

DEFOLIATION:

Defoliation is a basic technique essential for maples. Because of their rapidity in budding, this is the second means for balancing energy. Cutting off all the leaves at once is not recommended, doing so we will only succeed in weakening the tree and increasing the imbalance in strength. Defoliation is done when the leaves of the first budding have matured and has two main objectives:

1. To increase ramification and leaf density. Leaf size is reduced as is the length of the internodes. The tree will bud for the second time that year, increasing the branching at a pace that would normally take two growing seasons to achieve.
2. To balance the tree. With an established bonsai, if the outer part of the branches are compared with the inner part, there can be seen a notable difference in the number and vigour of the buds. If all the leaves were cut off at one time, those differences would be amplified.

Defoliation methods:

A well tried technique can be applied in two ways:

Procedure 1: – the removal of all the leaves with scissors, leaving just the leaf stalk or petiole at the leaf base (see Fig. 1). This serves to nourish the tree and new growth comes from buds at the base of the old leaves. The petiole will gradually die and drop off.

It takes about three to five weeks for new smaller leaves to be produced (Fig. 2). This technique is best carried out around June, once the annual leaf development is complete and the spring flush of growth has hardened off. It does not necessarily have to be done every year, but perhaps on alternate years.

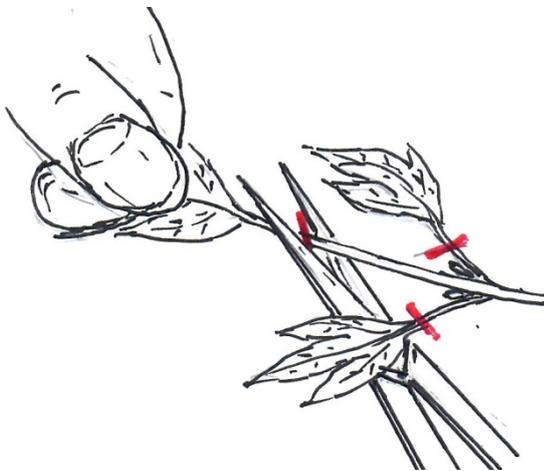


Fig. 1 Cut just below the leaf, leaving the petiole.

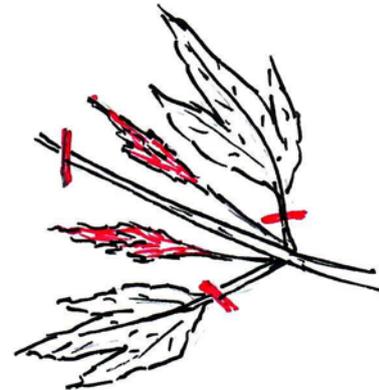


Fig. 2 New leaves grow from the dormant axial buds.

Procedure 2:- this is the less stressful technique where you pinch off larger leaves as they become too large or unacceptably close, causing too dense a growth. This can be in those parts of the tree with the strongest growth; they are then gradually replaced with new, smaller leaves. The tree hardly notices the absence and retains its vigour throughout.

This is a task that can be done throughout the summer, over a two or three month period depending as to the extent larger leaves need taking out, thereby maintaining the balance of foliage.



Fig. 3 Largest leaves are removed leaving smaller leaves. Fig. 4 New smaller leaves form, replacing the large.

Once defoliation has been completed, the tree should be located where there is a plentiful amount of light to encourage strong budding.

A point to emphasise – this technique is not necessarily a task needing to be carried out annually but would probably be undertaken at least every other year. It would be determined by the rate of growth exhibited and the strength of the tree.