Larch care calendar

Larix decidua and Larix kaempferi · outdoor · RHS H7 for European larch; Japanese larch is rated the same. A mountain tree and very hardy, but the roots in a pot are less hardy than the tree, so keep the root ball from freezing solid for days on end. · USDA 6a-1 · timings for a temperate northern climate

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

January

Dormant and bare. Keep the pot from standing in water; move it into a cold frame or against a wall for a prolonged hard freeze and back out afterwards. Water only when the soil is dry below the surface. This is a good month to study the branch structure and plan the year's pruning while every bud can be seen.

Basis (rhs): RHS: Larix decidua plant page (H7); RHS advice: overwintering plants in containers

February

The buds begin to swell towards the end of the month, earlier than most trees. Repot as soon as they do, every two years for a young tree and three to four for an older one, taking up to a third of the roots; do not wait for March in a mild year. Prune unwanted branches and do structural wiring now while the tree is bare.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com: Larix species guide (repot as buds swell, before the needles open); Peter Chan, Bonsai Masterclass

March

Finish repotting early in the month if the buds are still closed; once the green tufts show, leave the roots alone until next year. Keep a repotted tree sheltered from frost and wind for three to four weeks. Begin watering more often as the buds open.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com: Larix (timing of repotting against bud break)

April

The needles open. Start feeding with a balanced feed once the tufts are out, fortnightly at first. Water as the surface dries, which quickly becomes daily. Check any wire put on in February, as the branches start to thicken now.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: feeding with the first growth; RHS advice: feeding container plants

May

Growth is fast. Pinch or cut back extending shoots once they have made four or five tufts, leaving two or three, strongest first, to keep the tree compact and push strength into the interior buds. Water daily and feed fortnightly. Watch for adelgid fluff and deal with it early.

Basis (reference): Bonsai Empire: Larch bonsai care guide (pinching new growth); RHS advice: adelgids

June

Continue pinching the second flush as it extends. Water daily, twice in heat; a larch in leaf wilts fast. Feed fortnightly. Remove wire that is beginning to mark the bark; larch thickens quickly in early summer.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: larch wire checks every few weeks in early summer

July

Water generously and feed at half strength. Keep the tree in a bright, airy place rather than a hot, enclosed one. Light pinching only; the main work is over until autumn.

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

August

Water daily and feed. Thin crowded shoots so light reaches the inner buds that will form next year's growth. Avoid hard pruning in the heat.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: late-summer thinning for interior budding

September

Change to a low-nitrogen feed to ripen the wood. Water as needed. Wiring can be done now on hardened shoots, though the bare months after leaf fall are easier.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: autumn low-nitrogen feeding

October

The needles turn gold. Stop feeding. Reduce watering as the tree slows. Enjoy the colour; do nothing structural until the needles have dropped.

Basis (rhs): RHS: Larix decidua plant page (deciduous conifer, autumn colour)

November

After leaf fall the tree is bare and can be wired and pruned in detail; branches set over winter. Clean fallen needles off the soil surface. Water sparingly. Move an exposed tree to shelter before hard frosts.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com: Larix (wiring after leaf fall); Peter Warren, Bonsai (DK)

December

Dormant. Keep the root ball from freezing solid for long by moving the pot under cover in a hard freeze; do not water a frozen pot. Keep it cool: a larch brought somewhere warm will start into growth far too early.

Basis (rhs): RHS advice: protecting plants from frost; overwintering plants in containers

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