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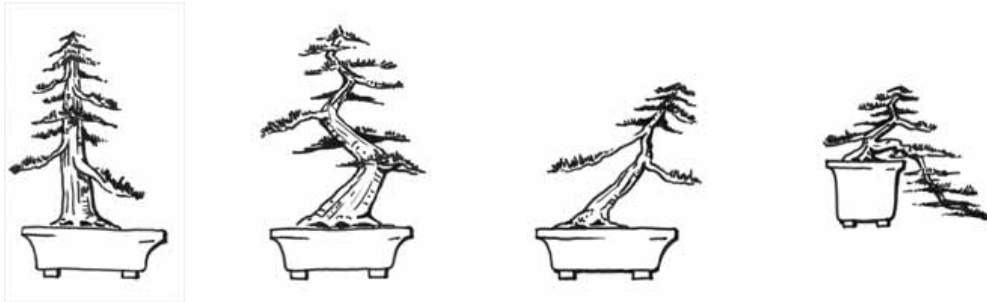
Where to begin, and what to buy.

In the last issue we introduced you to the art of bonsai. Now you are all inspired, and are itching to get growing. But where do you begin, and what do you buy?

Actually bonsai are created from a huge variety of plant material, the list would take up this entire. The type of trees you can grow is mostly dependent on the area in which you live and the local weather conditions. Most deciduous trees will struggle on the coast, as will most juniper species because the winters do not get cold enough.

Figs do well almost anywhere as do most acacias. Some tree species, particularly those that grow in very dry conditions, should receive NO water during the winter months otherwise they rot. Ideally, the tree to use should be the ones that grow in your neighborhood. Chances are that if you have an established garden, then you already have a pretty good stock of bonsai material on your doorstep. Most trees with small leaves make good bonsai, and many can be propagated easily by seed or cuttings.

One can find material with bonsai potential, (potensai) at many nurseries and flea markets, but one must know what to look for, and therefore one must have at least a rudimentary grasp of the various styles on which bonsai are based. There are five main styles, which are further broken down into about 120 subs-styles. The main styles are shown below.



The Formal Upright Style The Informal Upright Style The Slanting Style The Semi-Cascade Style



The Cascade Style

You need not stress too much about these styles at first, because the variations within each are so vast that whatever tree you acquire it is bound to fit into one style or another. More importantly, does the trunk have a well developed taper? Is the trunk thicker where it meets the roots (called the ne-abari), and does it become thinner as it gets to the top (apex)? The more extreme this taper the better.

Does the tree already look old and gnarled? Yet again the base of the tree is most important, the foliage gets renewed a few times a year but the base will always be there.



[Wabi Sabi and Haiku](#)
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Expose the roots of the nursery tree you are considering buying by digging around with your fingers. Firstly if your fingers go in easily then the tree has probably recently been planted in the bag and will then have a less developed root system than you would expect. This is still not serious as long as there are at least three fairly well established lateral roots that can be spread out when transplanted later. Single tap roots are problematic as they will be removed when the tree is repotted and the tree may well die.

The next aspect to look for is well developed lower branches. They must alternate up the trunk and not be opposite

