

It is usually not necessary to defoliate Portulacaria because of the size of their leaves. If you are growing a small shohin and wish to reduce the size of its leaves it can be done the same as with other bonsai except that you must allow the soil to become dry before you remove all the leaves. After the leaves have been removed place the plant in a semi-shaded location and do not water it until new growth begins.

**Insects / Pests:** Scale will wreak havoc on a jade. Root rot can also develop when the tree is watered too frequently with not enough light. The tree will show stress from both scale and root rot by dropping leaves and branches. The plant will defoliate if sprayed with a petroleum based pesticide. If you find insects on your plant try washing them off with water from your garden hose to control them. If you need insecticides use one that is not petroleum based.

**Propagation:** This is one of the easiest plants to reproduce. If any of the trimmings that you remove from your tree are left on the soil they will root in a few weeks. Large cuttings can also be rooted. It is better to allow the cuttings to dry for a day before placing them in the rooting medium. Keep them in a semi-shaded location until rooted. Does not need higher temps to root. Will root when temps are in the low 50's. Large cuttings can be trimmed and shaped into a bonsai style, then rooted in a bonsai pot using your regular bonsai soil for an instant bonsai. Group plantings can also be created this way.

**Repotting:** Spring is the best time to repot but it can be done at any time if given proper aftercare. It is important that you allow the soil to become dry before repotting or severely pruning the top. Do not water until new growth appears. Keep it in a semi-shaded location until new growth begins, then place it in its normal location.

Jade will do well in most bonsai soil mixes, but prefer those that are very well draining. Your soil mix should have less organic materials and no peat.

Their roots will rot if left wet for long periods of time.

**Design and Styling:** This plant adapts to any style including cascades and forest plantings. It is not practical to style the tree with long horizontal branches as they tend to droop because of their weight. This characteristic makes them excellent plants for full cascades.



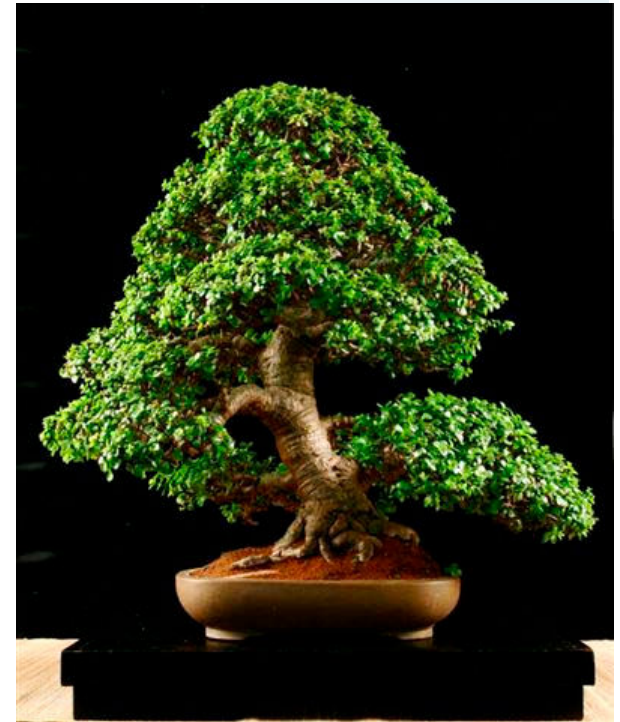


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## Dwarf Jade Care Sheet



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 Jade

### *(Portulacaria afra)*

**General Information:** *Portulacaria afra*, also called Elephant plant or Small-leaf jade. *Portulacaria afra* are excellent bonsai for beginners and their ability to conform to most bonsai styles make them popular with enthusiasts as well. They are great for beginners because they grow very quickly, can be kept indoors, and can go a long time without needing water, up to 4 weeks. This is because succulents store water in their stems and leaves. They also give clear signs when they need water which is helpful to those just starting out with bonsai growing.

A fleshy, soft, woody shrub or small tree from 9 feet to 12 feet tall. Often sprawling; occurring on dry rocky hillsides and in succulent scrub. The bark is green when young, becoming red-brown to slate grey, and smooth with conspicuous leaf scars.

Leaves are simple, opposite, almost circular, about 1/2" in diameter.

Flowers are small, star shaped; sepals 2; petals 5, pale pink to purplish; stamens 5 to 7.

Since *Portulacaria* is native to South Africa, it will not be possible for most people to find large old specimens to collect but pre-bonsai are available from bonsai dealers that sell tropical plants. When looking at an untrained plant in a nursery it may be difficult for the beginner to visualize a finished bonsai in this tangled mess of branches; but after the unneeded branches are removed you can always find an interesting trunk line.

Sometimes referred to as the "money plant", South Africans have a saying: "as long as your Spekboom (Elephant Bush) grows and prospers, so will your finances." Fortunately, this branching bonsai will thrive to a ripe old age with very little care. This lovely succulent is an important

source of food and moisture in the wild because elephants, sheep, goats and other creatures munch their way through its dense thickets.

### CARE

**Temperature:** As they are a tropical succulent, *Portulacaria afra* do best in zones 10-11, but will also grow in most areas where they won't be exposed to temperatures below 50°F. *Portulacaria* will tolerate a variety of growing conditions. Like all tropics it must be protected from long periods of cold temperatures. Freezing temperatures will destroy this succulent plant.

**Lighting:** *Portulacaria afra* can be grown both indoors and outdoors. If grown indoors they like being close to a natural light source. Placement near an open window usually works best. If this is not possible then keeping them in a room that has bright fluorescent lights usually works as well. If you are using florescent grow lights it is important to place the light very close to the bonsai. When kept outdoors they tend to grow very fast in full sun.

**Watering:** One needs to be careful about over-watering jade. Although the plant is a succulent it is not as particular about over-watering as most other succulents. If the soil you are using drains well you shouldn't have any problems, always allow the soil to approach dryness before watering.

One of the good things about them is they give you clear signs about when they actually need to be watered. Their leaves will begin to flatten and then wrinkle.

**Fertilizing:** The plant will develop very fast when given proper care, which includes heavy applications of fertilizer. No special fertilizer is required; any balanced formula will be satisfactory. When repotting use a slow release fertilizer which can be mixed in the soil, this can be supplemented with liquid 20-20-20 as needed. Since these plants are

such fast growers they will need to be fertilized more often than you do with your other bonsai to maintain a dark green foliage. Do not fertilize during the winter months as it only likes to be fertilized in the spring and summer

**Pruning / Training:** It is very hard to train a small leaf jade by wiring branches. Their branches tend to be very brittle and might snap under the pressure. Pruning in the direction of preferred growth and pinching is more effective. Do not prune immediately after watering. This plant tolerates drastic pruning if you allow the soil to dry completely before removing large branches and roots.

Cuts flat with the bark are reported to heal with less scarring than concave.

The branches will naturally droop from the weight of the water they store in their leaves. Many people take advantage of this characteristic by training them into cascade styles.

Refinement is achieved by removing the terminal bud from any branch that you do not wish to grow longer. Since the leaves are opposite and each set of consecutive leaves rotate 90°, it is possible to refine the tree by pinching and removing those buds and branches that are not growing where you wish. You can control the direction of growth by pinching back to a set of leaves that are growing in the direction you wish the branch to grow.

When creating shohin you sometimes need to shorten a branch to a vertical set of leaves. In order to get the horizontal growth we need it is necessary to rotate the vertical pair of leaves 90°. A few turns of 1 mm wire at the tip of the branch and a 90° twist of the last set of leaves will accomplish this.

Pinching is the key to the refinement of any bonsai; since *Portulacaria* is fast growing it must be performed on a regular schedule during the growing season. Usually once a week is sufficient for large bonsai, shohin might need pinching twice a week.