

February
2009



SPRINGFIELD BONSAI SOCIETY

Palmatum Press

Future Tense February Meeting

Monday February 9th will be our first meeting of 2009. Winter is still in full swing so it's hard to think about bonsai; however, it's not too early to start planning your bonsai activities. Meeting starts at 7 pm at the usual location – Washington Park Botanical Garden.

We will have a dessert social at the start of the meeting. Coffee will be provided and you are welcome to bring a small dessert to share. Dr. Folse, a founding member of the Springfield Bonsai Society, will do a presentation on bonsai styling and refinement. With over 40 years of experience, an unrivaled Bonsai collection and an educator's background, Dr. Folse always gives a very interesting and inspiring presentation. Gary Trammell and Scott Day are also working to put together some videos that show bonsai work. We hope you all can join us for the meeting.

Looking forward, the March meeting will feature a repotting workshop. So look for a tree in your garage or greenhouse that's showing signs of budding. Swelling buds are a good sign the tree is coming out of dormancy. In maple trees you can see a red tinge on branches as the sap starts flowing. If you want to be sure – carefully lift the tree out of its pot and look for white tips on the roots. This is a sure sign the tree can be repotted.

This leads to a very interesting question. Why do we repot bonsai in spring? According to the Repotting and Root Pruning article on the Bonsai4Me website – http://www.bonsai4me.com/Basics/Basics_Repotting1.html repotting a tree just before it comes out of dormancy allows the roots to be pruned when they have a chance to recover without having to support the entire tree. Repotting too early can leave the pruned dormant roots exposed to possible root rot, frost damage, etc. Root pruning too late, after the buds have leafed out, however, will put a lot of stress on the tree as the damaged roots have to support the new leaves.

Root pruning during repotting allows you to remove any big tap roots and also helps the root system develop more feeder roots. The fine feeder roots are responsible for nutrient uptake so having a well developed root ball is good for the health of your bonsai. Contrary to popular belief root pruning does not stunt or dwarf a bonsai, it actually invigorates the root system by allowing more feeder roots to develop. Please refer to the Harry Harington's Bonsai4Me website <http://www.bonsai4me.com/index.htm> for some very good articles on various bonsai topics.



Bonsai Growing Tips

- from newsletters of neighboring Bonsai clubs

I know these tips are supposed to be from knowledgeable sources, but I thought I might be preface this column with what I have planned for this year. I would like to work on my bonsai development by dividing them into three groups. (*Disclaimer: This is just an idea of how I wish to split work needed on various trees. Each tree still has its own requirements based on its species and the season.*)

Group 1 will be trees ready to display this year; the display doesn't have to be in a show. Just the tree in a nice pot ready to show off in my bonsai garden, photograph and enjoy is enough.

Group 2 will be trees with display potential but still in development, maybe needing a design change, branch development etc. These can be in training pots with major cuts, wiring jobs etc.

Group 3 will be trees being grown for future development. These trees will be in larger grow containers.

With this in mind I can focus on different requirements of each tree group. For example, in spring when most trees can be repotted –

Group 1 trees will be repotted only if the tree roots are overcrowding the pot, or the soil has broken down. Check for any roots growing out of the drainage holes of the pot. Carefully remove the tree from its pot and look for overgrown roots or roots circling along the pot edge. These trees can be repotted in a new pot that better suits their design style.

Group 2 trees can be repotted in their training pot with root pruning to get them closer towards the display bonsai pot by reducing any big tap roots. It should also help develop more feeder roots.

Group 3 trees, if they are healthy, will be repotted every year. Each year the tap root will be reduced further and the tree potted in fresh bonsai soil. At this stage the roots can be arranged so the *nebari* (surface roots which gives bonsai its strong base) is developed to support the design. These trees I like to repot in a bigger pot or nursery container so the tree has the room to grow.

Dave Bogan's *Bonsai by Design* Jan 09 newsletter has this great bit of advice regarding potting bonsai trees. Dave and Barbara Bogan have established a Bonsai service - **Bogan's Bonsai - Bonsai by Design** in Lynnville, Indiana.

Excerpted from the article *Bonsai Rules - Alternative thoughts* by Robert Steven in Jan '09 newsletter of *Bonsai by Design*.

Pot size:

Here is a rule that kills more Bonsai than any other. The rules state that a pot's size is determined by the tree's height, width of branch spread, and trunk diameter. If a bonsai is taller than it is wide, the pot length should be a little more than two-thirds its height. If a bonsai's branch spread is wider than its height, the pot should be a little more than two-thirds its width. The depth of the pot should match the diameter of the tree's trunk at its base. In general, this rule is applied to Finished and Mature trees. This does not mean when you initially design a tree and work on its roots that you should cut the root system to fit a shallow pot. Did you know that many of the Bonsai in the orient are grown in larger pots and only potted down into the proper container for a show? Developing a shallow root system takes years and even once obtained doesn't mean a tree will be healthy in a shallow container.

Continuing the group analysis to pruning in deciduous trees. In spring when trees can be pruned the extent and style of pruning will depend on the group. Trees in **Group 3** can be styled exten-

(Continued from page 2)

sively as long as the tree can handle it. **Group 2** trees will be pruned to increase ramification or a change in design. **Group 1** trees will be pruned only where really necessary to increase ramification or create negative space.

The same analysis can be continued to wiring as well. Each group has its own requirement and should be wired accordingly.

Following is an excerpt from Dave's newsletter about wiring in winter:

"Winter Wiring" - If wiring during winter or while a tree is dormant always remember that the sap and moisture usually contained in branches making them more flexible) is less now. When the tree went dormant, it withdrew a lot of the sap contained within the branches thus, they will be stiffer and slightly easier to break. Bend them carefully. Benders and strains placed on branches should always be done with care and understanding. We've probably all seen articles where the author used a bending tool and a point as the fulcrum. Always remember if you're placing a lot of pressure on a single point, it can cause internal injury. Especially the three point benders advertised in many bonsai stores. With these, they push in the middle while hooks on either end pull thus creating a bend in the middle area. Both of these points should be cushioned. If left in place long, it can cause the underlying tissues to die and create a dead spot on the branch or trunk your attempting to bend."

Dave Bogan's Bonsai Study group encourages each member to find one tree to work on throughout the year. You can bring this tree to every meeting and work on various aspects through the year so fellow members can appreciate how the tree develops through the year.

I also like the following article published in Jan 09 newsletter from **Iowa Bonsai Association**, courtesy of **Helen Magruder**.

TIMELY TIPS

There isn't a lot to do this month with your trees in storage. If they are not frozen you can do some wiring and pruning, however pruning now can cause dieback later in deciduous trees. Check trees in storage for moisture. They should be moist but not too wet or root rot may occur. This is a good time to plan for spring. Make a list of the trees you want to repot in the spring. Find pots for them. There are a number of sources for pots. Dave Lowman carries pots and he also has his own unique handmade pots to consider. Check the internet too. Some good sites are:

Bonsai by the Monastery, www.bonsaimonks.com

Bonsai Outlet, www.bonsaioutlet.com

Wee Tree Farm, www.weetree.com

Hollow Creek Bonsai, www.hollowcreekbonsai.com

Dallas Bonsai Garden, www.dallasbonsai.com

For that very special tree there is: Sara Rayner's Bonsai Pottery, www.redwing.net/~daalms/

It is also a good time to start collecting the supplies you need if you plan to mix your own soil. Those cold snowy winter days are a great time to curl up by the fire with a good bonsai book or watch a bonsai DVD. The club library is a good source for these, we have a number of DVD's and a large supply of Bonsai Today magazines. I enjoy browsing through the bonsai galleries in

Bonsai Today for inspiration. If you were a member a couple of years ago you may have had the pleasure of working with Mike Hagedorn shortly after he returned to this country after spending several years as an apprentice in Japan. He has written a book about his experience, "Post-Dated, the Schooling of an Irreverent Bonsai Monk". It is a delight to read, it is beautifully written. I picked up a copy a while back. You can order a copy from Michael directly at his website: www.crataegus.com and now Stone Lantern is carrying it. I can highly recommend it.

I find that this time of year, dreary as it is, can be inspirational for bonsai ideas. I enjoy looking at the bare trees as I drive along. There is a never ending fascination for me to look at the variety of forms of the deciduous trees. There are the wonderful craggy oak trees with their twisted crooked branches. Next time you wire a tree try copying that style. Branches will be much more interesting. Look at the branches of a maple and try to emulate the way the branches grow. All too often we try to style all of our trees to look like a pine tree. Maple trees should look like maple trees not pines. Look at the variety of shapes of different trees. Each has its own special shape. Study them. I am constantly intrigued by the way branches in nature are ramified.

There is certainly a lesson to be learned there. The most prestigious bonsai show in Japan is in February when deciduous trees are leafless. The structure of the tree is exposed for all the world to see and they are amazing.

[There are quite a few pictures in the examples in their newsletter and I will include one of them here to illustrate her point.]



Back to Basics – Bonsai Growing Tips

- borrowed from CABS – Jan 09 newsletter of Cox Arboretum, Dayton, OH

Bonsai trees are sometimes difficult to grow for some people. Often times, someone gets a bonsai tree as a gift from a person who does not really know a lot about them either. While there is nothing wrong with this, it makes it all the more imperative that the person who has received this gift do some research on the plant. With some knowledge about your tree, you can grow a bonsai tree on your own with no problems. That said, Bonsai trees will take a certain amount of work that some other plants will not. Many people who receive these trees as gifts simply put them next to a window to get some sunlight and do not bother with them afterwards, except to water them once a week or so. A bonsai tree in this situation will die quickly.

The truth is, when taken care of properly, a bonsai tree can live for hundreds of years or more. Seriously! The first thing you must do to take care of your bonsai tree is to find out what species it is. This is so important because every species has different needs. Finding out what species your tree is can sometimes be a daunting task because there are hundreds of species of bonsai trees. But finding the general name of the species will suffice because then you will know the type of environment it prefers to live in. After you find out what species your bonsai is, you will more than likely be sitting it outdoors unless it is a species of tropical bonsai, which will need special care. Of course, if you live in a tropical climate, it would be fine to sit your tropical bonsai

(Continued on page 5)

outdoors. Bonsai trees can usually not survive indoors for a number of reasons such as lack of humidity and light.

The next important step is learning how to water your bonsai properly. Watering your plant properly is crucial to its survival. Unfortunately, this is one of the most difficult parts of bonsai cultivation. Every species will need a different quantity of water. Too much or too little could quickly kill your bonsai tree. Bonsai trees are usually in a smaller pot, which will have a smaller amount of porous soil. Bonsai should have a rocky or porous soil by the way. Not the loamy soil gardeners usually prefer. This smaller amount of soil will cause the bonsai tree to dry out quicker or suffer from other temperature fluctuations very easily. Using the right size pot is also important to your plant's health because the roots of the tree dictate the pot size. Most bonsai trees will have to be watered every morning and evening in the summertime. I've heard that watering the plant during summer mornings will adversely affect the tree. I've also heard the same thing about watering in the evening. A good rule of thumb is to check a couple times a day if your tree is thirsty. If it is, give it some water. My thinking is that it rains whenever it rains and I don't see a lot of trees with fungal growth and rot in the wild.

CABS Editor's Note: This article was borrowed from an e-mail from Dallas Bonsai owner Fred Meyer to Judy Fister and is included as an example of the kind of article you can find on the web. Please see the article "Bonsai on the Web" on page 3 for further information about using the web for bonsai information.

Local Bonsai News:

I recently got an email from David Myers of Davidsans Japanese Maples. They have a large selection of Japanese Maples with over 200 different cultivars offered in one and two gal. and larger sizes – right here in Springfield. Per David many of these are dwarf varieties that are worthy of bonsai. They also have a good number of dwarf conifers. You can visit their website at www.davidsansjapanesemaples.com

Cass Bonsai in Edwardsville will have their repotting workshops and open shop dates starting Saturday Feb 7th. MARCH 7 will be their OPEN HOUSE & BEGINNER WORKSHOP (cost \$35). For details contact Milt at 618-656-9087. Their website is <http://www.cassbonsaigardens.com/>

I do not have much information from Twin City Bonsai in Normal, IL but you can contact Ed Hernandez at (309) 454-8060

February Bonsai Care Tips

Disclaimer: This is a general guide. Times can vary as much as a month depending on the weather trends. Some species of trees do not follow the general category guidelines of deciduous, evergreen or tropicals. Know your trees!

- Prune hardy deciduous trees as buds begin to swell.
 - Repot hardy deciduous trees near end of month when roots are white at tips. Protect newly repotted trees from hard frosts until buds burst.
 - Wire deciduous trees while buds still tight. Take care not to damage new buds. Protect newly wired trees from frost until buds burst.
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SPRINGFIELD BONSAI SOCIETY

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Upcoming Events

February 9 – Dessert Social, Bonsai styling and refinement, Roland Folse –

March 9 – Repotting workshop – bring your trees to repot. If your bonsai are showing signs of budding this is a great time to repot your trees.

April 24-26 – Shohin Bonsai Convention in St.Louis visit www.stlbonsai.org or call 314-952-1317

May 9th and 16th – Bonsai Basics – To register, call LLCC Community Learning 217-786-2292
Bonsai, literally “potted plant,” is the art of styling miniature trees in a container. This workshop introduces you to the basic styles and principles of bon-

sai. You will get hands-on experience styling and potting two trees (a tropical and an evergreen) for you to keep and enjoy. *A \$40 supply fee is payable to the instructor the first day of class.*

Instructor: Gary Trammell and members of the Springfield Bonsai Association

Course Code: CEW 106-X40 (summer session)

Dates: Saturdays, 5/9/09 – 5/16/09

Time: 10 a.m.– noon

Number of Sessions: 2

Registration Fee: \$15 **Limit:** 15

Location: Washington Park Botanical Gardens, 1740 W. Fayette, Springfield

Administrivia

Your 2009 Officers are:

President – Gary Trammell 217-741-4849 (M)

Vice President – Scott Day 217-585-8473 (R)

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& newsletter editor

Annual membership is \$20 (family \$30).

Email msumant1@netscape.net to sign up or visit

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BonsaiSBS/>