Juniper care calendar

Juniperus chinensis 'Itoigawa' and J. procumbens 'Nana' · outdoor · RHS H7 for Juniperus procumbens 'Nana'; Chinese juniper cultivars are rated H6 to H7. Fully hardy in the ground; the roots in a shallow pot are less hardy than the tree, so freeze-thaw is the risk, not cold alone. · USDA 6a-1 · timings for a temperate northern climate

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

January

Leave the tree alone and outside. Keep the pot out of standing water and off bare ground; when a hard frost is forecast for several nights, move it against a wall or into a cold frame, and bring it back out as soon as the freeze lifts. Water only when the surface is dry, which in a cool January may be once a fortnight.

Basis (rhs): RHS: Juniperus procumbens 'Nana' plant page (H7, full sun, well drained); RHS advice: overwintering plants in containers

February

Still dormant. This is the month to clean the tree for the year ahead: remove dead interior foliage with tweezers, check old wire and cut off anything biting in. Order soil components so they are to hand for repotting. Keep frost protection as in January.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: winter cleaning and wire checks before growth starts

March

Repot in the second half of the month as the buds swell, every two years for a young tree and three to five for an established one, removing no more than a third of the roots and never bare-rooting a juniper. Put it into an open mix and keep it sheltered from wind and frost for three weeks afterwards. Structural wiring can be done now while the branches are bare of new growth.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com: Juniperus species guide (repotting in early spring, never bare-root); Peter Chan, Bonsai Masterclass

April

Growth begins. Start feeding once the new tips are moving: a balanced slow-release pellet on the soil plus a weak liquid feed every fortnight. Water as the surface dries, which will move from weekly to every few days as the month warms. Watch for late frosts on a tree just repotted.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: feeding starts with visible growth; RHS advice: feeding container plants

May

Full growth. Water daily in dry weather and feed every fortnight. Do not pinch the tips; let the shoots extend and build strength. Treat any deadwood with diluted lime sulphur on a dry day. Check for spider mite as the weather warms.

Basis (reference): Bonsai Empire: Juniper bonsai care guide (let shoots run rather than pinch); general practice on lime sulphur

June

Keep watering daily and feeding fortnightly. Thin crowded pads lightly with scissors so light reaches the interior, cutting back to a side shoot rather than pinching the tips. Wire young shoots that have hardened enough to hold a bend. Spray the foliage in the evening on hot days.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com: Juniper pruning and pinching (scissor pruning to side shoots)

July

Water daily, twice on very hot days, and watch the pot does not dry through. Keep feeding at half strength. Avoid heavy pruning in the heat; it is a month for maintenance and for watching. Keep the tree in full sun unless it is a freshly repotted or weak tree.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: summer watering; RHS advice: watering container plants

August

Towards the end of the month, when growth slows, do the main scissor work: shorten extended shoots back to side shoots, open the pads, and remove any juvenile foliage on 'Itoigawa' that is not wanted. This is also the best time to wire, as the tree has time to set the bend before winter. Continue watering daily and feeding.

Basis (reference): Bonsai Empire: Juniper care guide (late-summer pruning and wiring); Peter Warren, Bonsai (DK)

September

Change to a low-nitrogen feed to harden the growth for winter. Water as needed; the pot dries more slowly now. Finish any wiring early in the month and check wire applied in spring for cutting in.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: autumn low-nitrogen feeding; wire checks before growth thickens

October

Stop feeding by the middle of the month. Clean out dead interior foliage that the tree has shed. Move the tree where it will get winter light but not sit in rain for days on end, and raise the pot on feet. Reduce watering as the days shorten.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: autumn clean-up and reduced watering

November

Dormancy. Water only when the soil is dry a finger's depth down. Expect the foliage to bronze. If the tree is in a very exposed spot, move it to shelter before the first hard frosts; otherwise leave it in the open.

Basis (rhs): RHS advice: overwintering plants in containers; RHS: Juniperus procumbens 'Nana' (winter colour change is normal)

December

Nothing but watching. Keep the root ball from freezing solid for days at a time by moving the pot under cover when a hard freeze is forecast. Do not water a frozen pot; wait for a thaw. Keep the tree out of the wind, which dries conifers faster than cold does.

Basis (rhs): RHS advice: protecting plants from frost; freeze-thaw and wind desiccation of container conifers

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