

Brazilian Raintree Care Sheet



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



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

The Brazilian Raintree

(*Pithecellobium tortum*)

General Information: The Brazilian Raintree is a member of the legume family. The sandy growing conditions in Brazil demonstrate how well the raintree tolerates dry conditions, however it prefers to be evenly moist in a container. This tree will tolerate temperatures in the upper 30's but not for very long. Although they grow in full sun in nature, Brazilian raintrees as bonsai seem to appreciate some shade during the hottest days of tropical summers.

Fluted and flattened "muscular" trunks. Exfoliating trunks - As the tree matures, pieces of the outer bark peel off in thin layers leaving a nearly white color which makes a beautiful contrast in bark color. The Brazilian Raintree has leaves which fold up at dark or when it is cloudy or even when the tree is getting overheated! Brazilian Raintree produce a small powder puff type flower which is white turning yellow in a few days. LARGE THORNS! Large thorns on the trunk and branches makes this a tree that can protect itself .

A native of Central and South America this tree is considered one of the tropical world's most beautiful and also one of the most popular bonsai subjects.

CARE

Temperature: Protect below 45°F. Although they appear to be able to take temperatures a little colder you may experience some leaf and/or branch die-back. This Bonsai will tolerate temperatures in the upper 30 degree range, but not for a long time and should be brought indoors for the winter. This tree is very adaptable to indoor conditions which are a bonus for bonsai owners living in cooler climates.

Lighting: This tree is mainly grown outside, if attempting to grow this tree indoors, you may be required to give it additional lighting by the use of grow lights. Do not place your tree so close to a window that the sun is magnified through the glass and can burn fragile branches and leaves.

Air:

Watering: You will need to keep this bonsai specimen evenly moist and ensure that it does not get too dry. Provide humidity with a humidity tray filled with pebbles and take care to ensure that you do not overwater in your attempts to provide enough moisture.

Fertilizing: The Brazilian Raintree is a heavy feeder, use a balanced fertilizer 10-10-10 weekly during the growing season. A regular weekly feeding program with a balanced liquid fertilizer during the growing season and once a month during cooler weather will keep the *P. tortum* nourished.

Pruning / Training: When cutting branches and twigs leave a small nub to allow for the possible die-back that often occurs. Many artists do not use a concave cutter on the Brazilian raintree for this reason. Later this can be refined. Once the initial trunk and branch shape is established, clip-and-grow is the best way to develop a Brazilian raintree. No wire is used here, only nylon due to the delicate green branches. It is very difficult to 'educate' the wood once it forms. It is better to use nylon strips on green branches. If you utilize wire, do so loosely or use it to tie down branches.

Insects / Pests: Mostly pest and disease free, but it is however very susceptible to nematodes. Do not put Brazilian Raintrees on the ground in bonsai pots or nursery pots. If you should decide to grow your Raintree in the ground to get a larger trunk, air-layer to get your tree. If grown indoors, look for common greenhouse pests. Many pests can be eliminated with a simple solution of 1tsp. dish soap to 1 quart warm water liberally sprayed on the plant until runoff occurs. Rinse the plant well, and repeat as needed.

Propagation: This tree can be grown from cuttings and air-layerings when the nights are warm. I have seen somewhat large branches air layered as good small trees! To air layer, cut a small ring of bark away from the desired branch. Do not let the ends of the ring make a complete ring. You need to have some bark connecting the two halves of the branch so the tree will survive. Wrap the cut area with a small bag filled with moist sphagnum and peat- keep uniformly moist and wait about 6-12 weeks, at which time roots should begin to grow. Take the cutting once it has enough roots to live on its own in a new pot cutting just below the root ball and transplant into a container. Keep the peat/sphagnum mix around the roots when potting and enjoy your new bonsai.

Repotting: Your tree should be repotted as a general rule every 2 - 3 years. You should examine your trees root system to determine if it has become pot bound. Repotting should be done in mid-summer.

Use a well draining bonsai soil, as too much organic in the soil mix can create wet conditions which causes root rot, fungus and branch die-back. Prune your bonsai's roots moderately and be sure to avoid fertilization for 4 weeks after transplanting. Repotting should only be done when night temperatures are in the low to mid 60'sF. The Brazilian Raintree does not like to be root bound.

When these trees are collected at seaside they are planted in 100 % sand, no soil. Too much organic mix can create wet conditions and besides root rot can cause fungus and branch die-back.

Design and Styling: Most of the styles used are upright because of the nature of the tree to grow straight when not affected by the winds in their natural habitat. Mame and shohin are excellent possibilities, especially when begun from air layers.