

GRAFTING

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Grafting is used both for propagating bonsai as well as for improving an existing tree. Most gardeners will be familiar with the principles of grafting, at the very least, and will realise that many flowering and fruiting plants are made up from two plants. The vigorous rootstock, which will furnish the rootsystem for the new plant, is usually a common variety; the scion, supplying branches and roots, is an ornamental variety of the common stock. For example, a named variety of rosebush will be grafted onto a rootstock of a wild rosebush. It is most important that the stock and the scion of the proposed tree should be closely allied to each other.

In this article we are dealing with the ficus varieties that apply to bonsai.

When cutting straight across the trunk or branch of a tree you will see, between the bark and the wood, a thin layer of green. This is called the cambium layer and is composed of the cells which are capable of uniting with other cells of a similar type so that the two may grow together. Whichever form of grafting is used, it is important that the cambium layer of the stock must be joined to the cambium layer of the scion.

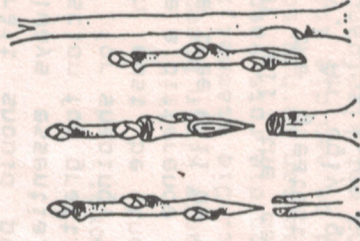
Although it is possible to grow a well-developed bonsai in a relatively short time by grafting, it is a form of propagation that will require practice. It may be possible to produce a successfully grafted tree fairly quickly but more skills is needed to produce a grafted tree on which the join of the stock and the scion is not an unsightly swollen scar. The Japanese are expert at this process and many trees are propagated by this method in their nurseries.

There are a number of different grafting processes for different purposes, but of these only

two are generally used for bonsai; the top-graft and the side-graft. Spring is considered the best time for grafting. Early Spring for the Ficus trees. It is also possible to graft Ficus trees in early Autumn - say the last two weeks of March and the first two weeks of April. But the rising sap of the Spring helps to bind the scion and stock together and loss through a hard Winter is less likely.

For the top-graft select a suitable stock and scion and, with a sharp knife cut the scion to the length of 50 - 70 mm and, where it is united to the stock cut it at an angle. Cut the selected stock straight across at the point where the graft is to be made - if the join is made low there is a chance of hiding the ugly scar and make a slit on one side of the top of the stock to match the depth of the angle cut of the scion.

Put the scion into the slit of the stock with the angled cut towards the centre of the stock. Work as quickly as possible so that the sap may unite the two. Bind the join with wide raffia or strips of polythene and plant the whole in a pot as if potting on a cutting. The two plants should be growing as one in about a year.



Where the side-graft is used the scion is prepared in the same way but the stock of the plant is left intact. The scion is cut at the angle as before and a slanting cut matching it, is made in the trunk of the stock at the desired spot. The scion and the stock are placed together, the angled face of the scion to the inner surface of the slit in the stock. The graft is bound and the whole repotted.