

Juniper “Itoigawa”

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Photo of a Juniper exhibited in the Pacific Bonsai Museum, WA, USA

Juniper Itoigawa

(*Juniperus chinensis* var. Itoigawa)

The Itoigawa Juniper, originating from the Itoigawa region in the Niigata Prefecture, Japan, is a variant of the Chinese Juniper. Renowned for its fine, compact foliage that forms tight clusters, it is exceptionally well-suited for creating intricate, detailed pads through precise pruning and wiring. This distinctive quality has earned it the status of being the most sought-after Chinese Juniper variant among bonsai artists worldwide.

Key Characteristics

Tree Type: hardy evergreen conifer with compact foliage. Low maintenance. Eye-catching driftwood.

Natural Habitat: Native to Japan. Present in China, Korea, parts of Russia.

Size and Growth Rate: moderate growth rates. Typically maintained at heights of 20-60 cm in bonsai form

Indoor or Outdoor?

Itoigawa Junipers thrive outdoors in bright, indirect sunlight or full sun. While they can tolerate brief indoor display, a lack of light and ventilation in prolonged indoor conditions can lead to poor health.

Watering

Consistent moisture is vital for Itoigawa Junipers, but overwatering must be avoided as it can lead to root rot. Always allow the topsoil to dry slightly before watering. In dry or indoor environments, misting the foliage helps to maintain humidity mimicking the tree's natural habitat.

Light and Temperature

Junipers, including Itoigawa, thrive in bright, indirect

sunlight but can tolerate full sun exposure. While they prefer temperatures ranging from 10°C to 25°C, they can endure mild frosts. Better protect your junipers using mulch or a cold frame if temperatures drop to -10 °C instead,

Foliage and Trunk

The foliage remains vibrant green under optimal sunlight but may take on a slightly bronze hue in extreme cold or prolonged frost, that's a natural protective response. Don't fret yet, foliage will turn green again in springtime. The trunk features smooth bark in younger trees, gradually developing a rugged, textured surface with age, adding character. Itoigawa is also renowned for its potential to showcase striking shari (deadwood on the trunk) and jins (weathered, stripped branches), which contrast beautifully with its



vivid foliage, and gives junipers a dramatic aesthetic.

Pruning & Wiring

Pruning is an essential aspect of maintaining the beauty of an Itoigawa Juniper bonsai. By pruning regularly you ensure air and light reaching the foliage and avoid the inner parts of the foliage pads to die (foliage will become brown) Pruning can be done anytime of the year, however Spring and autumn are the best seasons.

You can either pinching out new growth by hand or use a pair of scissors. Be mindful though! The secret is to never cut through the foliage but target the wood part of the twig.

It is common practise to stile the pads so that they appear flat undearneath and organized in clusters. When wiring, avoid wrapping too tightly to prevent bark damage, and check the wires periodically to ensure they do not cut into the tree as it grows.

Soil and Repotting

Itoigawa Junipers thrive in well-draining soil mixes, typically a combination of akadama, pumice, and lava rock. These materials provide aeration and prevent waterlogging, crucial for the plant's health. Repotting should occur every 2-3 years, ideally in early spring before new growth begins. Check if the tree has become root-bound by gently lifting it from its pot; if the roots are densely packed, it's time to repot.

Fertilizing

A balanced bonsai fertilizer, such as one with an NPK* ratio of 10-10-10, supports healthy growth during the active growing season. Apply fertilizer every two weeks in spring and summer, reducing frequency in autumn and halting feeding during winter dormancy.

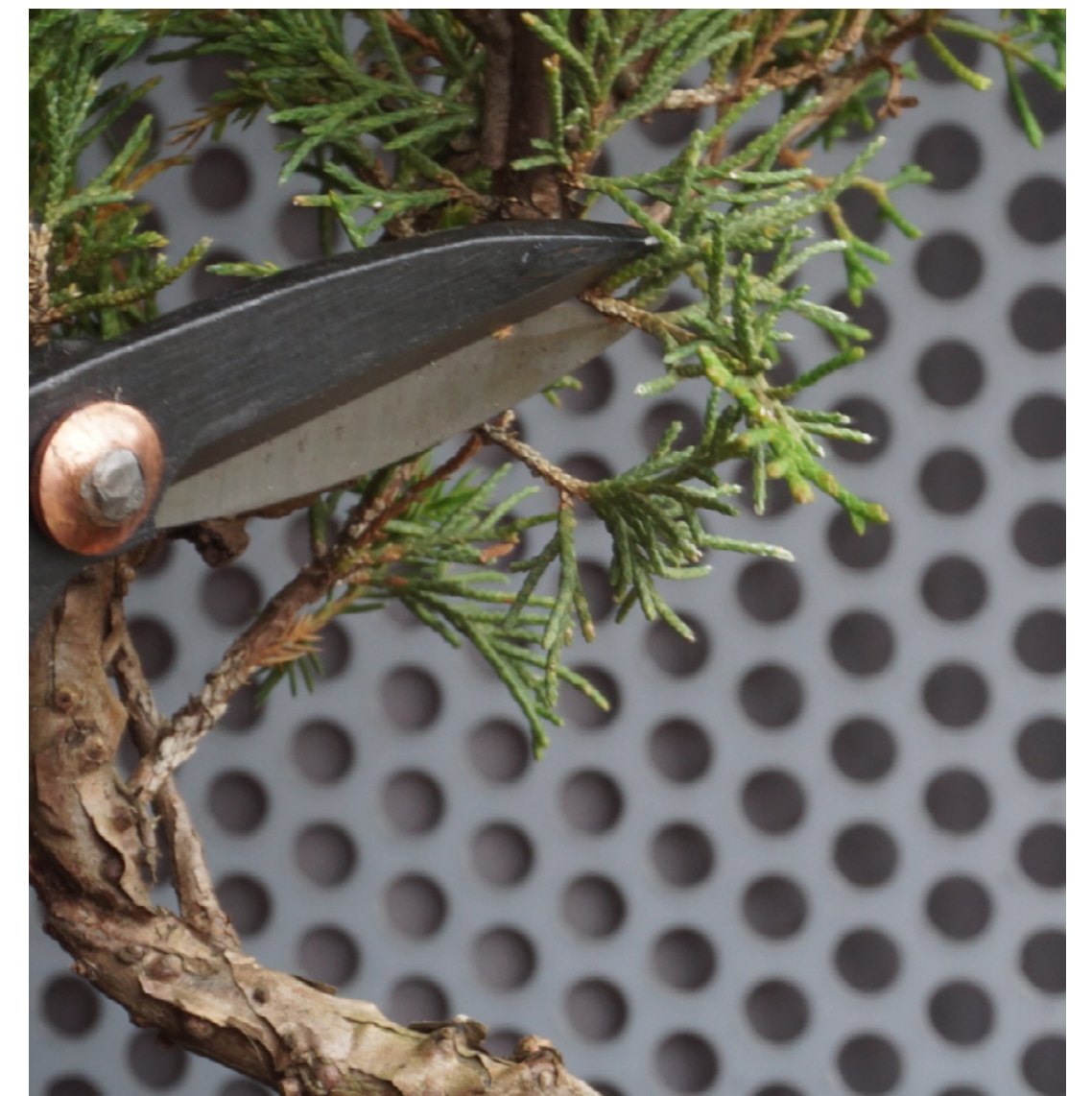
*NPK= nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.

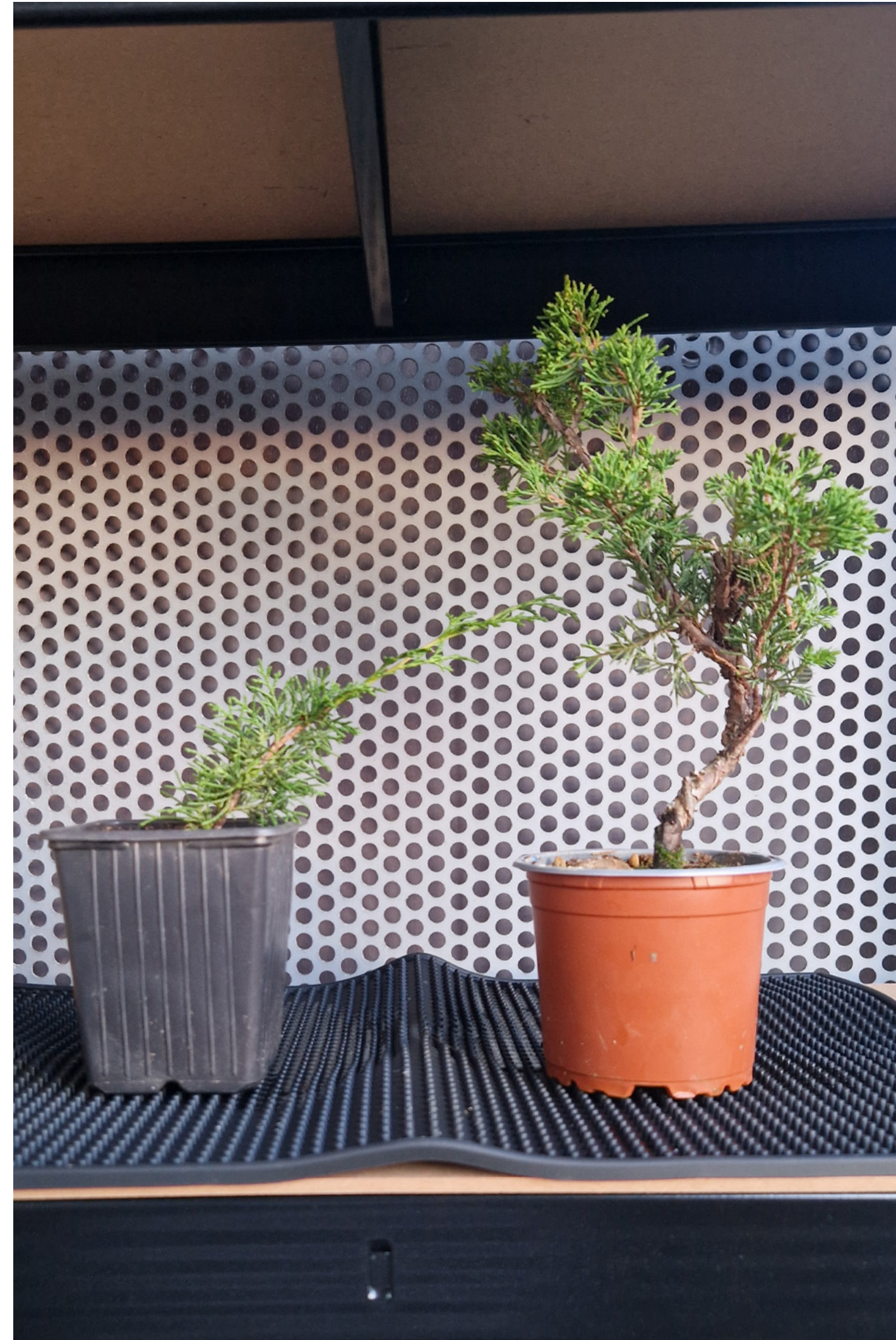
Tips for Success

Junipers are naturally resilient to pests, but infestations can still occur. To keep your tree healthy and insect-free, inspect it regularly for common culprits like spider mites, aphids, or scale. Catching them early and treating with horticultural oils or suitable insecticides will quickly resolve the issue.

Regular pruning is key to maintaining airflow, which helps prevent pest problems. Just be careful not to overdo it—never prune branches down to bare wood, as junipers won't recover from severe dieback.

And that's it! now you are all set to grow your Itoigawa Juniper!





Here you are the two cute Itoigawa Junipers from the Bonsai Unit family, one cutting and a pre-bonsai of about 25cm, basking in the sun on the balcony.



AWESOME that you decided to read this bite size guide on Chinese Elm bonsai!
Use this compendium to grow your bonsai and, most importantly, have fun doing it!

Don't forget to tag Bonsai Unit – @bonsaiunit – on socials. We'd love to see your trees grow and welcome other small-flat bonsai growers to the Bonsai Unit community

... **WANT TO STAY IN THE LOOP ?** ...

Dive into our [Instagram \(@bonsaiunit\)](#) for bonsai inspirations and behind-the-scenes magic.

OR

Check out more **Compendiums** on the [Bonsai Unit website](#). If your tree's not listed yet, don't panic –it's probably in the works! ;)

... **SIGN UP [HERE!](#)** ...

Sign up to our newsletter to receive updates when new Compendiums are out and to be **THE FIRST** to hear about all the exciting stuff we've got brewing.

... **Catch you soon!** ...