

May/June
2009



SPRINGFIELD BONSAI SOCIETY

Palmatum Press

Future Tense June Meeting

Our **July 13th** meeting will focus on Tropical Bonsai and Companion plants.

The hot summer days of July and August are good to work on Tropical Bonsai. This year our summer has been a mixed bag of very hot, very rainy and very cool temperatures but with night time temperatures staying over 50° F my Tropicals (Ficus, Bougainvillea, etc) are doing quite well outside.

At last year's meeting on tropicals we learned from Jim Reynolds that tropical bonsai do great in a controlled indoor environment with artificial light all year long. So you do not have to worry about too hot, too cold, too much or too little water etc. Another side benefit of this practice is that you do not have to worry about "de-bugging" your tropicals when you move them indoors in winter! We hope to have Jim at this month's meeting to share similar ideas. Bring along a Ficus tree to repot or style.

The second topic of the month is Companion plants. As I understand it, companion plants or accent plants are used in bonsai displays to "fill the picture", to highlight and accentuate the character of the tree. The feature article this month is borrowed from the online Bonsai journal <http://www.artofbonsai.org/> In this article Andy Rutledge introduces the art of bonsai display so you can see how companion plants fit in the picture!

We hope to have some small pots and accent plant material for this meeting so come prepared with ideas to make some companion plants!

Past Tense – June Meeting and SBS Social



The **June 8th** meeting focused on Azaleas. Dr. Folse and Scott Day brought in some Azaleas for folks to style. A few members had picked up some good bargains from clearance racks of local landscape nurseries.

Dr. Folse gave a small talk on Azaleas. June is a good month to style Azaleas as you can prune them back in Spring right after flowering. We also learned that the best time to take cuttings is in Spring or September. Cut a 1" slit on the cutting's cambium, dip it in rooting hormone and plant it in fast draining medium (like sand).

The SBS Social on **June 14th** was a big hit as well. I do not have any pictures from this event; I just know that you had to be there to enjoy it!!

"Bonsai Display 101" article and images by Andy Rutledge

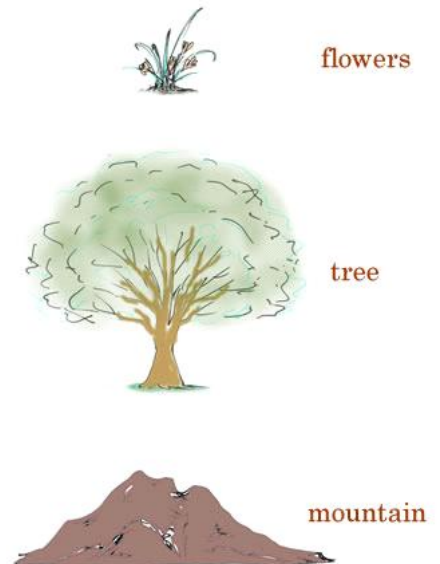
http://www.artofbonsai.org/feature_articles/display101.php

A very primary introduction to the hows and whys of bonsai display.

If you're just beginning to consider bonsai display and the basics of artistry, the many conventions surrounding traditional bonsai display may leave you confused. Face it, all of the fussy particulars for how to properly display a bonsai can prove to be either daunting or maddening. It may seem easiest to simply ignore the traditional conventions and just do your own thing when displaying bonsai.

Rather than approaching bonsai display conventions from the "rules" perspective, it may be helpful to first take a logical look at what you're dealing with from a natural perspective. Let's consider the natural elements that you're working with or working to represent in your bonsai display. Let's imagine working with a meadow-grown-image elm or maple tree, a meadow variety flowering plant, and a mountain.

First, imagine these elements in nature and consider your place in nature. How do you usually encounter these things in real life? If you're standing out in a meadow admiring a tree, you're usually closest to the flowering plant. It rests at your feet. Next closest to you is the tree. After all, you're not going to be able to admire the whole tree if you're standing right at the foot of it. Rather, you are standing a few yards away so that you can take in the whole image. Lastly, the mountain is far away in the distance.



(Below) This is what most would likely deem to be a proper order of perspective.



Now that you're reminded of a common natural perspective, let's apply that to how you want to represent it in your display. The viewers will be standing in front looking at your display, similar to the way that you might stand out in that meadow looking at the flowers, tree and mountain.

Think of the order of proximity that we commonly encounter.



Is this a familiar perspective?



Does the image (Right) best represent the way you'd want to depict that scene?

Probably not. The tree is at the center, perhaps the center of attention, but it is far away in the background. And the mountain seems to be in the foreground. That's not right. How about the image below? Does that look any better?



Not really. This time the flowers, usually the element closest to you, are far away - farther away than even the mountain!

No, you want to closely represent the image you might see if you were standing out in that meadow in the mountain valley. That means that the mountain is farthest away, the tree is next closest and the flowers are right up front. That should look something like this (Image below).



That's more like it. Now let's take that natural perspective and use it as a template for your bonsai display.

Since a bonsai display must use artistry rather than literal specifics to portray a scene from nature, there are other elements you must employ in your display beyond just a tree, a flower and a mountain. For starters, you have to get things in the right order, as in the image above. Next, you have to try and convey the appropriate distances in the perspective. Remember, closest, near and far? You also have to account for the relative heights among these elements (flowers are on the ground, the tree is tall, the mountain is far away and very tall).

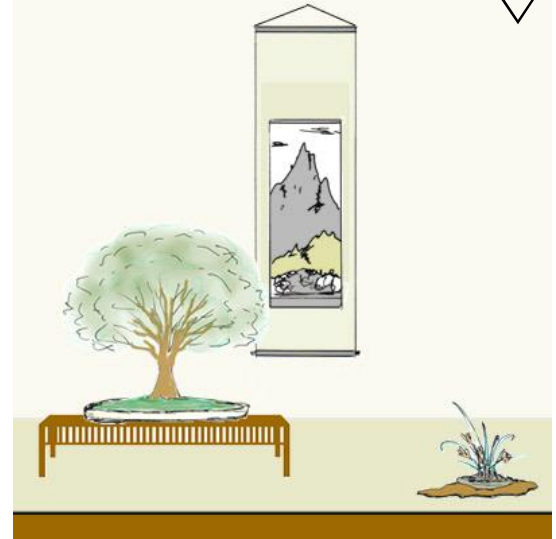
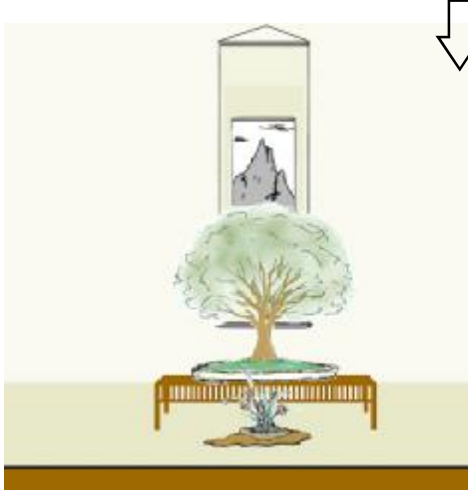


This sort of perspective effect will require some apparatus and evocative elements rather than literal elements. For instance, the tree should be shown to be "taller" than the ground-growing flower, so it should go on a stand rather than sitting on the floor of the display. The mountain is rather difficult to bring into a display literally, so use a simple painting of a mountain hanging from a wall scroll to suggest that element far away in the distance. The flowering plant should be in a simple pot and on a simple platform, not just sitting on the floor of the display. Displaying the plant without a stand would be too informal and seem haphazard.

As for the placement of the elements in the display, they should clearly echo the commonly encountered perspective: flowering plant closest, the tree in the near distance, and the mountain farthest away. This way, you've got a very 3-dimensional display. The dimension varies from a front-to-back perspective, a relative height perspective, as well as a left-to-right perspective. Spreading the 3 elements out to comfortably fill the display space helps to evoke the wide expanse of nature. This sort of arrangement makes for a very convincing and believable image.

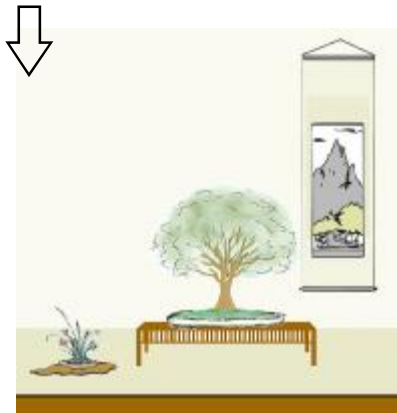
Following these advisable considerations, your display might look something like this (Below). ↓

Now, why not just arrange the three main elements in another way? Why not just adhere to the front-to-back perspective and ignore the rest? You could be "different" and arrange your display like this (Below). ↓



Not very evocative is it? No, this would not look good from the front, and a bonsai display, like a landscape painting, has a specific front and a specific viewing angle.

Then why not just arrange the elements "differently" so that they can all be seen from the specific front ...like this (Below)? ↓



Again, pretty unnatural and uninspiring. True, it looks orderly, but nature is not orderly. Nature is off-center and lopsided. Nature seldom has straight lines or even distribution or perfect rhythm. That element of randomness and chaos has to be reflected in your display effort to some (greater or smaller) degree or it will seem too obviously artificial. The fact that you are already using a rather artificial representation of a natural scene means that you must do everything you can to introduce natural looking perspectives and rhythms.

So, the display (next page) would represent a rather natural perspective and use the artificial elements in evocative ways.

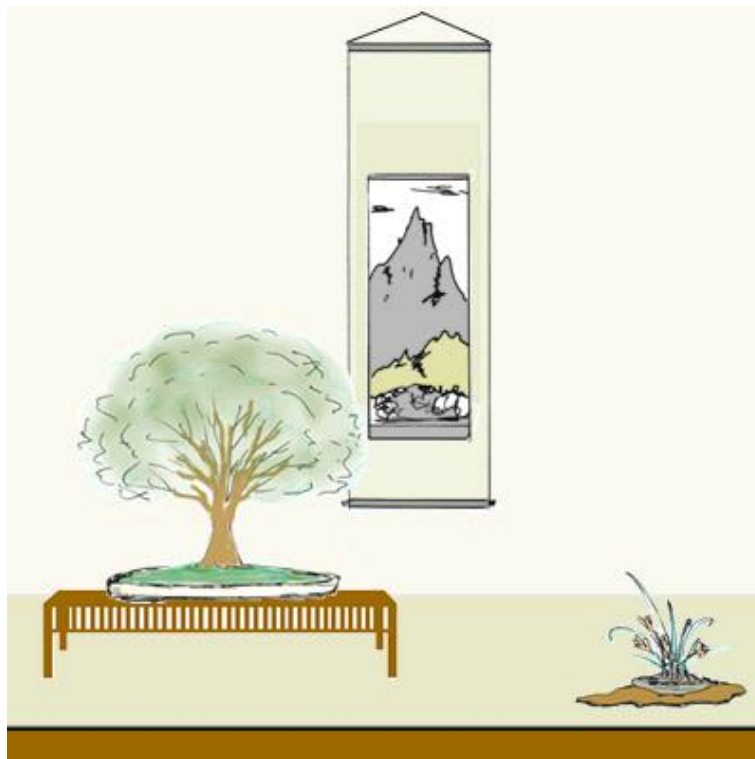
Note the natural, irregular shape of the companion plant platform. Notice how the tree and the companion plant are not placed at the same distance from the center of the scroll. Notice how the foliage of the tree lightly caresses the scroll, suggesting some connection. The display is neat and orderly, but not clinical and antiseptic.

Now, how might the elements be rearranged if the tree were a mountain-dwelling juniper with a

(Continued on page 5)

tortured trunk and the companion element was a mountain stone suiseki (no scroll)? Surely you can see that this group of elements might necessitate a different perspective and a different arrangement. What if the tree were a cascading bonsai and what if the season were winter instead of spring? What if you didn't have a painting of a mountain, but only a painting of a cricket? What season would make that painting appropriate?

These are the sorts of considerations that can make bonsai display an interesting and challenging endeavor. It is also a part of why artistry becomes important in such displays. You, as the artist, have to tell the viewer a story, not merely put some beautiful, neatly arranged pieces of craft on a table. There's no artistry in that. The entire endeavor of bonsai is about a story. Creating and recreating and relating that story, your different stories, to viewers is what bonsai display is about. I hope that you may find it worthwhile to try and tell a compelling story with your bonsai. Artistry is what makes it compelling, but it all starts with a common sense look at your place in nature.



Author's note: Please forgive the sloppy and silly images used in this article. I got inspired this evening and hastily worked this piece up, having to create the images on the fly. Anyway, hope they helped to get the ideas across. ;-/

July 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!

- Repot tropicals.
- Prune pines. Pinch back junipers, as they will be growing rapidly. Leaf prune deciduous through middle of month. Wounds heal quickly. Create jin and shari.
- Continue wiring, especially conifers.
- Keep close eye on watering. Some trees may need water twice daily. Avoid watering during hottest part of day.

In addition to these tips I thought of a few things myself –

- If you styled any deciduous trees in spring using wire check for wire clearance. Deciduous trees grow very fast in spring so the wire might be close to digging into the branch.
- Rotate trees on your bonsai display so all sides get proper sunlight – I try to do this every week.
- Check for insect infestations – spider mites on junipers and spruce, scales on tropicals etc

**Expiration Notice:**

If you are not a 2009 SBS member, please contact one of the club officers to continue getting the printed copy of our newsletter. You can also choose to receive just the electronic copy.

SPRINGFIELD BONSAI SOCIETY

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Upcoming Events

July 13th SBS Meeting – Tropical Bonsai and companion plants: Companion plants are small trees / plants that accompany a bonsai display.

August 10, Monday 7 pm SBS Meeting – Wiring, Shaping and Refining Trees.

August 14, 15 and 16. Midwest Bonsai Society – Fall Show, Chicago Botanic Garden

September 5, 6, 7 St. Louis Japanese Festival - Lindsey Shiba Guest Bonsai Artist. Missouri Botanical Garden.

September 14, Monday 7 pm SBS Meeting – Photographing Bonsai. Dick Adorjan and Dick Hendee. Bring a tree and your digital camera to learn about taking good bonsai pictures.

October ?? – Fall Show and Bonsai Auction
Its not too late to style a tropical / conifer tree for display at our annual show or for the year end auction.

Administrivia

Your 2009 Officers are:

President – Gary Trammell 217-741-4849 (M)
Vice President – Scott Day 217-585-8473 (R)
Treasurer – Tom Applebee
Secretary – Manish Sumant 217-652-9619 (M)
& newsletter editor

There is no fee to receive the newsletter electronically or to attend the meetings. The membership dues typically pay for Bonsai supplies used during the meeting and for newsletter mailing expenses.

Annual membership is \$20 (family \$30).
Email msumant1@netscape.net to sign up or visit
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BonsaiSBS/>