



S & S Bonsai
Steven Alford

1024 Bonfoy Ave.
Colorado Springs CO 80909

Bus: 719-633-9110 cell: 719-332-0546
fax: 719-633-9110 support@bonsaitoolchest.com
www.bonsaitoolchest.com

Dwarf Honeysuckle Care Sheet



Brought to you by
S & S Bonsai of Colorado Springs, Colorado
(Most of the included information is obtained from several
online sources.)

*"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if
you were to live forever."*
—*Mahatma Gandhi*—

The Dwarf Honeysuckle or

Box Honeysuckle

(*Lonicera Nitida*)

General Information: Box honeysuckle is a fast growing shrub with dense evergreen habit. Though a member of the honeysuckle family it is not a climber but an evergreen which looks very much like a miniature boxwood. It has a high tolerance of clipping which makes it ideal as a neat, formal hedge and is also a very popular choice for topiary. As a bonsai this honeysuckle can easily be "sculpted" to resemble a tree.

There are about 180 species of *Lonicera* from *albertii* to *xylostemum*. Two are typically used for bonsai: *Lonicera* 'morrowii' which has creamy white flowers changing to yellow, later followed by dark red berries; and *L.* 'nitida' has fragrant creamy white flowers and purplish blue fruit.

The leaves of *L. nitida* are tiny, about 1/3 of an inch or so, egg shaped and a dark green. They later turn to bronze or plum colored in winter. The old branches are very brittle, but one can cut off all the vegetation and it back buds profusely. Box-leaf honeysuckle is also an ideal plant for making very small or Mame bonsai. An evergreen, it is in leaf all year. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Insects. The pairs of small white flowers give way to lovely purple-blue berries. The small white flowers appear at the end of spring and do not resemble those of traditional honeysuckle vines. They are fragrant bells that hang in pairs and give way to purple berries that ripen in summer and are relished by birds.

This shrub is renowned for growing under a wide variety of conditions from heat to cold, moist to dry, and in any soil that is well drained. However, if kept in the open, its leaf color can be damaged

by sun scald in the summer. The ideal location offers morning sun and shade in the hot afternoons. This plant is notably tolerant of salt spray and resistant to oak root fungus.

The bark is buff on older plants and can become quite thick.

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Temperature: Hardy to USDA Zone 7. When grown as a garden plant it can well tolerate temperatures below zero. But as a bonsai in a small pot, they should be placed indoors after the first frost.

Lighting: Good light at all times, but shade from hot sun once the plant is potted. Full sun. Frosts below 23°F can cause lose of foliage though this is quickly replaced in Spring. Some frost protection is advised for trees in very small pots.

Watering: *Lonicera* is tough and can tolerate some dryness, though evenly damp conditions produce the best results. Take care to avoid excess watering.

Fertilizing: pH: 4.5 to 8. Feed *Lonicera* with a balanced food of the kind suggested for roses every two weeks during the growing season. In the spring use a fertilizer rich in nitrogen and potassium, which will help with the development of new vegetation and flowers. Use a 0-10-10 once in the Winter.

Pruning / Training: Pinch growth once the flowers are finished. It's similar to crab apple in that if flowers are wanted in the following growing season, early pinching is followed with a period of free growth. If you don't want flowers, the plant can be trimmed back whenever growth becomes ragged. It is a forgiving plant and soon buds freely. But as with all plants, extension of growth should be allowed before pinching as this strengthens the plant. Budding is enhanced by sealing cuts to in-

hibit drying out of the tissue. It normally looks better to hollow out branch stumps rather than trying to disguise them. Carve the cuts if necessary: a reverse teardrop is a good motif to use as it mimics the tearing when a branch is damaged.

Wire from Spring to Summer while growth is still reasonably pliable. Older wood snaps easily where it has been pruned back.

Insects / Pests: Trouble free but can occasionally get attacked by aphids.

Propagation: Easy to root from cuttings and layers take well. If you simply lay an attached branch in soil it will root. Then you can cut it off and plant.

Repotting: Repot in early Spring every two to three years. Soil: 4 parts composted bark, 2 parts peat, 4 parts pea gravel or similar. In nature the plant is tolerant of most soils, but a fibrous and well-drained soil works best.

Design and Styling: Old *Lonicera* trunks tend to be stiff and erect and this can create difficulties when designing them as bonsai. Trees can either have curves built into their design by using primary and secondary branches or can be carved to create dead-wood effects. Suitable for all forms except broom in all sizes.

Informal upright, Shohin, Clump and raft.

There are many varieties, but the varieties of *L. nitida*, such as 'Baggessen's Gold' or 'Ernest Wilson' are good choices, as is 'Fertilis', similar to 'Ernest Wilson', but with a more erect habit, fragrant flowers and rather more freely-produced violet fruits.