

## **A Bonsai Close-Up on *Punica granatum* "nana"**

Dwarf pomegranate

By Pauline F. Muth copyright 1999 updated 2002

The pomegranate originated in the Mediterranean region, in the Himalayas and in Southern China and has been cultivated long before we have written records. Today it is widely grown in subtropical climates and as an indoor plant in the cold climates.

Its name *Punica* comes from *malum punicum*, apple of Carthage. Pomegranate derives from *pomum*, the apple and *granatum* having many seeds. This refers to the apple-like fruit that is full of seeds.

In reality, it is a shrub that grows to small trees proportions of about 5 feet in mild climates in the nana form. Branches may have small spines on them. The leaves are thin, glossy and bright green and have reddish veins giving the petioles a reddish hue.

### **Climate**

For bonsai purposes it is considered to be subtropical and will survive down to a 35 degree F temperature. It is semi- deciduous depending on the temperatures at which it is cultivated. The idea climate will have hot summers with cool nights. In cooler climates, it is brought out for frost-free weather and returned to the greenhouse or light garden culture in the fall after leaf loss. In temperatures up to 70 degrees F, growth will be tight will short internodal spaces, in higher temperatures, new growth will be leggy and thin.

If brought into the greenhouse, keep damp and the bonsai will bud out in mid winter. If brought into a light garden, it will bud out about one month after leaf drop. A southern or eastern window is required for indoor culture.

## **Soil**

*Punica* adapts to a wide range from slightly alkaline to acid soils, but prefers acid soil and will develop excellent color and growth if used. The soil must show excellent drainage. The plant must receive plenty of water during the growing period, but it just kept damp in the cool of winter. If given a dormant period, water sparingly until growth starts.

It needs high phosphorus fertilizer and applications of iron twice during the growing season to prevent chlorosis. Begin fertilizing when buds swell and stop during the flowering period.

## **Repotting**

Repotting is best done in late winter or early spring before the buds leaf out. In fast growing young plants, yearly repotting with root pruning is needed. Be extremely careful when pruning the roots as this tree exhibits direct relationships between the main roots and its branches. Working with stock that has been especially developed for bonsai helps as it should have a well developed fibrous roots system which will eliminate the need for removing larger roots that could effect the tree health. In any case the removal of root mass must be done gradually to prevent the loss of branches.

In established plants, repotting should be done every two years.

## **Sun Exposure**

Although full sun is preferred, take care not to burn the leaves during hot dry periods. It will tolerate some shade. Well developed specimens thrive in an eastern exposure.

## **Flowers**

*Punica* flowers range in color from white to yellow to orange-red. They are hermaphroditic (capable of self-pollination). Although

they often will have a high bloom period in mid summer, blooming will continue into fall. Take care to remove pollinated blossoms as too many fruit can overtax the strength of this plant in a bonsai pot.

### **Training and Pruning**

The tree is best worked in late winter or early spring for hard pruning. Wire only the trunk and woody branches and raffia protection before wiring in young plants is suggested. It can be wired at any time except while flowering. Larger branches can be very brittle.

Trimming of new shoots (those with 4-6 pairs of leaves) to one or two pairs of leaves throughout spring and summer is needed. Watch out for shorter rounded shoots. These are flowering shoots. After flowering, prune hard to regain the style.

This tree works best in formal and informal upright styles as well as group plantings.

### **Propagation**

It can be propagated by mid summer soft wood cuttings, leaf-less hardwood cuttings in winter, air layering or seeds. Bottom heat and rooting hormone is required for cuttings.

### **Problems**

The tree is prone to attacks from white flies, aphids and red spider mite as well as mildew. Treating the plant to a soap spray and wash periodically will reduce insect problems and good air circulation will prevent mildew attacks. To prevent disease and insect problems it needs excellent air circulation

Comment or questions to

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