



# Kongetsu

## West Michigan Bonsai Club Newsletter

Vol. 10 No. 8

August 2006

Mollie Hollar, Editor

### 2006 Schedule

**Sat, Sept 16:** Tanuki/phoenix graft workshop, 9 AM-Noon, FMG

**Fri, Oct 13:** Set-up for Club show

**Sat & Sun, Oct 14 & 15:** Club show

**Thurs, Oct 19:** Planning meeting for 2007

**Sat, Nov 18:** Potluck & auction (location TBA)

*All events are at Meijer Gardens unless otherwise noted. Thursday meetings are 7:00-9:00 PM, and Saturday workshops are 9:00 AM to Noon. More details will come in future newsletters as events draw nearer.*

### Anita's Corner Part 1

A couple of reminders:

1) Plant clearance-sales are ongoing @ local nursery outlets. If you have the space to overwinter a new tree or two, this is an excellent time to buy.

2) We're still in need of a location for our November 16 auction/potluck.

Unfortunately, the location in Wayland was unavailable.

Please look @ what is available in your area for this event.

#### American Bonsai Society

Have you read "BONSAI - Journal of The American Bonsai Society" lately? If not, you should definitely consider joining ABS. The \$40.00 Individual Membership includes 4 issues of this informative full-color magazine.

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### No August Event

I know many of you are attending the Mid-American Bonsai Exhibition in Chicago this weekend. I hope someone will let me know how it was. Should be interesting scattered around the Chicago Botanic Garden like that!

Besides that, there is no scheduled event. I tried to make some contacts for some kind of program, but nothing worked out. And with the low attendance we've had at events this summer, perhaps everyone needs a month off.

### September Event

Vance Wood from the Detroit area has kindly accepted my invitation to present our September tanuki/phoenix graft workshop. I anticipate this being one of the best events of this year. Here's how this will work:

I have several pieces of deadwood that you could use for your tanuki planting, or you can bring your own. However, if you want to use one of mine, I *must* know soon. I have a couple of small dead bonsai that could be used to attach something like an ivy to. I also have several dead junipers, and a few pieces I've picked up in the woods across from my house. These range from quite small to about two feet in height/length, depending on how you would want to use it. Or of course you can bring your own deadwood, which you should have since I've been telling you about this for several months, right?

For plant material, again I have mentioned you providing your own. But if you don't have anything, I do have a few Shimpaku juniper whips (one or two trunks/branches) and then the great buffalo junipers I picked up at Gee Farms last spring. They have quite successfully been growing in my side yard since then, and would be perfect for a tanuki.

The Club will provide soil for the planting. I'll also bring some plastic pots, oval, some 12" long and some 17" long, both about 2" deep for you to use as training pots if you want. However, I would recommend that you bring your own pot in which to put your planting. Size of pot needed will vary widely depending on what wood and what live plants you use.

You will also need to bring your bonsai tools and, most importantly, power tools for carving out grooves in the deadwood, and preferably a power screwdriver for the nails or screws we'll use to fasten the live plant to the deadwood. You could possibly share these tools with someone but you should make arrangements for this ahead of time.

A registration form for this workshop is on page 5. ***Please be sure to get this to me by Friday, September 8 at the latest.***

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Here are some recent highlights:

>CHOPSTICKS - Bonsai's Most Versatile Tool by Will Heath (Spring 2006) - a fun look @ this wonderful tool that really details some innovative uses for chopsticks.

>CEDAR APPLE RUST & Your Bonsai by Steven D Ittel (Spring 2006) - "must" reading for anyone having junipers, cedars, hawthorns, &/or crabapples.

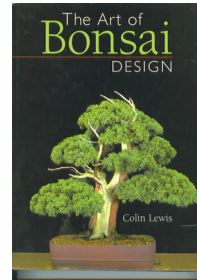
>MAKING THE PERFECT POT - Bonsai Pottery As Art by Sara Rayner (Summer 2006) - A nice article detailing some of the methods used by Ms Rayner to produce such wonderful pots!

>WEEPING BEECH BONSAI - Re-Bar & Re-Shaping by David Rowe (Summer 2006) - A photo-laden article describing how to use re-bar to achieve some very dramatic shaping!

These are just a few of the highlights from some recent issues. Each issue also features a REGIONAL CARE section, advertising (with an index of advertisers (VERY handy), and ABSTRACTS which is a section of "short news items, opinions, and photographs pertaining to bonsai in North America. This section always has something worth reading.

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Below I am repeating a great article written by Ron Martin of Tokonoma Bonsai in one of the Carolinas (can't ever remember which). This is an excellent description of the process and background of the planting we'll be doing.



According to Japanese legend certain animals are created with supernatural powers. They can transform themselves into anything they desire. The Japanese raccoon (tanuki) is one of the most popular animals attributed with magical powers. The Tanuki are pictured as mischievous rogues who often get themselves into trouble. They can, at times, be frightening creatures, and at other moments be capable of great kindness, turning a bad situation into a windfall. Sometimes they are treated as godly figures and become cultural heroes. But mostly he is a mischievous scoundrel that is constantly cheating a farmer out of money, food and the sexual favors of the farmer's wife. At times he has been known to invade houses of ill repute but I will leave it up to your imagination as to the kinds of scams he pulls there.

The word Tanuki has become synonymous with fraud. If something is a fake it can usually be blamed on the Tanuki. Life's little tragedies can also be blamed on him.

If your bonsai dies then guess who killed it ;o)

But, as I said previously, the Tanuki can sometimes be used to turn a negative situation into a positive one. Your dead bonsai can come back to life. It won't be what some call a real bonsai but then it won't wind up in the compost pile either.

Actually you will be creating a tree. Better yet a work of art. Something from your mind's eye.

A tanuki bonsai starts with a piece of old driftwood and then to this we artfully attach a live tree. The driftwood usually becomes the trunk and the branches are made using the live material.

One of the best examples that I have seen of a Tanuki bonsai is the one pictured above. Colin Lewis is a master at these sorts of things. No, he isn't a scoundrel (well maybe a bit) he is just a pretty talented artist. That tree is just a piece of driftwood to which two shimpaku junipers have been attached. Mind you the word "just" is misleading. There is a bit more to it than that. In his book "The Art of Bonsai Design" he tells a lot about how he did the one pictured above. Good reading and I would highly recommend it as a source of information for those attempting to do one.

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Lastly, membership in ABS has other advantages, including a pretty good website ([www.absbonsai.org](http://www.absbonsai.org)) & the invitation to join the online discussion group ABSForum. ABSForum is an e-mail-based discussion group that is VERY active and covers a WIDE range of bonsai-related topics. Membership forms can be downloaded from the website ([www.absbonsai.org](http://www.absbonsai.org)) or write to Gloria Duncan, ABS Executive Secretary, PO Box 351604, Toledo, OH 43635-1604, USA; Ph 419-868-9009. Include your check payable to THE AMERICAN BONSAI SOCIETY, INC for \$40.00 for an individual membership & include your name, address, telephone number, & e-mail address.

### John Naka Wisdom

For some reason I have lately been hearing and reading one of the late John Naka's sayings that has definitely been an influence on the work I've been doing this summer in preparation of the various shows at which I sell bonsai. It is this: Don't make your tree look like a bonsai, make your bonsai look like a tree. Something valuable to remember while we're working on our trees.

A few years ago Dan Robinson renamed Tanuki Bonsai to Phoenix Graft. The idea being that the bonsai was rising from the ashes much in the same way as the fabled bird of Greek mythology did. In the US this new name caught on pretty quickly.

To me, though, the new name just does not fit. I like the playful image of the Tanuki. The trick is to fool someone into thinking the tree is alive. We are not recreating it, just disguising a dead piece of wood. We are doing a playful scam. A fraud but, not a bad one. Besides Tanuki sounds like a more fun word.

I'm really looking forward to our September 16 workshop. If for some off reason you choose not to participate in the workshop but would like to watch others of us do the tanuki, you are welcome to come and observe. By the way, there will be no charge for this workshop, for either participating or observing.

## Anita's Corner Part 2

Anita has definitely outdone herself this month with a review of a book I just purchased and a couple others.

### **Book Review Aug 2006 - A Review of Three Books by Masakuni Kawasumi II By Anita Buckowing**

This month, I have the pleasure of presenting a review of three books by the famous Masakuni Kawasumi II. Each of these books is a pleasure to read & to own, and each one is definitely worth looking at. These three books span a wide time-frame during the evolution of the art of bonsai in America & each definitely has something to offer. Masakuni Kawasumi II was the second Masakuni to become world-famous. His father, Masakuni Kawasumi I, pioneered the design of specialized bonsai tools, and the tool company that was born as he developed these tools is still around today (Masakuni Tools is world-famous for some of the finest bonsai tools available!). Masakuni II continued to refine the design & function of bonsai tools produced by their company AND took the time to write these three books. Masakuni Kawasumi II passed away in 2002 & the third book in this review (THE SECRET TECHNIQUES OF BONSAI) was completed by Masakuni Kawasumi III. I hope you enjoy the review & are inspired to take a look at these three wonderful books. ~ Anita

Title:	Introductory Bonsai & the Care & Use of Bonsai Tools	Bonsai With American Trees	The Secret Techniques of Bonsai
Author:	Supervised by Kyuzo Murato	Intro by Kyuzo Murata	w/Masakuni Kasasumi III
Pub Date:	1971	1975, 1983	2005
# of Pgs:	84	131	111
# of Chapt:	15	8	15
Table of Contents:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Index:	No	Yes	Yes
Charts:	Yes, some	Yes, few	Yes, some
Color Photo:	Minimal	Yes, varied throughout	Yes (in "Styles")
Black/White Photo:	Yes, good sequential pics	Yes, pretty good sequential pics	Yes, excellent photos; good sequential pics
Available?	Yes, secondary markets (eBay) (approx \$9.00) (varies by auction & ship/handling)	Yes, secondary markets (eBay) (approx \$ 8.00) (varies by auction & ship/handling)	Yes; online or special order; ck w/your bonsai supplier (\$29.00 retail)
Topics:	Grafts, Bonsai w/ Stones, jin, wiring, tool usage & care	Beginner's section, growing bonsai, grafts, tool usage & care	Layering, grafting, re-potting, bud trimming, defoliation, tool usage & care

As I have already said, each of these books has its' own individual merit. INTRODUCTORY BONSAI & THE SECRET TECHNIQUES OF BONSAI both deal with grafting a bit more than does BONSAI WITH AMERICAN TREES. BONSAI WITH AMERICAN TREES delves into the title topic more than does INTRODUCTORY BONSAI. THE SECRET TECHNIQUES OF BONSAI has a much better section on STYLES of bonsai than the prior to books.

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If your budget only allows for ONE of these books, then I feel that **BONSAI WITH AMERICAN TREES** is probably the best "bang for your buck". But, if your budget & book shelf can handle it, I would strongly recommend that you purchase **THE SECRET TECHNIQUES OF BONSAI** also, it is the most current & up-to-date of the three books. Plus, this book has the added benefit of Masakuni Kawasumi III's input (he IS the first tree doctor in Japan to specialize in bonsai & has been officially recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, & Fisheries). I hope that this information helps & I do hope that you find the time to check each of these books out yourself. Happy Reading!

## August into Fall

This is the time of year when you're likely to feel as though there's nothing to do with your bonsai. Well, don't! Some trees can still be worked on, even repotted, although this should be done only in cases of emergency. Here's what Bonsai Clubs International website says about junipers:

Junipers can also be repotted in autumn if necessary, since they enter a period of renewed root growth at that time.

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Extensive root pruning in autumn is probably not a good idea, however. The tree should be protected from wind and direct sun for a month or two after repotting.

You should continue to trim undesirable growth on your trees, but again nothing extensive. Fertilizing isn't recommended on much of anything during hot weather. That's one reason I love using Rapeseed Cake or some other cake fertilizer: you put it on the soil in the spring, and every time you water, a little bit of fertilizer goes into the soil. Most cakes will last through one season.

The really important thing to be doing religiously during this time of year is watering. I have discovered through personal experience that even conifers need that drink every day when the sun is beating down on them. Here's what one of my pot suppliers says in his occasional newsletter:

### Watering

This is the crux of the art of bonsai. Most trees that die are lost to dehydration, either from lack of watering or from being kept in a low humidity environment like indoors too long.

Different soils dry at different rates, trees differ from species to species in water requirements, and even different styles of pots dry out at varying rates, so each pot must be checked regularly until you become more familiar with the plant in question. The other end of the spectrum, over watering, can damage plants nearly as quickly, it is in finding the proper balance of soil, water and air that you will develop a healthy root system and thus a healthy bonsai.

Watering accomplishes three things for your bonsai. First, and most obviously, it provides water for your tree. Secondly, the water that flows through the soil carries nutrients your plant needs and washes out the excess salts that might otherwise build up. Third, and least obvious, the flow of water pushes out the old, spent gasses in the soil and pulls in new, fresh air.

People are conditioned to believe all the plants transpiration takes place in the leaves, but if that was true, how would a plant that was totally cut down spring back from the roots. The first few inches of soil are crucial to all of a plant's functions, even a mighty oak does most of its feeding and drinking and much of its breathing in the top foot of soil. It is this reliance on a shallow soil profile that allows us to grow trees in such shallow pots in the first place. The porous quality of bonsai soil allows for quicker water flows and better gas exchange, this is why bonsai soil is so granular, it helps develop a dense mat of roots to support a dense mass of foliage.

### Some quick watering tips:

The old Japanese adage is to water three times, once for the pot, once for the soil, and once for the tree. By going back and forth over your collection three times, it allows the water to soak into the soil and the pot and leave water for the tree to take in.

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Don't just water the soil. All parts of a plant absorb water to some degree. 35 percent of the water intake for a plant doesn't involve the root system at all. Washing off the foliage also keeps dust and pollutants from clogging stomata or breathing holes in the plant leaves.

Sure it's raining, but is it enough to get good flow-through? Better safe than sorry, water anyway. Been raining all week? Prop up one end of the pot a few inches to increase drainage.

Using the hose to water? Too much water pressure can blast soil out of the pots, be sure to get an adjustable spray nozzle to allow for different needs. Get one with a mist setting, it's great for occasional wash downs of the foliage. Keep in mind that if that hose has been lying in the sun for a few days, or hours, that first blast can boil a tree, literally.

Water early in the day. If you must, water late in the day, but be aware that leaves your plants more vulnerable to fungus and slugs. Plants don't breathe above 85 degrees, so when you water in midday, you temporarily cool the leaf enough to start transpiration, which allows the moisture inside the leaf to escape in the exhalation, kind of counterproductive, AND the water sitting on a leaf in the midday sun can act as a lens, burning leaves. So watering early morning beats all these problems and gives you a few uninterrupted minutes with your trees, and that can be a real stress beater. If you have flowering bonsai, don't water the flower, it will make them pass almost instantly.

Watering is a learned skill. In Japan an apprentice is given pruning shears on his first day, but he won't touch a watering can for another four years.

## Invitation

Got an e-mail a couple weeks ago from Bill Struhar of the Four Seasons Bonsai Club in the Detroit area:

Every year in late August FSBC has a club auction of bonsai stuff. This year the auction will be open to any member of recognized bonsai club, and their guests. It will be held this year on August 27th at the home of our President, Jimmy Whiteley in Rochester Hills. Particulars will be published in our August Newsletter which will be downloadable from our website, beginning August 15th.

<http://www.fourseasonsbonsai.org/newsletters.htm>

### Tanuki Workshop Registration Saturday, September 16, 9:00 AM – Noon

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

I will bring my own driftwood.

I will bring my own live plant.

Please call me at 616-754-2351 or e-mail [hollar@chartermi.net](mailto:hollar@chartermi.net) with this information, or send this form to:

Mollie Hollar  
520 W South Street  
Greenville MI 48838

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE BY ANY METHOD IS DUE BY  
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8.**

### 2006 Membership Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phones: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

(Check one:)

Active membership (\$25.00)       Inactive membership (\$6.00)

Please make check out to:

**WMBC**

and mail to:

Ed Spaans  
947 Orchard SE  
East Grand Rapids MI 49506

Or bring to any meeting or workshop.