

## **A Bonsai Close-Up on Pouteria**

By Pauline F. Muth copyright 2004

The *Pouteria* (pouteria) originated in the Tropical regions of America. Today it is grown in tropical climates and as an indoor plant in the cold climates.

*Pouteria* is derived from its local native name. It is also called sapote, marmalade plum and marmalade fruit due to its edible fruit.

In reality, it is a shrub that grows to small trees proportions of about 5 feet in mild climates. The leaves are thin, glossy and bright green and have reddish coloring in late summer and fall in cool climates.

### **Climate**

For bonsai purposes it is considered to be tropical 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**

*Pouteria* requires a slightly alkaline soil. 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 for flowering and applications of iron twice during the growing season to prevent chlorosis. Begin fertilizing when buds swell and stop during the flowering period. Continue after flowering stops. Leave the buds if fruits are wanted.

### **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. 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**

*Pouteria* flowers arise below the leaves on naked stems. They are hermaphroditic (capable of self-pollination). They bloom in early spring with clusters of white flowers. 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. It can be wired at any time except while flowering.

Trimming of new shoots (those with 4-6 pairs of leaves) to one or two pairs of leaves throughout spring and summer is needed.

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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