



Kongetsu

West Michigan Bonsai Club Newsletter

Vol. 10 No. 2

February 2006

Mollie Hollar, Editor

2006 Schedule

- Sat, Feb. 18:** Root-over-rock with tropicals plants
Thurs, March 16: BYOT (bring your own tree) in preparation for the May show, also pests and diseases, and bonsai mums!
Sat, April 1: Repotting workshop
Sat, April 22: Collecting trip (location TBA)
Fri, May 5: Set-up for All-State
Sat & Sun, May 6 & 7: Michigan All-State Bonsai Show
Thurs, May 18: Show re-cap and photos
Sat, June 10: Open studio/BYOT
Sat, July 22: BYOT, styling, wiring, general care
Weekend of Aug 19 & 20: Trip to MidAmerica Bonsai Exhibit & Show in Chicago
Sat, Sept 16: Tanuki/phoenix graft workshop
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.

The Chicago Show

Got the newsletter from the Midwest Bonsai Society yesterday. Due to construction, the August show is going to be in tents. Should be an interesting time.

Official Start of a New Season

On Saturday, February 18, at 9:00 AM our 2006 season will officially begin with the root-over-rock workshop. The registration form for this workshop is on page 5.

I have collected a variety of types of tropical plants. Prices of each type of plant vary from \$5.00 for small China Dolls and Schefflera to \$18.00 for Catlin elms that are "ready-made" for root-over-rock. There are two variegated ficus that are multi-stemmed and will cost \$12.00. Photos are below. If you know which type of plant you want to use, please call me so I can reserve one for you.

On doing more reading in my myriad books about root-over-rock, I have found information that has caused me to decide to do our planting a little bit differently from what I had originally thought. Therefore, nursery pots will be provided for those of you who want to keep your planting in one, but fairly deep plastic pots will also be available.

Rocks for our plantings should be rough textured so the roots will cling to them well. So for our workshop, look for a rock (or rocks) with lumps and bumps, and craggy, rough-textured surfaces. Feather (volcanic) rock will be available for a small extra charge.

As far as the size of the rock goes, there are unlimited possibilities. Realistically, since you'll want to move your planting at some point, if for nothing more than getting it home, huge, heavy rocks are not practical. However, your planting can be anything from a mame (2"-4") size to one of about 10"-12". So anything from golf-ball size to cantaloupe size would work well.



Catlin Elm, ~7" tall



Mimosa, ~9" tall



Schefflera, 8"-10"



China doll, multi-stemmed, ~8" - 15" tall

Variegated ficus, multi-stemmed, ~16" tall



Anita's Corner

I am thrilled this month to begin a new feature for our newsletter. Anita Buckowing, Club member since 2004, has begun contributing a column monthly. Thanks, Anita, it's great to have help! Of course, any member who has something to say for the good of the group, I encourage you to contribute as well.

How to Survive Winter in Michigan

In the January newsletter, Mollie pointed out the importance of **READING** to help us Bonsai enthusiasts not only survive Winter in Michigan but also by **READING** we will learn something new about our passion. I hope I'm not the only one who took these words to heart...there is SO much good information about Bonsai available in print and almost every publication has **SOMETHING** that will help each of us in some aspect of our art.

I recently visited the **BARGAIN** sections of a couple of local bookstores. Here are the bargains I was fortunate enough to pick up: At Schuler Books (28th St store):

Creating Bonsai Landscapes
by Su Chin Ee - \$5.99;
published in 2003, original
price \$24.95.

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Since I am providing all the materials for the workshop through my business, I will accept checks, Visa and MasterCard for payment. Basic cost for the workshop will be \$10.00, which will include a nursery pot, soil, raffia and plastic wrap. Plastic pots, all plants, and feather rock will cost extra. More info on page 5.

Is Winter Finally Here?

I don't know what the weather has been where you all are, but until yesterday we've had highs in the low 40s and lows near freezing for quite a few weeks. I have noticed that my quince are budding and a few other of my deciduous trees are looking as though they're hoping winter is over. All we can do in that case is hope for the best. That's part of nature, and part of having a living hobby.

Yesterday things got back closer to normal. The overnight temps are under 20, and daytimes get maybe 25-27. Yes, that's more like the winter we all know and love.

So what should you be doing with your bonsai? **Nothing!** Actually that's not strictly true, since you can be doing some trimming. Many people I know prefer trimming their deciduous trees now particularly since it's so much easier to see which branches should be removed. Trimming is a good thing to do when your trees are dormant, and it helps to save time in the busy spring repotting season.

Just be aware of one thing: be sure you don't get carried away (especially with our warmer weather) and do any fertilizing. At this time of year, fertilizing could actually do some damage to some of your trees.

In writing about trimming of maples in winter, David De Groot, curator of the Weyerhaeuser Company's Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection near Seattle, says:

“(Maples) grow very fast, so about every 5 years with young trees, cut off thick secondary branches in order to get interior branch development. Old trees are handled similarly but only every 10-15 years, and the cutting is less drastic. ...

“Drastic work cannot be done all at once . . . because it will spoil the appearance for a long time. In this case:

1. The general good appearance of the tree, including the outline of the crown, must be preserved.
2. The balance and strength of the branches and twigs between various parts of the tree must be preserved.

“Therefore, some places on the tree might have small branches or twigs that are too long, or too thick, or too straight. Do not cut them immediately if it will have a negative effect on the outline or balance of the tree. Instead, leave the branch or twig alone until nearby buds have developed. After buds have grown into twigs, the long/thick/straight branch can be removed.”

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The Complete Practical Encyclopedia of Bonsai by Ken Norman - \$5.99; published in 2005, unknown original price (probably above \$20.00 based on the number of color pictures alone).

At Bargain Books (29th St corner store):

Bonsai by Werner M Busch - \$6.99; published in 1993, 1995, & 2001, original price \$16.95

Each of these BARGAINS has something to offer. Each book is loaded with color pictures, information, definitions, and more. Each book is MORE than worth the BARGAIN price.

So, visit your library, your local book store, or your favorite Bonsai supplier & buy a book today. You'll be glad you did!

Why I "Do" Bonsai

I have been asked the question "Why do you 'do' Bonsai?" countless times by friends, family, & casual acquaintances. I have taken the time during this UNUSUAL Michigan Winter to reflect on that question & I think I'm finally ready with an answer.

Plain & simple - I "do" Bonsai because I find it to be a relaxing & rejuvenating
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These techniques would, of course, apply more to well-established bonsai than to a tree that you are still in the process of developing basic shape and proportions. They would also apply to most deciduous trees.

Get Your Soil Now!

Remember that repotting season is coming. You should be deciding which of your bonsai you will need to repot this spring and be sure you will have enough soil mix to do so. As usual, we will have available the Turface and aged pine bark that make up the mix many of us use for all our trees. Price for a 50# bag of Turface is \$9.50. A 3-cu.-ft. bag of pine bark is also \$9.50. If you don't need this much, we will have 2# and 4# bags of conifer mix (2/3 Turface and 1/3 pine bark) and deciduous mix (2/3 pine bark and 1/3 Turface) available for purchase.

This is a perfect time to get the two components we use for our soil mix, and sift and mix them so they will be ready when you need the soil. There are many different substances you can mix into your soil - any good bonsai book will give you some examples. I was a bit surprised to read the following written by one of our favorite bonsaiists, Ivan Watters:

Some Things I've Learned about Growing Media

Where does one start when writing about growing media for bonsai without writing a couple of chapters for a book? This, I have no intention of doing. Growing media, or soil as we'll call it for short, is probably one of the most complex and controversial subjects in bonsai, causing nearly every practitioner to express multiple opinions. Most of these opinions, by the way, are wrong, have no basis in fact or are just plain silly.

Most of what I've learned has been gleaned from about forty years of study, research and experience. There's no substitute for producing a healthy, vigorously growing bonsai - and mostly this is related in some way to the soil.

Primarily, the purpose of any growing medium is fourfold - to hold the plant up, to retain and release moisture, to provide and release nutrients for growth as needed, and to allow gas exchange between the atmosphere and plant roots. There are probably about two-dozen other functions that soil performs, but these four are the basic requirements for successful plant growth. Remove any one of these and trouble begins. Using these four basic principles a proper soil mix for any purpose can be constructed, amended or maintained. Just keep in mind that the purpose is health and vigor. Also, one must be aware that changing something in any one element will probably have some effect on every other element.

My strong beliefs about soil for any container grown plant, but especially bonsai, require that the mix be simple (not containing many different materials), inexpensive (the trees, pots and all the other stuff we need are expensive enough), and easily obtainable. I also believe that in the ideal bonsai world every species of trees wants its own very special mix. Maybe in the utopia of bonsai worlds each individual tree wants its own special mix.

Sounds like a tough job - but it really isn't. You can construct this ideal soil mix with just two products. Something inorganic and something organic that together provide the four basic requirements of good soil are all that are needed.

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art form; I know that I will work the rest of my life to even APPROACH a full understanding & mastery of this art-form!

Now, while you may find that statement to be a bit OVERWHELMING and maybe even

INTIMIDATING, let me elaborate so that you'll understand why I enjoy an art-form that I know I'll never master.

Again, plain & simple, it is THE TREES! I have worked in a wide variety of media throughout my life and I continue to explore & improve my abilities in all art-forms. One thing that I had to learn VERY early in my artistic studies was that I had to put the tool(s) down & walk away from the project; otherwise, I would continue to "fuss" with it. I ruined quite a few projects before I learned to WALK AWAY, sometimes just for the night, other times for good ("t'is done, leave it alone!"). But BONSAI, due to the primary portion of the media being a living entity (THE TREES), ALWAYS requires "revisiting & retouching" in the future (the process of continual care & pruning, re-potting, etc). Bonsai allows
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What products should be used? I'm not going to fall into that trap and start the never-ending discussion that usually goes nowhere. Find the right ingredients that fulfill the basic needs – mix them to fit the tree's needs, your growing conditions, watering pattern and fertilizing practices – give your bonsai enough water and fertilizer – then watch the bonsai grow happily. It's really that simple.

(- from the October 2005 "Midwest Bonsai Connection")

I agree entirely with Ivan. As I've said for years, there are almost as many "perfect" soil mixes as there are bonsai Masters. Most of the Masters have researched and experimented with myriad ingredients for their soil, and use what they have found to be "best." But what is best in Japan is not necessarily even good in Michigan. What works for me might not work at all for you. So as confusing as it sounds, you really need to do your own research and experimenting to decide what is going to work best for your trees. If you remember Ivan's four basic purposes for growing medium, you should be able to put together a soil mix that will work for you.

Mums for Bonsai

I got the catalog today from our chrysanthemum grower. I'll be ordering various colors and types of tiny mums to hand out at our March meeting. Only paid members will be able to get the mums. We will receive rooted cuttings that can easily grow to woody stems by fall. I'll bring the catalog with me to the workshop next Saturday.

Exciting Announcement!

Anita Buckowing, our new columnist for the newsletter, has most graciously volunteered to become our Assistant Coordinator for the All-State Show. We are very happy to have someone come forward for this important position in our organization.

We have for many years had a "core group" that does most of the organizing for the Club. Please remember that this is *your* Club and we would greatly appreciate having more members volunteer to help.

Dues

Remember, dues are due by April 1. Membership form for 2006 is on page 5.

Couldn't pass this one up without sharing it.



me to exercise my artistic nature on a project that will NEVER be finished.

And that is OKAY, because that means that my trees are living, thriving, changing, growing, evolving. Along the way, I get to learn something new every day, so I also get to grow & evolve.

All in all, a very good thing for me and for my trees too!

I invite YOU to share your stories of "Why I "do" Bonsai"; these can be great tools to share our love of Bonsai with others. Please send your thoughts to Anita Buckowing at mr buckowing@yahoo.com.

Registration Form

Root-Over-Rock Workshop – Sat. Feb. 18

Name _____ Phone _____

Basic charge: \$10.00 (includes nursery pot, soil, raffia, plastic wrap)

There will be an extra charge for plants, plastic pots and feather rock:

Plants: China doll - \$5.00 - \$10.00

Schefflera - \$5.00

Ficus - \$12.00

Mimosa - \$10.00

Catlin elm - \$18.00

Payment will be made at the workshop by check, Visa or Mastercard.

Plastic pots: 6" x 4" x 2" - \$1.65

8" x 6" x 2" - \$2.75

10" round x 5" deep - \$4.70

Feather rock: 50¢ per pound

Remember to call me at 616-754-2351 or e-mail me at mollie@basicallybonsai.com, or send this form to 520 W. South Street, Greenville MI 48838, to reserve your space. If there is a specific type of plant you know you want to use, let me know ahead of time so I can reserve it for you.

2006 Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phones: Home _____ Work: _____

E-mail: _____

(Check one:)

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

Please make check payable to:

WMBC

and mail to:

Ed Spaans

947 Orchard SE

East Grand Rapids MI 49506

Or bring to any meeting or workshop.