

## Why Not Winged Elm for Bonsai?

The winged elm is not on a species you hear a lot of bonsai enthusiasts talk about. Instead, if anyone is talking about native southeastern trees that are desirable for a collection you always hear about bald cypress. This is justified for the bald cypress is an outstanding species for our bonsai practice. I personally find the winged elm to be the second runner up for best southeastern collected species.

A lot of credit is given to bald cypress because it is the tree you cannot overwater, and it is encouraged that you absolutely soak it most days of the year. What about a species you do not have to fear underwatering? How about a species of elm that you do not have to worry too much about keeping the soil media evenly moist throughout the day? I am not saying you that you treat winged elm like a cactus, not even close.

How about a species that helps you learn proper watering practices to further improve your overall bonsai water techniques? Winged elms are very forgiving when it comes to learning how to water your collection properly. I find that they fall somewhere in between the Japanese black pine and bald cypress when it comes to learning how to gauge the amount of water each tree needs throughout each season.

So, what is a winged elm? It is the most unique species of elm locally available in the southeastern states. They are set apart by their corky, sometimes described as wart like, growth that occurs along their branches. They are fully deciduous to our range and when bare of leaves they can look like a gnarly and spooky mess of branches. This look causes some to call them the "witch elm". They can be further identified by their double toothed ovate leaves that are asymmetrical at the base. These leaves are naturally smaller than the American elm and reduce well over time. Another thing that sets them apart from other elm species is the plated like bark. Deep fissures run throughout the bark patterning and can sometimes build up its own wart like texture sort of like a hackberry can have.

So, we have an elm that has small leaves, short internodes, corky bark, and an interesting "winged" feature on their branches, what are the cons of this species?

Not many to be honest. They are relatively pest free save from the aphid season and the occasional basket worm, typical sap sucking insects that are easily removed. Dutch elm disease is not much a concern either due to the fact it takes a significant amount of heart wood to get infected by the disease. We are growing bonsai not full-sized shade tree elms.

Keeping them thriving is straight forward. They enjoy organically rich soil, so use organic fertilizer cakes to feed them throughout the year. They are understory trees that sometimes occur in the edge of thickets, so keep them in indirect sunlight for most of the year. They are found growing in our temperate zone, so keep them outside all year long only dropping them to the ground to get some ground radiation heat to their root systems for the winter season.

Sources for winged elm varies as they are not a species used in commercial nursery trade. The best way of acquisition of this species is yamadori (wild) collection or a bonsai nursery that specializes in the growing them.

-Evan Pardue

