Scots pine care calendar

Pinus sylvestris · outdoor · RHS H7: hardy in severe winters. In a shallow pot the roots are less hardy than the tree, so the risk is a root ball that freezes and thaws daily rather than cold itself. · USDA 6a-1 · timings for a temperate northern climate

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

January

Fully dormant. Keep the pot out of standing water and move it into a cold frame or against a wall when a hard freeze is forecast for several nights, returning it to the open when the freeze lifts. Water only when the soil is dry below the surface, perhaps once in the month. Shelter it from drying wind.

Basis (rhs): RHS: Pinus sylvestris plant page (H7, native); RHS advice: overwintering plants in containers

February

Still dormant. Check wire from the autumn and remove any that is close to cutting in before the sap rises. Old needles that were not pulled in autumn can be removed now. Prepare soil for repotting next month.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: late-winter wire checks and needle cleaning before spring thickening

March

Repot in the second half of the month as the buds begin to swell, every three to five years for an established tree, taking no more than a quarter to a third of the roots and keeping some of the old soil with its mycorrhiza. Set it into a coarse, open mix and keep it out of wind and frost for a month afterwards. Do not repot and candle-cut in the same year.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com: Pinus sylvestris species guide (repotting in early spring, keep mycorrhiza); Peter Chan, Bonsai Masterclass

April

The candles extend. Begin feeding with a balanced feed as they move, weekly at low strength. Water as the surface dries. If the tree is strong, shorten the strongest candles by up to half and leave the weak ones whole, to balance vigour across the tree.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com: Pinus sylvestris (single-flush pine; candle shortening to balance vigour)

May

Finish any candle work early in the month before the needles open. Water daily in dry spells and keep feeding. Watch for adelgid fluff at the base of the new needles and deal with it early. Keep the tree in full sun.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice for single-flush pines; RHS advice: adelgids

June

Needles harden. Water daily and feed every week or two. Do nothing structural; this is the month the tree builds the year's strength. Check spring wire, as the branches thicken fastest now.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: summer growth, wire checks

July

Water daily, more in heat; a pine in a gritty mix can dry out in a day. Feed at half strength. Keep it in the brightest spot available. Light scissor removal of any shoots growing straight down or up on a branch can be done now.

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

August

Continue watering and feeding. From the end of the month, needle-pull the strongest areas (leaving perhaps eight to twelve pairs per shoot) so light reaches the interior and the weak areas catch up. The main pruning window opens: remove unwanted branches and shorten shoots back to a bud or side shoot where one exists.

Basis (reference): Bonsai Empire: Pine bonsai care guide (late-summer needle pulling and branch pruning); Peter Warren, Bonsai (DK)

September

The best month to wire: the branches have hardened and will set over winter. Change to a low-nitrogen feed. Water as needed. Pull old needles if not already done.

Basis (reference): Harry Harrington, bonsai4me.com: Pinus sylvestris (autumn wiring and needle plucking)

October

Finish wiring early in the month. Stop feeding by mid-month. Remove yellowing old needles the tree is shedding. Raise the pot on feet and begin to reduce watering as the days shorten.

Basis (practice): general bonsai practice: autumn needle shedding is normal; reduce water as growth stops

November

Dormant. Water sparingly and only when dry. Move an exposed tree to a sheltered spot before the first hard frost. Protect from wind more than from cold.

Basis (rhs): RHS advice: overwintering plants in containers (wind desiccation of conifers)

December

Leave it be. Keep the root ball from freezing solid for days at a time with a cold frame or a wall; do not water a frozen pot. Snow on the branches can stay; wind should be kept off.

Basis (rhs): RHS advice: protecting plants from frost

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