

HOW TO GROW BONSAI: The process over four years.

FIRST "TREE": *Acacia aneura* (mulga) tube stock.

I bought a tube similar to this four years ago in Dubbo. If the species you need aren't available locally, there are mail-order services from native-plant nurseries on the Net.

THEN:

I cut it back to about 1/3, put it in a 6" pot, and let it grow as long as it wanted. Watered well, and fertilised when I got around to it. It grew about 40cms.

After about a year, in September, I repotted it into an 8" pot, cut the roots back by 1/3, and cut all the growth back to about the last two leaves. You can't cut *Acacias* back to bare wood. It had grown about 60cms, on a number of stems.

SECOND TREE:

After two years of letting it grow long and cutting it back, it was something like this. The bark had started to develop, and the first few bends in the trunk were in place, due to the hard pruning. Each year you select branches that “look interesting”, and cut out those that are crowded, come out at an ugly angle, or confuse the eye.

The same process continues: prune 1/3 of the roots in September, and cut back to the last two leaves. Cut out branches you don't want. Water, fertilise, and let it grow rampant, to thicken the trunk.

THIRD TREE:

After four years in training, it went into a smaller pot last year to prepare the rootball for the bonsai pot next September. I have cut it back now to show what I am aiming for. The trunk is quite thick for its height, and the bark is interesting. The branches all drive in one direction to indicate harsh conditions. It will be further opened out and refined in the next few years, as it continues to grow.

Many of the bonsai you see in this exhibition started out as tube stock. Buy plenty, experiment, and work out your own ways to develop trees! This is just one way.