

Mulberry Care Sheet



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



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

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

The Mulberry

(*Morus sp.*)

General Information: Mulberry originate in Asia and have long been cultivated in China for the mulberry leaves which are the staple diet of the silkworm. It was also for the purpose of providing food for silkworms that the trees were introduced to Europe during the time of the Roman empire, but they have since become a familiar ornamental feature of parks and gardens. King James planted a field of black mulberries at Greenwich in the 17th century, only to discover that silkworms only ate the white variety. (Color refers to the fruit).

A fast growing, semi-deciduous, spreading tree. In nature, mulberries are small to medium-sized trees, forming gnarled, picturesque shapes. The heavy trunk, rugged bark and toothed leaves form an interesting combination of shape and texture in a bonsai specimen.

The mulberry looks old even when it's young. The branches become gnarled and twisted and droop a little. The black mulberry, *Morus nigra*, can live for a couple of hundred years, but the majority last only a couple of generations – enough to outlive their planters for sure.

The pink male and female flowers are fairly insignificant, appearing in late Winter to early Spring, but are soon followed by small edible fruits which ripen from reddish pink to black. The fruits resemble raspberries, but have a more wholesome flavor and, as soon as they're ripe, the berries fall from the tree. For

this reason the traditional way to grow the plant is in short grass. Every part of the plant is edible and is used in medicine – particularly against tetanus in the Third World.

There are three types of Mulberry; black, white and pendulous white. The names describe the color of the buds, not the fruit. It's the black that bears the best fruit and, unless you wanted to experiment with making your own silk, there's really nothing to be gained from buying a white mulberry. The pendulous white has fruit that are a little less sharp than the white, and also has a weeping habit, making it more suitable for bonsai.

Interestingly, mulberries seem to have a unique defense against fungi, although this hasn't been fully researched. They don't appear to succumb to fungal diseases when mature, and mushrooms won't grow close to them. Some people grow grape vines around mulberries to avoid fungal disease, like botrytis, appearing on the grapes, and this seems to work.

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Temperature: In the south they grow well but they'll need a little more shelter in the north. In the autumn give the plant a good mulch of leaf mould and compost, and protect it from harsh, wet or icy winds. Once the first frosts appear the plant quickly loses its leaves and becomes heavily dormant. Around a month after leaf fall you can prune it.

Lighting: Full sun.

Watering: Daily throughout the growing season, less frequently in the winter but keep the soil moist at all times, as this tree is moisture loving.

Fertilizing: Apply fertilizer every two weeks during the growing season. Use a high potash fertilizer such as 0-10-10 in the Autumn.

Pruning / Training: Prune smaller branches and leaves during the growing season, trim back new growth to two leaves. Remove any large leaves immediately. Around a month after Winter leaf fall or early Spring before buds start opening you can prune larger branches. Don't prune large branches when the plant is in leaf; it's almost impossible to stop the sap flowing.

Insects / Pests: No information available.

Propagation: The traditional way to plant a mulberry is to thrust a piece of sawn-off trunk into the soil. It seems a little haphazard, but all the ancient mulberries have been grown in this way. You can plant stratified seeds sown in Spring. Also cuttings in the Spring. And air-layering in the Summer.

Repotting: Repot every two years in early Spring in a free draining bonsai soil mix. Be careful with the roots, which can be quite brittle and break easily.

Design and Styling: Informal upright, slanting, semi-cascade, cascade, root-over-rock, twin-trunk, and clump. Suitable for all sizes.