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### *Introduction to Wiring*

The use of wire to bend and hold branches in position is quite a new innovation in bonsai and has really only been developed in the last 100 years (consider that the art of bonsai has been in existence for thousands of years).

The wire is normally left on the tree for only one growing season, although some trees grow more slowly and may need the wire on for a bit longer before the branch or wired area retains its position. The wire MUST be removed before the bark begins to cut into the wire otherwise the wire will leave scars on the branch that might take many years to grow out.

Bending thick branches and extreme direction changes can put a lot of extra stress on the branch itself. In a case like this it would be a good idea to split the branch lengthwise using branch-splitters, after which a few layers of moist raffia should be wrapped around the branch. The raffia acts like a bandage, protecting the exposed split and preventing green-stick fractures. The raffia also allows one to leave the wire on for a longer period, and also prevents the tree from putting out new shoots from the healing scars.

The wire used for bonsai is fairly soft and easily bent by hand, and also has a protective coating to prevent it from corroding in the weather. Some people use copper wire, but it is often a bit stiff. It can be softened by heating it gently or by vigorous bending by hand before attaching to the tree.

The thickness or gauge of wire must be selected according to the thickness of the branch it will be required to bend. To get an idea of the gauge required use the following method. Hold a piece of wire with about an inch and a half extending forward. Then try and bend the branch with the tip. If the wire bends without bending the branch then it is too thin.

Applying the wire is a fairly simple operation but can be a challenge when working with thorny subjects. The wire must always be anchored firmly, be it in the soil, a root, another branch or even the side of the pot. It is then wrapped in a spiral at about 45 degrees around the branch. When bending a trunk or a thick branch it might be necessary to use a second or even third piece of wire to achieve sufficient rigidity to hold the bend. The most important rule in the whole procedure is not to damage the tree!

There are many other do's and don'ts related to applying the wire and we will cover some of them in the next issue.

Most bonsai nurseries and even garden nurseries stock bonsai wire. You should also be able to get hold of it through any of the regional representatives below. It is not very expensive and can be used repeatedly. A must in any bonsai toolkit. Remember to always use sharp good quality wire-cutters or pliers as sharp points are painful.

Happy bending.