



Kongetsu

West Michigan Bonsai Club Newsletter

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September 2007

Mollie Hollar, Editor

2007 Schedule of Events

Thurs, Sept 20: Fine-tuning our trees for the show

Fri, Oct 12: Set-up for fall Club Show

Sat & Sun, Oct 13 & 14: Fall Club Show

Thurs, Oct. 18: 2008 Planning Meeting

Sat, Nov 17: TBA

All events are held at Frederik Meijer Gardens unless otherwise noted.

Club Auction

Due to changes in their work schedules, Carlos and Teresa Marcano are unable to host the auction this year. I would love to have the auction somewhere since it is a great way for the Club to make some money, and a fantastic opportunity for members to pick up a great variety of bonsai-related items. It also helps people like me to rid myself of myriad plant material I've had for years that I'll probably never touch.

The TBA on Saturday, Nov. 17 is the date we've tentatively scheduled for the auction. It's possible that I can rent a large room at our local community center which would work very well. However, I would need to be sure that we'd get a good number of people here.

We do need to make arrangements for this soon. If you have any ideas for a location, please let me know at the meeting next week, call me at 616-754-2351 or e-mail at hollar@chartermi.net.

Season's Winding Down

Notice how short our 2007 schedule at the left is getting. We don't have many events left this year, but what we do have is very important for all of us.

The Club show in particular is our big opportunity to show the public what we are all about. As usual, I want everyone in the Club to bring a bonsai that you've been working on, no matter what kind of pot it's in or how "good" you feel it is. We want the public to know that we're an educational organization for beginners as well as experienced bonsai enthusiasts. We want them to know that everyone has to start at the beginning and, through our own education and consistent care of our trees, they become well-formed and attractive bonsai.

If you feel your trees are not "good" enough, choose one or two to bring in, write up an explanation of where you are in the training of the trees and where you hope to go with them. We'll put the explanation beside your tree so people can see the progress and future of your bonsai. Plastic pots or training pots are fine, and you don't need stands.

On the other hand, from those of you who are well experienced, we'd love to have anything you feel comfortable bringing. We will make space for you to set up a tokonoma-style display if you'd like to do that. I've been to a few shows this summer and gotten some ideas for display that I'll share with everyone who wants to help set up on the Friday before the show, and we'll decide together just how we want the display to look.

This is an educational show and we want people to see all aspects of the bonsai process. So plan to bring something regardless of your feelings about its worthiness. In case we do get an over-abundance of trees we might need to limit the number from each member. We will also be either having a separate area to display viewing stones, or have them interspersed with the bonsai.

Next Meeting

I had been waiting to hear from Frank Mihalic to see if he still planned to do a pine demo for us next week. Finally got to him yesterday and he's not able to come. So we'll do something we need to do anyway: bring your trees for the show to work on.

There are several details about showing trees at an exhibit that I do like to follow, but again, we're all about education here so we're not as picky as for, say, a judged show. This meeting will help you to prepare all the trees and plantings you plan to bring to the show. You'll be able to get advice if you need it, and we'll have wire available in case you want to change something. This is a great opportunity for you to take the time that you might not have otherwise to work on your show trees.

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October Planning Meeting

It's time for us to start thinking about what we want to do in 2008. We do of course have annual events such as the All-State Show and the Club show. Other than that, each month we have the opportunity to pretty much do what we want/need for our members.

Since we have quite a few new, novice members, I'd like to see our Bonsai 101 sessions continue in 2008. If there's something you feel particularly competent with, let me know. As this year, Bonsai 101 will be during the half-hour before our regularly scheduled meetings or workshops.

I'd also like to see us do more practical work on our trees in open studios. That's where we all bring whatever trees we want to work on, whether doing trimming, wiring, repotting or whatever. We have the opportunity to not only get this work done (a definite attraction for me!) but also to have available the other Club members for asking questions and getting suggestions or solutions to our problems.

With the October newsletter I will send a planning sheet for you to use to prepare for our Oct. 18 meeting. I'd like a lot of participation for this, so come ready to give us ideas for our 2008 season.

The planning meeting includes election of officers for 2008. If you are interested in one of the positions, please let me know ahead of time so we can have your name for the elections.

The meeting will start at 7:00 PM this time since any work we do will be appropriate for beginners and experienced members. We're scheduled for the Frey Environmental Room in the lower level. So bring your trees and your tools and we'll whip those trees into great showable condition!

What To Do Now?

Although Fall is quickly approaching and the bonsai season is winding down, there's still plenty for us to do with our trees. While we've had a decent amount of rain lately and temperatures have lowered considerably, that doesn't mean you shouldn't check your bonsai daily to see if they need to be watered. This Wednesday we got just over ½" of rain in just a few minutes, but it came down so hard that it unfortunately just ran off the surfaces of some of our trees. Less sun and lower temperatures mean they probably won't need to be watered as often, but you should still check them.

I seem to have an inordinate number of weeds in my trees this year. I have my Japanese maples on the ground because of the size of pots they're in, and between assistance from our feathered friends and very prolific dropping of seeds from surrounding weeds in the ground, I'm pulling weeds at least once a week. You might not think that weeds are a problem, but remember that their roots are taking water and nutrients away from the roots of the bonsai.

When the temps have cooled down for what will probably be the rest of the year, if you're using a liquid or powder fertilizer you should switch to something with less nitrogen. We want the good health of our trees to continue, but they don't need the vigorous growth enhancers that they have gotten since spring. That's one reason I like cake fertilizers like rapeseed cakes. They disperse just enough of all their elements every time the trees are watered, and even in the fall I don't need to do anything special with them.

Something else I've tried this year is a fertilizer that Cary Gee at Gee Farms recommended to Bob Goddard and me. It's called Hollytone and is mainly for hollies, azaleas, camellias, rhodies and evergreens. That covers the greater part of what I have. Cary said she puts it on the soil surface once in the spring and then again in the fall and she has seen a great benefit to her plants. I know Bob has been happy with it as well. I've done some experimenting with it, mainly with my Tophat blueberries, and I've seen a huge improvement with those that I used it on as opposed to those I didn't. Growth was strong, and flowers and berries prolific. I'll be carrying this soon so will be able to provide it for you. If you have the opportunity to try some, I strongly advise that you do so.

Unless you're preparing your trees for exhibiting at the show, this is not a good time to be doing much trimming, and definitely not the ideal time for repotting outdoor trees. As the weather gets colder all the time, any new growth can easily be damaged.

And don't forget about your indoor bonsai, which I tend to do since I don't have many. When temps are consistently below 55 degrees, get your tropicals indoors and set up with their winter lighting.

Bonsai Magazines

I received copies of International Bonsai magazine and Bonsai Focus yesterday, which gave me the opportunity to think about the benefits of each at the same sitting. I'm changing my thinking about which magazine(s) I would recommend to anyone who might ask for my opinion.

Before Bonsai Today and Bonsai Europe combined, I would have recommended Bonsai Today as the premier magazine for almost any bonsaiist. Well, that's not entirely true either. I haven't been particularly excited about Bonsai Today for the past several years. It seemed to have more Stone Lantern advertising and fewer practical articles. But I still felt that it was better geared to most of our Club members or any new bonsaiists.

However, since the combining of the two magazines, I've definitely changed my thinking. Bonsai Focus certainly has a lot of practical information, but the majority of what appears on its pages is European-based. Therefore, it is difficult to know about such issues as whether care information would be appropriate in our area and what would be indoor and what outdoor trees. There have even been some trees with which I'm not at all familiar, ones that apparently don't grow in the US or at least not in the Midwest. I still consider this to be a very interesting magazine to read and many of the techniques could be used on my trees. But as for its practical application for me and my collection, I'd

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have to go with another magazine entirely. It's also rather difficult to wade through the ads. There are a lot of them, but I personally wouldn't shop at bonsai businesses in Europe or Japan except for something really special.

So what is there left to us? Two magazines are connected with prominent bonsai organizations. One of these is the Journal of the American Bonsai Society, and the other is that of Bonsai Clubs International. I must admit two things. First, I'm a Board member of ABS, and second, I haven't taken BCI's magazine for several years. So take my advice as you will.

The ABS Journal has almost entirely American information and articles – something I greatly appreciate -- as well as such things as seasonal tips for various parts of the country and letters from the ABSForum. It is definitely a more practical periodical than what Bonsai Focus seems to be.

But there is the other option of Bill Valavanis's International Bonsai. In years past, he has concentrated on one kind of tree in each issue, which I found to be useless to me if I wasn't interested in that particular plant. But now, while many of the articles are about one genus, there is quite a bit of other information such as seasonal tips, photographing bonsai, and usually something about shohin bonsai – valuable and interesting information for most of us. His photos are always excellent as well, although I've tried to get him to include sizes of the trees. He says he has enough trouble just getting the photos!

And so, until I get my first issue of BCI's magazine, I must go with International Bonsai as my favorite. I'd welcome comments from some of the rest of you about which magazine you like and why.

Remember, this is *your* newsletter. I'd like to hear from all of you who read this issue all the way through, just to know if all my hard work is getting through to everyone – or anyone!

2007 Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phones: Home _____ Work: _____

E-mail: _____

(Check one:)

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

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