

## Ponytail Palm Care from BonsaiOutlet.com

### **General Background:**

The Pony Tail Palm is not actually a palm; this native of southeastern Mexico is actually a member of the lily family and, also goes by the names Bottle Palm and Elephant's Foot because of its bulbous base. Ponytails make great indoor Bonsais and, are ideal for beginners who desire a slow growing, low maintenance plant for home, office or anywhere. Considered extremely hardy, they do well in either bright indirect or full sun making it a bonsai to sit back and enjoy. Simply providing light and a little water will ensure that this plant will flourish for years.

### **Trees Features:**

The Ponytail Palm has a unique feature in the swollen base of the trunk, which is where it stores a reserve of water making it highly tolerant to drought. The texture of the trunk looks and feels like an elephant's foot from which clusters of long strap-like leaves arch and droop gracefully from the trunk giving the impression of a tropical palm. No two specimens are alike ensuring that your ponytail bonsai is a one of a kind treasure.

### **Temperature:**

Ponytail Palms are native to a dry Mexican climate; this habitat allows it to survive outdoors in dry hot summers as well as giving it the ability to withstand interior winter heat very well, once the temperature goes below 55 degrees. If it is normally indoors and you take it outside, do it a little at a time until it gets used to its new environment. Avoid putting your Bonsai near a draft or vent, which dries out the foliage.

### **Lighting:**

Provide your ponytail palm with bright indirect light to full sun. Any window space indoors particularly one facing north will suit the light requirements of this high-light plant; however, full sun is best. This Bonsai can adjust to bright artificial light as well as it is not at all picky.

**Watering:**

Because water is stored in the trunk for longer time periods, it doesn't need to be watered frequently. Your Ponytail palm will need its soil to dry well between watering, and if you have any doubt on whether or not to water the plant, skip it until the next week. If your Pony tail palm develops dry, brown foliage, a shriveled stem or desiccated roots, you can be sure that these are signs of under watering. Excessive watering can drown the roots and let the tree decay. Remember, The Ponytail Palm's extraordinarily thick, bulbous trunk serves as a reservoir, storing water against dry spells which makes it very drought tolerate. This feature allows the tree to last up to four weeks without water without harming the plant. Ponytails generally need to be watered every couple of weeks, but there is no set schedule. Check your Bonsai regularly by sticking your finger into the soil. Do not water the tree if the soil is damp or cool and when the topsoil feels dry, water thoroughly and deeply. If yellow foliage begins to appear, allow several days to pass before watering again and make sure the soil is draining well and the roots are not sitting in water.

**Fertilizing:**

Fertilizing a Bonsai is essential to its health because nutrients in the soil are washed away with each watering. Fertilizer is like vitamins and minerals for a plant. When new growth appears in the spring, it's time to start feeding your Bonsai. Use an organic liquid fertilizer or a chemical fertilizer diluted to 1/2 strength. Ponytail Palms should be fertilized once or twice per month during the growing season and once a month in the winter. Water your tree well before fertilizing. Fertilizing a weak or freshly repotted tree will cause stress to the tree by burning the roots.

**Pruning / Training:**

The tuft of thin leaves that poke out of the top of the bonsai will need only a little trimming to keep the entire plant looking fresh. To keep this Bonsai miniature, it needs to be trimmed and pruned as new growth appears. Never remove all the new growth at one time. Ponytail Palms are pruned by cutting the top to force foliage to grow from the sides of the trunk creating the ponytail look. Sit at eye level with your Bonsai tree and use Bonsai trimming shears. Your cuts should be smooth or slightly concave so the wound will heal quickly. If the cut surface is brown, add pruning paint to the surface. Ponytail Palms can be trimmed throughout the year. The Ponytail Palm does not need training like some Bonsai and cannot be wired. Regular pruning should be all that is needed to keep your Palm in shape.

**Insects / Pests:**

Insects such as spider mites and scale are common Ponytail palm pests. Small moving pinpoints of red or brown on branch tips identify mites, severe infestations leave “spider webs on branch tips and yellow leaves all over the tree. Scale is identified by brown or black bumps on the branches. These bumps contain insects under a protective waxy shell which should be removed by hand. To combat pests, spray a light coat of Neem oil or a solution of 1tsp. dish soap to 1 quart warm water and rinse well. Repeat as needed.

**Propagation:**

Pony tail palms can be grown from seeds. Lay two layers of paper towels onto a flat surface and sprinkle the ponytail palm seeds onto the paper towels. Mist with water so that the paper towels are moderately damp. Layer a single sheet of paper towels on top of the seeds and mist with water. Place in a cool, dry place shielded from wind, heat and sunlight. Keep the paper towels moist, checking daily to ensure the towels are not drying out. Wait for the seeds to sprout. This may take approximately two weeks. Remove the ponytail palm seedlings once they have germinated and the seed hulls have fallen off of the seedlings. Use tweezers to carefully remove the seedlings, as baby ponytail palms are fragile. Carefully insert into the seedling trays and cover with the seedling mix so that only the seedling's top leaves are visible and place the tray in an area that gets two to three hours of direct sunlight.

Too much sunlight can quickly dry out the seedling mix and kill the plants. Water gently, being careful not to wash away the seedling mix to expose the fragile plant. Once the seedlings have grown to a height of 2 inches tall, carefully scoop up the seedling and its surrounding soil and place in a pot filled with potting soil. Place the pots in direct sunlight and water twice daily. You may choose to replant the ponytail palms into the ground when they are too large for their pot or continue transplanting them to pots that are progressively larger.

**Repotting:**

A sandy-mix soil will minimize the probability of root rot. After repotting, water thoroughly and do not fertilize for 3-4 weeks. Re-pot the plant only if you want it to grow taller. This type of plant likes to be root bound so it is not necessary to put it in a larger pot if you see that there is not much soil and a lot of roots. However, if you desire the plant to be larger, re-pot it in a larger pot. Clay or ceramic work best as their roots have

been known to bust out of plastic pots. You can transplant this Bonsai in the spring or summer.

**Additional Comments:**

The Ponytail Palm is normally grown in containers and indoors. They can reach heights of 20 feet with the right conditions which is why you will want to keep it in a small pot to ensure that your bonsai stays small.

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