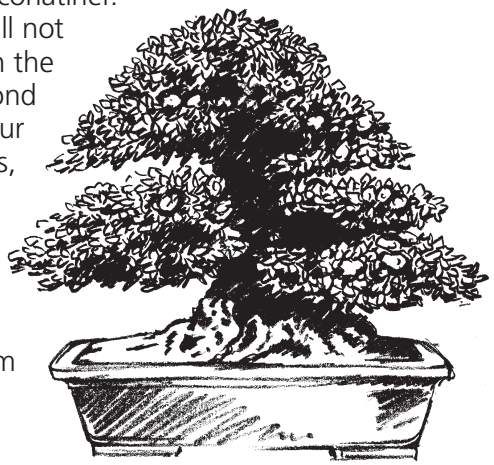
Anchoring Trees to the Pot

Bonsai Skills Series

There are several main objectives when anchoring a bonsai tree to it's conatiner. The first is to stabilize the tree so that the roots do not move. Roots will not grow properly in loose soil. Many trees require anchoring just to stay in the pot, as is the case with leaning, slanting and cascading styles. The second objective is make an attachment invisible from the outside. We want our presentation to be free of any visual intervention. Any wires, chopsticks, or supports should be hidden under the soil line. This handout covers some basic methods for anchoring trees to bonsai containers. Different methods work best in varying situations. Having a variety of techniques allows you to address each situation as needed. There are also endless variations of these methods, so be creative. You may also need to support from under the tree where the root ball is not firm enough using chopstick or other wooden suppports.



What wire to use?

If you have an established, flat root ball, it takes a minimal amount of force to keep the tree nicely in place and aluminum wire works very well for this. The larger the tree and the more that it cantelevers over the edge of the pot, the more strength is required. Do not use aluminum in these situations as it will stretch and the tree will not hold it's position. Copper works well at times, but galvanized steel fencing wire is much stronger and cheaper and will not stretch over time. 19 gauge works well for most bonsai applications.

The Chopstick Anchor

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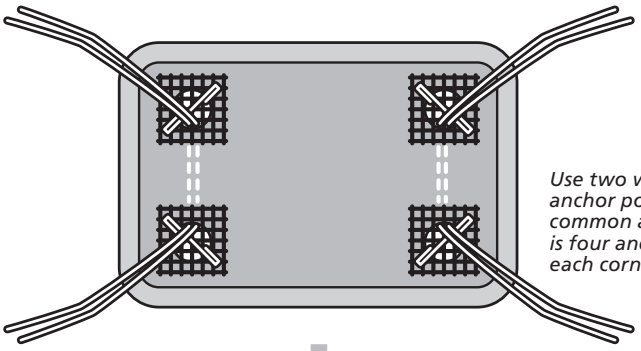
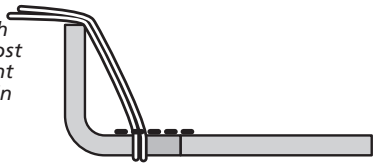
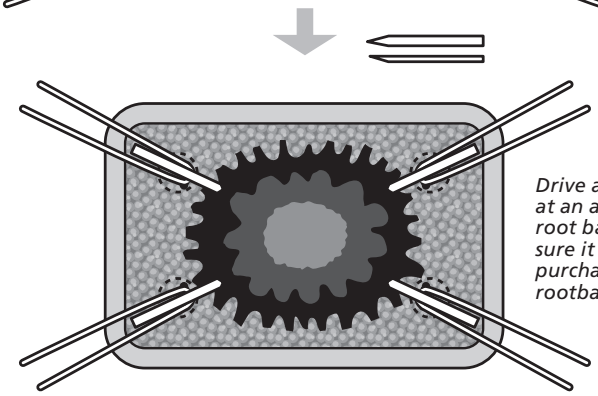
This first method is the safest, cleanest, and most non-intrusive method of anchoring a tree to a container. However, it requires a mature, stable root ball. This is where all bonsai end up over time and it requires a minimum of time and resources to execute. The closer the holes can be to the edge of the root ball the more stable the tree will be. This method can be applied to any number of anchor points, even or odd numbers, so long as you end up with two wires at any anchor point.

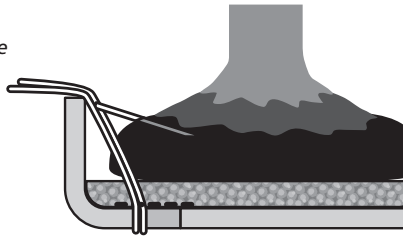


Use two wires at each anchor point. The most common arrangement is four anchors, one in each corner.

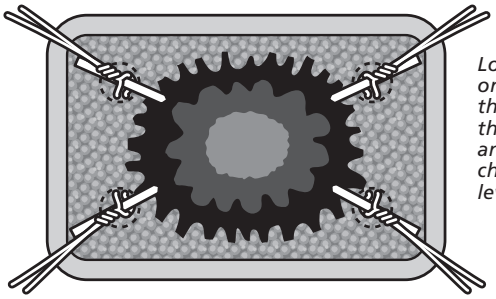




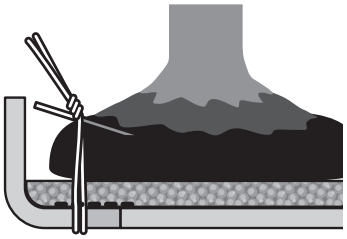
Drive a bamboo stake at an angle into the root ball making sure it has good purchase on the rootball.



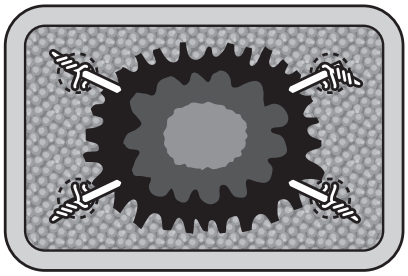
The angle of the chopstick must be above horizontal or the wire may slip off.



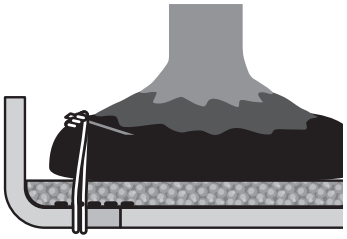
Loosely twist the wires on all four corners so that they do not pull through. Tighten each anchor snugly, pull the chopstick below soil level.



Make sure the chopstick clears the pot side wall as you tighten.



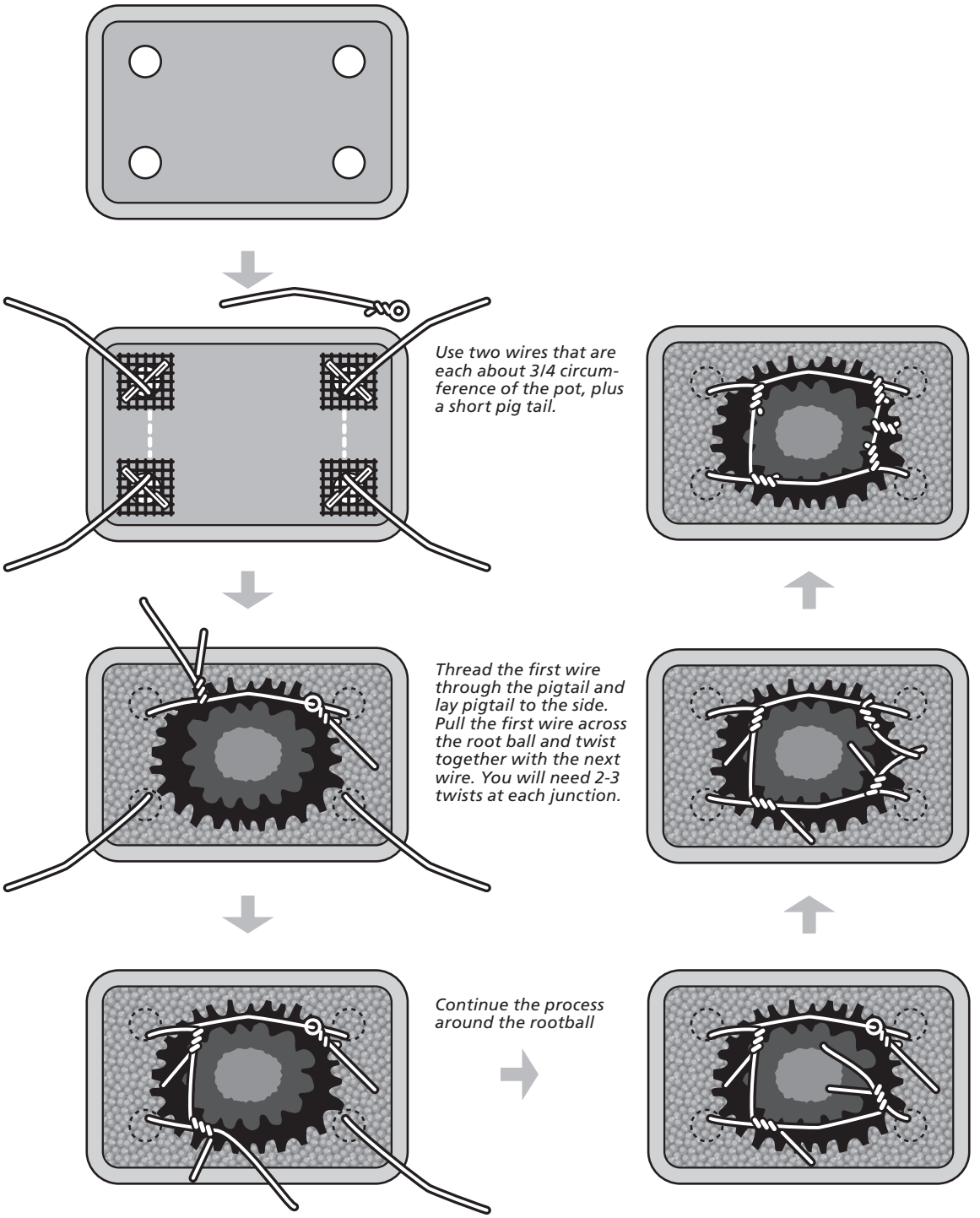
Trim chopstick flush with rootball. Twist wires down then trim to three turns or so.



Everything disappears under the soil line.

The Boon Wrap Anchor

This method works great when you don't have a dense root ball, but you do have numerous roots that flare out from the trunk. The roots do not have to be especially thick so this method works very well for deciduous trees in development. This method is also fairly effective with just two holes, or three. You can always drill and add holes as needed.



Use two wires that are each about 3/4 circumference of the pot, plus a short pig tail.

Thread the first wire through the pigtail and lay pigtail to the side. Pull the first wire across the root ball and twist together with the next wire. You will need 2-3 twists at each junction.

Continue the process around the rootball

Swing the pigtail over to meet the last wire.

Twist together the pigtail and last wire to cinch the entire mesh snuggly together. Trim the exess wire

Round Pot Variations

Sometimes you don't have four nice holes to utilize in anchoring your trees. Here are some alternate ways of using an odd number of holes.

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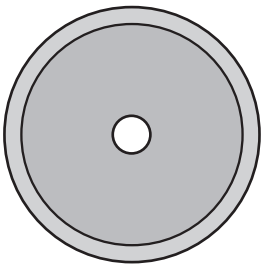
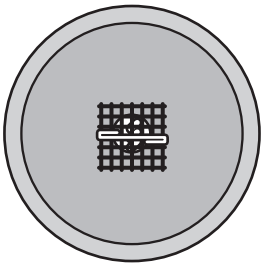
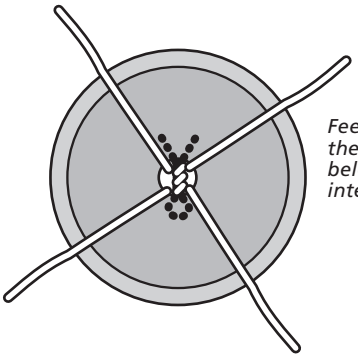
Single Hole Pot



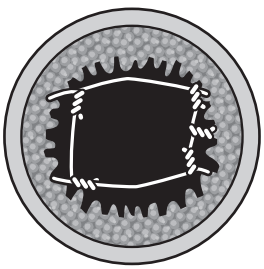
Use a heavy gauge Aluminum or copper wire to make a little cotter pin shaped anchor.



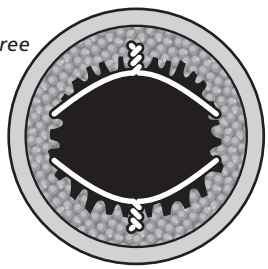
Wrap your tree anchor wires around this heavy duty anchor.



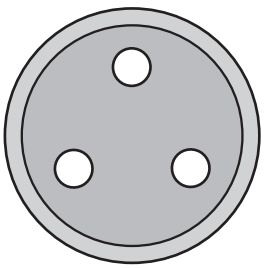
Feed the wires through the drain screen from below the pot into the interior of the pot

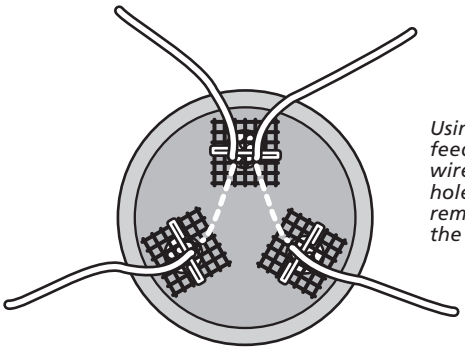


Tie the tree in as desired.

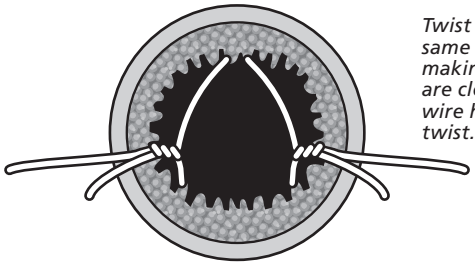


Triple Hole Pot

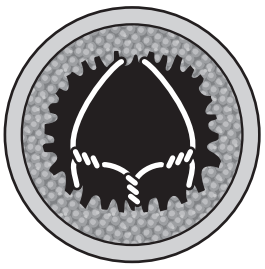




Using just two wires, feed one end of each wire into a drain hole. Feed the two remaining ends into the remaining hole.



Twist two ends of the same wire together, making sure that you are closer to single wire holes with each twist.



Finish by joing the two remaining ends together and cinching snugly together. Trim excess.