the wired branch, will die. The best time to wire is in the window between the greening of the buds and their elongation to about 1/2 to 1 centimeter. Pinching is a growing season activity. Larches put out new growth all year, so undesirable buds and elongations should be rubbed or pinched off as soon as possible. Older bonsai will have to undergo periodic serious debudding in the spring in order to maintain design.

REPOTTING AND SOIL: As with pruning, repotting is done in the spring when the new growth is ready for wiring. Larches will fill a bonsai container with roots very quickly. Most have to be repotted at least every 3 years; the more vigorous bonsai and those planted in shallow containers, more frequently. Roots should be combed out and trimmed back by one-third. Dead and heavy roots should be removed. Soil is the standard, commercially available, bonsai mix. Ensure good drainage.

FERTILIZING: A solution of 20-20-20 should be applied every 2 weeks during the growing season. Fertilizer brands should be alternated.

WATERING: The same as for your other bonsai.

SEASONAL CARE: Larch bonsai should bud out in full sun. During very hot weather, place them out of direct sunlight, and return them to full sun once moderate temperatures return. For winter care, small to medium size larch bonsai can be buried in the ground or stored as you do other outdoor bonsai. Very large bonsai in deep pots can be stored above ground. Wind protection should be provided in all cases. Cover the bonsai with snow, if you have it.

NOTE: Larches prefer a hard and prolonged dormancy period.