

Creating Quality Pre-Bonsai – 2 Routes

Marty Weiser, September 2025

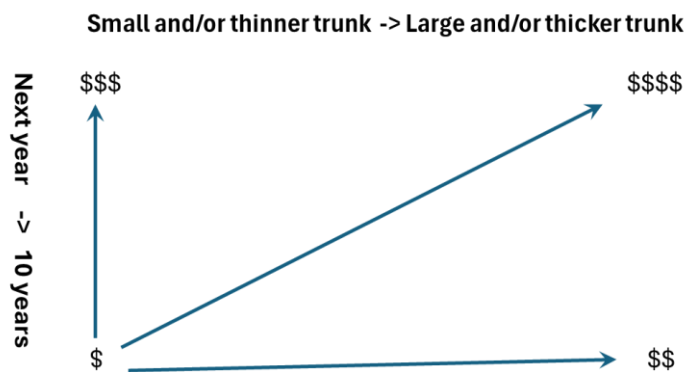
Buying quality pre-bonsai stock involves paying for someone's time.

Attributes of Quality Pre-Bonsai

- Trunk – thickness, movement, and taper
- Nebari – spreading roots and flare
- Branches – multiple options, well positioned

Key Considerations

- Large tree and thick vs. smaller tree and/or thinner trunk
- Resources – time and money



What is your overall goal?

- Larger tree or one where you can style quickly to learn – nursery stock
- Smaller tree and/or detailed development from scratch – seedling/cutting
- Larger, more mature bonsai quickly – Yamadori or developed Pre-Bonsai (\$\$\$)

From Nursery Stock	From Seedling/Cutting/Airlayer
Pros • Larger trunk to start • Wider range of species – more limited at end of season sales	Pros • More control of shape, roots, etc. • Low cost • More amenable to small bonsai • No ugly grafts
Cons • Trunk is often long & straight • Named cultivars often have ugly grafts	Cons • Thin trunk so it takes much more time to develop

• Branch spacing is rarely optimal • Roots are often congested – takes time to sort out	• Less range of cultivars
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Typical Development Steps

From Nursery Stock	From Seedling/Cutting
Year 1 - Find an acceptable tree • Does the trunk have any movement • Does it have low branches • Does it have any nebari • Cut off and excessively tall top, but leave plenty of foliage • If acquired in spring can skip to year 2 Year 2 • Repot and clean out about ½ of the nursery soil, particularly the bottom to get it into a shorter pot • Cut back excessively strong deciduous growth after it hardens • Let conifers grow Year 3 • Cut back robust growth and wire to set primary branches Year 4 • Repot again to clear out the rest of the nursery soil • Repeat year 2 growth management Years 5+ • Repeat growth management and repotting to improve structure until you decide it is time to style as a bonsai	Year 1 – Acquire seedlings/cuttings • If in spring, repot into pots with about two to four times the soil volume if well established • Planting at an angle can be better for many styles • Can even be repotted into late summer with sun and wind protection • Wire to set structure in the lower portion – remember to remove before it cuts in Year 1 – Airlayering • Airlayer a branch with good characteristics in June • Check for roots in September and remove if good roots • If no or poor roots prepare to over winter – ideally above freezing Year 2 to 4 • Repot every other year cutting back strong roots to encourage a good nebari – can increase pot size • Use sacrifice branches to thicken the trunk • Cut back the top growth leaving a sacrifice after it hardens to encourage low branches Year 5 • Consider ground growing once a good nebari is created – use a grow bag and work the roots every 2 to 4 years, or • Continue to grow in a shallow box for rapid growth, but easier to wire and prune

