

**A Bonsai Close-up on Clump Planting** by Pauline F. Muth  
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A pinecone, still laden with some of its seeds, falls to the ground. The seeds germinate together in a clump. As they grow some die due to the competition for space, nutrients, water and light. The remaining young trees grow together. Their trunks fuse over time producing a many trunked pine tree. Sometimes a single tree starts its growth only to find its immature terminal damaged by an animal, freezing or disease. The young seedling continues to grow using lateral buds. Each of these side buds grows with equal vigor to replace the lost terminal resulting in a multi-trunked clump tree.

As a bonsai artist, nature's methods can certainly be duplicated to produce a grown-from-seed-clump however, there is a less time consuming method.

**Materials Needed to Produce A Clump Planting**

- ◇ A suitable **container** for the clump. This can vary from a round pot to an oval or rectangular pot to a shallow tray. Well-placed drainage hole are essential. Remember that shallow container retain more water than deep containers.
- ◇ **Screening** to cover the drainage holes. If the container does not have enough drainage and/or wire holes to allow you to wire your clump in, you may wish to use a large sheet of plastic needlepoint in the bottom of the tray to give you more locations to attach wire. (See **Forest Plantings** for details on this method.
- ◇ **Bonsai soils** suitable for the species of tree you are using.
- ◇ **Wire** for securing the trees and shaping the trunks.

- ◇ **Trees** in the whip (young tree) stage of growth. The specimens must all be of the same species and age. Older trees may also be used IF you can locate trees that have the same motion feeling to them and will look as if they have grown together.
- ◇ **Plastic locking ties** and **florist tape** to wrap the trees together.
- ◇ **Bonsai tools** including concave cutter, wire cutter, scissors, root trimmers, chopstick, and brush.
- ◇ **Transplanting liquid, rooting hormone** and water.
- ◇ **Work space.**

### **Steps in Creating a Clump Planting**

1. Set up all supplies in the work area.
2. Prepare the container with drainage screening and attachment wires or set up the plastic needlepoint screening with wires. Slightly twist wires together at matching ends to avoid fastening the wrong wires together after soil and trees are added.
3. Put a layer of coarse bonsai soil to cover the bottom of the container. Add a mound of the proper bonsai soil where the clump will be planted. Sometimes a ball of muck is used for this purpose for added stability.
4. Prepare the trees by grouping the trunks together at their base. Lightly scrap the trunks at the points of contact. Wrap the bases of the trunks together with florist tape.
5. Create a root ball spreading the roots out around a small ball of muck. Then wrap the moist ball of roots and muck in a damp piece of cloth or a plastic bag ties with string.
6. Wire the trunks of the clump starting the wire in the muck ball, wrapping each wire around the tied together trunks and continuing up each separate trunk. Remember that only the

very bases of the trunks are to fuse together. Be careful not to wrap the wires too tightly since these young trees will grow rapidly.

7. Position the clump over the prewired spot in the container and secure it with the base wires after removing the wrapper from the root ball. Dust rooting hormone on the roots.
8. Add soil around the root ball and throughout the container. Chopstick the soil to remove air pockets.
9. Shape the trunk by bending the wires. Cut the height of each tree to create a triangular silhouette.
10. Water thoroughly with water infused with Super Thrive.
11. Add mosses and put the planting in semi-shade for a week. After a week set the bonsai in the sun.
12. Fertilize as required. Spraying the bark with dilute liquid fertilizer will promote budding out. Trim branches often to promote ramification. Style the entire clump as a complete tree. Observe the following examples of clump styling.

### **The Future of the Clump Planting**

Watch the base of the clump carefully. Do not allow wire damage to occur. The trunks will grow into each other within the first year. Some artists prefer not to wire the young clump during the first year, but this can leave the lower trunks close to each other and cause the trunks to fuse together above the base area. The florist tape may break off on its own but sometimes the trees grow into the tape. As a result, watch the base area and remove any tape and wire before it ruins the design.

In subsequent years the fused trunk and the individual upper trunks will increase in girth. As the branches develop, wire and

trim for style. Repotting needs should be checked at the end of winter dormancy and transplanted only if required by lack of soil or if the present soil has broken down too much.