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### *Branches*

The cornerstone of almost all bonsai styling is working with branches. A bonsai artist is constantly confronted with the decision of what branches to remove, and which ones to develop.

One of the main differences between a bush and a bonsai tree is the amount of branches and foliage each has. If one buys bonsai material from a nursery essentially what one buys is a trunk with a lot of bushy growth. The artist must now remove the branches that 'don't belong' to reveal the hidden shape much like Leonardo carved beautiful statues from a block of granite. It is all in there you just have to find it.

But where to start? Actually it is not too difficult. You need to look long and hard at the tree and have some sort of plan before you cut anything off. You will be able to eliminate quite a few branches and shoots immediately. Many branches are obviously 'bad'. Those that grow straight up or down from a side branch should be removed. This will create the flat horizontal form to the leaf pads which one sees in old trees.

A branch should not grow out of the armpit of two others, or from the inside of a bend. Side branches should grow from the outside of the elbow of larger branches or the trunk.

Branches should not grow in toward the center of the tree. In large trees this would not happen naturally as branches grow toward the light, away from the trunk.

Avoid handlebar branches. This occurs if a branch originates from a trunk directly opposite another branch. Remove one of them. Branches should begin from alternate positions up the trunk.

Young shoots growing from the very base of the trunk are called water shoots. If left alone these water shoots will grow furiously and rob the rest of the tree of nutrients.

I will go into working with branches in more detail next issue.