Chinese elm care calendar

Ulmus parvifolia · either · RHS H7 in the ground (https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/21508/ulmus-parvifolia/details, checked 30 Oct 2026: hardy in the severest European climates, deciduous to semi-evergreen). The roots in a shallow bonsai pot are far less hardy than the tree, so a potted Chinese elm is treated as about H4: sheltered, and under cover below about -5 °C. Indoors it is semi-evergreen and keeps most of its leaves. · USDA 6a-1 · timings for a temperate northern climate

Root & Wire · https://rootandwire.com/bonsai/care/chinese-elm/ · a rule-of-thumb plan, not a guarantee; your garden varies

January

Outdoors: the tree is bare and dormant; keep the pot from freezing solid by moving it under cover below about -5 °C, and check it is not bone dry on a sunny day. Indoors: a cool, bright sill, water only when the surface is dry.

Basis (rhs): RHS: Ulmus parvifolia, https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/21508/ulmus-parvifolia/details (H7 in the ground); RHS advice: overwintering container plants (pot roots are less hardy than the tree)

February

Buds begin to swell late in the month. Prepare the repotting kit. Indoors, the tree may drop and replace old leaves now; that is normal if the new buds are green. Wipe scale off the twigs while they are bare.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice for deciduous trees in late winter

March

Repot as the buds swell and before they open, every two years young and three or four later: roots back by about a third, into a free-draining mix, water well, keep out of frost for a fortnight. Structural pruning of larger branches is done now, before the sap rises fully.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com species guide: Ulmus parvifolia; Peter Chan, Bonsai Masterclass (repotting deciduous trees at bud swell)

April

The spring flush. Start feeding fortnightly once the first leaves have hardened. Let shoots extend to six or eight leaves, then cut back to two or three. An indoor tree moves outside at the end of the month in a mild year, after the last frost in your area.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice (clip-and-grow on elms); last-frost timing from RHS advice: frost protection

May

Keep pruning shoots back as they extend, which is what builds the fine twigging. Wire young shoots while green; check it monthly, the bark marks fast. Water daily in a warm spell outdoors. Watch for aphids on the soft growth.

Basis (reference): Bonsai Empire species guide: Chinese elm; RHS advice: aphids

June

As May. A strong, healthy tree can be partly defoliated now to reduce leaf size and let light into the crown; leave the weak and the recently repotted alone. Feed fortnightly.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com: defoliation (healthy deciduous trees in early summer); Peter Warren, Bonsai (DK)

July

Peak growth. Prune extended shoots back to two or three leaves, pinch the leader so it does not thicken out of proportion. Never let the pot dry out in a heatwave: morning and evening checks. Elm leaf beetle larvae, if any, are picked off.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice for summer maintenance of deciduous trees

August

Last pruning of the year by the end of the month so new growth can harden before autumn. Remove wire that is starting to bite. Keep feeding, moving to a lower-nitrogen feed late in the month.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice; the switch to a low-nitrogen autumn feed is common UK practice, not a measured rule

September

An indoor tree comes back to its cool sill before the first cool nights, usually early to mid September. Outdoor trees stay out. Feed with a low-nitrogen feed to harden the wood. No more pruning or wiring.

Basis (estimate): the move-in date is our judgement from average first cool nights for England; autumn feeding from general practice

October

Outdoors the leaves begin to turn and drop late in the month; clear fallen leaves from the pot surface to stop fungus overwintering. Stop feeding. Reduce watering as the tree slows. Indoors, water less as the light drops.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice; leaf hygiene from RHS advice: leaf spot

November

Outdoor trees drop their last leaves and show their winter silhouette; this is the month to study the branch structure and plan winter pruning. Move the tree to a sheltered spot out of the wind. Indoors, a cool bright sill and sparing water.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice for deciduous trees entering dormancy

December

Fully dormant outdoors. Protect from hard frost under cover; a cold frame or unheated shed is ideal, a heated room is not. Check for dryness on dry windy days. Indoors, as November; do nothing but water correctly.

Basis (rhs): RHS advice: overwintering container plants (frost protection for pot-grown roots); RHS: Ulmus parvifolia (H7 (in the ground; about H4 in a pot))

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