

Lou Deherrera on Portulacaria



Lou DeHerrera, a former Artist of the Year and one of the outstanding artist in the RMBS

Lou has had great success with this tropical species over the last twelve years. All of his beautiful specimen's have been started from one tree.



Pruning:

Put away concave cutters...cut proud.

Leave two sets of (healthy) leaves to ramify limb.

Branch patterns:

Eliminate every other opposing branch (and any up or down growing branch)

Cut out limb between opposing branches to form a Y.

When: Best time is late spring to early summer when roots are most active but anytime is OK.

Roots: Light pruning to stimulate growth.

-For severe pruning let the roots callus over for day or two before watering.

-Lace like feeder roots grow in everywhere.

Portulacaria afra for use as Bonsai:

-Pluses: Great buttressed roots, trunk can be tapered easily, fast growth, pest and disease resistant (in our climate), drought resistant, takes well to pot culture, will allow bottom growth (although top dominate), propagation is a snap, opposing buds and 90 degree turn to next set of buds is an important design element, can be wired or bent into place.

-Minuses: No jin or shari, it feels soft to the touch, "leans to the light" (more than other trees), segmented internode lines stay on to maturity, very thin bark.

Styles: What does the mature P. afra look like... almost all of the traditional styles are possible.

- Formal upright, informal upright, slant.
- Natural drooping of heavy water filled limbs... semi or full cascade.
- Exposed or root over rock.
- Root in rock...a natural (as long as it doesn't break the rock)
- Intertwining roots requiring little space allows a good forest style.

Location and Care:

Loves full sun

Pot culture restricts growth when intake of light exceeds root growth.

Shade is OK but will elongate internodes and increase size of leaves.

-Tolerates cold but can't take frost

(from 50 to 45F degrees unhappy).

Needs to be indoors in fall.

Lou has discovered 1/2" hardware cloth as a terrific technique to develop lush foliage pads and branch ramification!



Water: Uses leaves, branches, trunk, and roots as reservoirs which help it tolerate drought

-Prolific and efficient root system take up water readily.

-No defense against over watering (let dry out between watering)

-If it doesn't receive enough water mature leaves will start to shrivel.

-Use coarse, free draining soil.

Fertilizers: Likes more fertilizer than most bonsai.

-20-20-20 water soluble fertilizer is good once a week during heavy growth season (June \ to August in our area).

-Once a month the rest of year depending on light.

-Osmocote at all times (in case I forget).

Pest and Diseases: In our climate there is not much to worry about.

-In humid areas (sunrooms, green houses, sheltered areas, etc) mealy bugs, root mealy bugs and aphids are a threat.

References: Robert J. Baran of Phoenix, AZ Bonsai Society (<http://www.users.uswest.net/rjbphx/Portulacaria.html>)

Mary C. Miller, Bonsai Today Vol. 68, Jul/Aug 2000, page 39/43