

The Bonsai trunk is the most important part of a bonsai. It is the body of the tree. This is the first part that catches the eye of a viewer. It is essential in bonsai, to have a large tapering trunk. In my experience all trunks have a potential, it is only time and the skill of the artist that dictates the outcome. In the next topics I will discuss the following:

- What to do with a thin bonsai trunk?
- How to make your trunk taper?
- Why taper?
- Why should the trunk lean forward?
- Why the trunk dictates what style you can create?

### **What to do with a thin bonsai trunk?**

When I encounter a seedling or a plant with a thin bonsai trunk, four things come into my mind. First, shall I plant it on the ground or a large pot to give it time to grow in size? Second, shall I create a smaller bonsai out of it? Planting on the ground will take several years but developing it as a mame' or shohin would be a lot faster. A thin trunk would seem larger if you create a smaller bonsai. Third, shall I convert it to a cascade? The cascade style is not so particular in the girth of the bonsai trunk. Since a thin trunk is more flexible, now is the right time to wire it down to form a semi or full cascade. Fourth, shall I turn it into a literati by wiring it up with interesting movements?

Frankly, when you buy plants from a commercial garden, the easiest thing to do without a trunk chop is a cascade or a literati. When I was beginning bonsai a commercial garden is the only resource I have. The materials that are available are long trunks with some foliage on top. A trunk chop is so scary, so the best thing I could do is a literati and a cascade bonsai style. You will learn later that a cascade and literati is a lot easier than you might think.

## How to create taper?

Taper is the gradual narrowing of the trunk as you go up the tree. This is created through successive trunk chops with "let grow" stages in between (see my article on [creating a bonsai](#) ). Another method is by torturing the lower part of the trunk. By stressing the trunk in key areas callus forms beneath thereby enlarging the trunk. You could use wire which tightens as you go down the base, or use a hammer and strike at key points where you want to be enlarged, or you could use a sharp object and pierce the cambium layer of the tree. But the easiest way is to hunt for a tapered trunk. Good

[bonsai hunters](#)

sell mostly tapered trunks. You could also hunt for good tapered trunks in backyards and gardens. But check that the

[root](#)

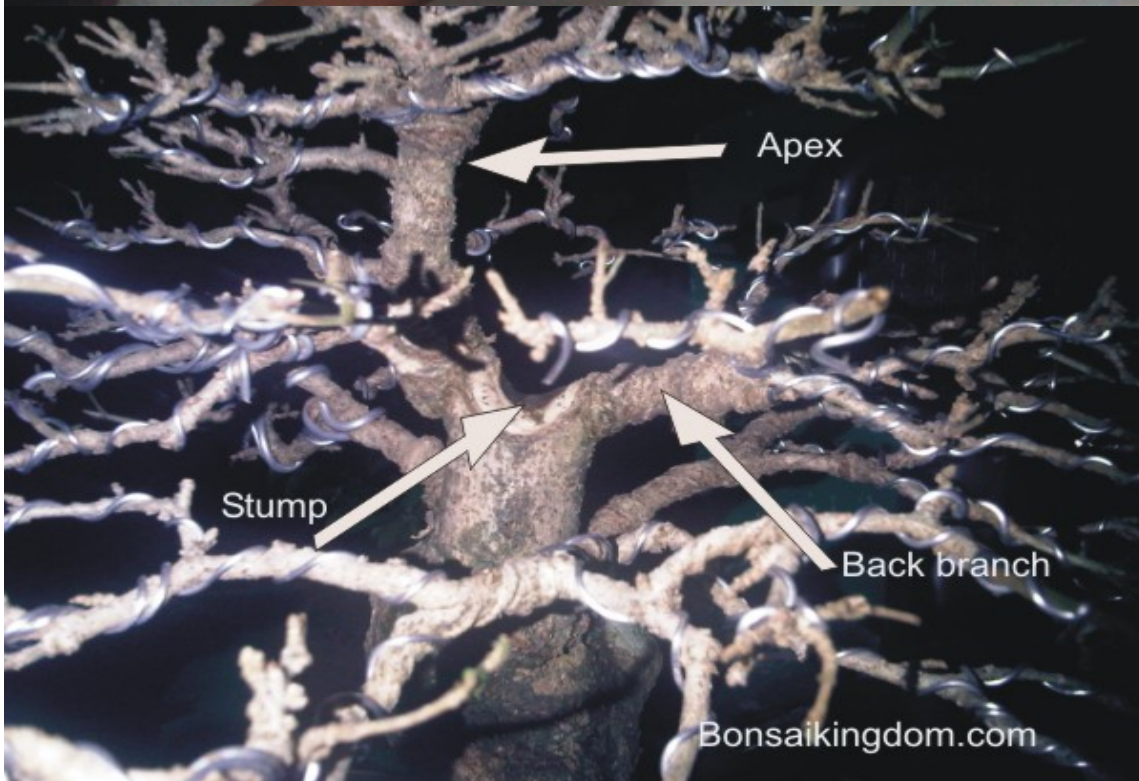
formation (nebari) is also good before buying it.

The best way to create taper is to grow two branches at the stump or at the point where it was chopped. One branch is wired sideways and the other is wired upwards as the new apex. In time the branches will grow and the chop / stump would be hidden.

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