

All the articles on this page also appeared in [The Gardiner](#) magazine, was written by [Gary English](#) and published with his kind permission..

© Gary English gary@cybersmith.co.za

© The Gardener Magazine - Editor: Tanya Visser tanya@thegardener.co.za

Buddleja saligna

All of the bonsai species I have written about so far have been species for the novice. Here is a tree for the brave and intrepid bonsai master-to-be. The *Buddleja saligna* is not for the faint-hearted but has a number of fairly unique characteristics that make it a very desirable tree for bonsai. I am not an expert when it comes to the *Buddleja*, so I am going to make liberal use of a book written by probably this country's foremost *Buddleja* Master, Louis Nel. The book is simply called *Buddleja Bonsai*.

Buddleja are found throughout South Africa except in the really dry areas. It can be a bush, small tree or a climber. It has simple leaves, long and oval in shape with smooth edges. The leaves look very similar to the wild olive except the olive's leaves are dark green and shiny whereas the *Buddleja*'s leaves are grey and dull. The *Buddleja* is often called the False Olive because of the similarity in the leaves. With constant pruning the leaves can reduce a significant amount. It also buds easily from old wood which is also very desirable.

The bark is smooth and grey in colour, and the wood is very hard, although wood less than 3 years old is fairly soft and takes shaping well. This is a very good species for creating jinns and deadwood carving, but any exposed wood must be treated because it does rot.

The most significant feature of the *Buddleja* is that it has vertical sap flow. The sap on all trees flows in a vertical direction but it can also move sideways from one vertical tube to another. The tubes of the *Buddleja* do not allow sideways movement, meaning that nutrition from one side of the tree cannot feed the other side. The branches and the crown of this tree are more directly dependent on their specific roots than with any other species. If a root on one side of the tree is cut or damaged the whole side of the tree will die back. If a thick side branch is removed it will also affect the trunk both above and below the scar. Thick branches must be cut back in stages. In older trees the trunks become fluted vertically. The ridges resemble muscles and are actually called that. These are the veins that carry the sap. Under very skilled hands the excess bark can be removed from between the muscles, revealing the wood below. Startling effects can be achieved through this carving method and it is about as close to the traditional windblown desperately-hanging-onto-survival look that the Japanese get using local tree species.

Buddleja trees are not easy to find so please don't flood me with emails asking as to their whereabouts. You might be lucky and find one or two at nurseries particularly on the Reef, but mostly *Buddleja* are found in the bush or on farms where they can become invasive and farmers may allow you to dig one or two out. There are many ethical issues regarding digging plants from the bush and they will require a whole article to cover, but briefly, always ask permission, never damage somebody else's property and never take more than you need.

Rather than rushing out to get a *Buddleja* tomorrow, bide your time and keep a lookout for one and eventually you will receive.