

What do I need?

Empty margarine tub with lid

Strong glue

Brown pipe cleaners

Coloured tissue paper

Acrylic paint
(any colour)

Paint brush

Fine gravel



What do I do?

Look at page 2 to learn about the Japanese art of bonsai.

Turn the lid upside down and glue it to the top of your tub to create a base for your pipe cleaners to sit on. Paint it in your colours of choice to make it look like a bright and colourful plant pot.

To make your tree, twist 4 pipe cleaners together leaving about 3-4cm at the base of each to look like roots.

Keep twisting the rest of the pipe cleaners together above the root to create a strong tree trunk until you almost reach the ends, leaving about 2cm spare.

Bend the trunk with your fingers to create a natural curve like the pictures on page 2 of the worksheet.

Create branches coming out from the trunk by bending the tops of the pipe cleaners out to the sides. You can add more branches by twisting extra pipe cleaners onto your trunk.

Now, rip and scrunch pieces of tissue paper and stick these to the ends of your branches to create leaves or blossom.

Once you're happy with your tree, glue it in the centre of the lid on your painted base. Bend the roots out evenly to give your tree stability.

Scatter fine gravel onto the lid around the tree roots so it looks like a real bonsai tree growing in a plant pot!

the art of bonsai

The art of bonsai, or ‘tray planting’, originates from the Chinese tradition of penjing, where artistically formed plants and landscapes are depicted in miniature form.

Japanese bonsai is the practice of planting a single tree in a small tray and restricting its growth to keep it in miniature form. Firs, maples, camellias and hornbeam are all popular trees for bonsai.

The overall purpose of bonsai is contemplation for the gardener who needs patience and determination to intricately care for the tree over many years.

Bonsai gardeners follow strict pruning techniques and training methods to force a tree to grow in a particular way. Wires are used to manipulate the growth of the trunk and branches to create a miniature replica of a full-sized tree responding to the weather conditions in a specific spot in nature (see image, right).



As an art form, bonsai is heavily influenced by Japanese aesthetics, especially wabi-sabi - the belief that we should appreciate the beauty that is imperfect in nature. This is why bonsai trees like the ones pictured below are not symmetrical or balanced - it's just not how trees in nature grow!

Did you know that the smallest bonsai in the world can fit in the palm of your hand? There are some even reaching less than 3cm in height! Great if you don't have a lot of space for plants in your home, like many houses in Japan!

