



# Kongetsu

## West Michigan Bonsai Club Newsletter

Vol. 12 No. 4

May 2008

Mollie Hollar, Editor

### 2008 Schedule of Events

**Sat, May 17:** Trip to Gee Farms

**Thurs, June 19:** Japanese maples & raffle drawing

**Sat, July 19:** Trip to Stone Zone

**Thur, July 24:** Tropicals

**Thur, Aug 14:** Bring Your Own Tree

**Sun, Aug 24:** Silent Auction

**Thur, Sept 18:** Show prep

**Sat & Sun, Oct 11 & 12:** Fall Show

**Thur, Oct 16:** 2009 Planning meeting

**Thur, Nov 20:** Winterizing

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

### Raffle Update and June Workshop

Please note that we have changed the date and time of the Japanese maples workshop to Thursday, June 19, from 6:00 to 9:00 PM. I'm really excited to have Steve Jetzer working with us on the maples. More info in the June newsletter. **We will also be doing the raffle for the Steve Pilacik's pine. Raffle tickets are still available – send me a check if you want some or more: \$5 each or three for \$18. Check April's newsletter on our website [www.wmbonsai.org](http://www.wmbonsai.org) for photos.**

### On into the 2008 Season

It's approaching the middle of May, and your bonsai should be reminding you of why this is such a passion for you. My quince are in full bloom, dwarf lilacs blossoms are just beginning to open, azaleas and dwarf rhododendrons are at different stages of bloom, conifers are showing an abundance of new growth, and Japanese maples' leaves are fully open. While the winter was hard for many of us, it seems it was perfect for especially flowering trees, small and large. The crabapples in my town are just gorgeous! The bloomers in my own yard have more blossoms and buds than they have had in years. It's amazing for me to drive around Greenville and note that the majority of yards have some sort of blooming tree or bush, and many have multiple bloomers. What a great time of year! And of course we're not yet having to complain that it's too hot – that'll come soon enough though.

On page 2 I've included an article from the Lake Charles, LA club newsletter written by their member Alan Walker, a bonsai expert by anyone's measure. In it he tells what we should be doing with our bonsai in May. As you read, keep in mind that he's in the Deep South. But much of his advice is right on for our area too. Since my time for finishing this newsletter is very limited, I hope you'll enjoy someone else providing an important topic of information for you.

### May Event

There are lots of activities that make Spring my favorite season, and one of them is visiting nurseries. As many of you know, Gee Farms (between Lansing and Jackson), our destination for Saturday, May 17, has an abundance of plant material perfect for not only bonsai but also several hundred acres of landscape plants and trees. I've been going to Gee Farms since I was a child, and have taught a couple of bonsai classes there. While the drive is a bit long (about an hour from our meeting place), it's definitely worth the time to see all they have to offer.

On page 2 I've included the list of appropriate bonsai material that appeared in the April 2006 newsletter. I'm sure many of these plants are still available if you want to look for something in particular.

It'll work like this: we'll all meet at the M-66/Ionia/Battle Creek exit off from I-96 east of Grand Rapids. There is a large gas station and a hotel there. If you want to carpool or just meet and drive with the group, come to the back parking lot of the hotel, where people not driving can safely leave vehicles. We'll meet there at 8:00 AM and will leave promptly at 8:15 AM. If you prefer to go on your own, I'm including directions to Gee Farms on the last page.

This trip is truly one of the best events of the year for those of you who are looking to enlarge your bonsai collections. The plants that are  
*(cont on page 2)*

## Ash Borer Update

If you have ash trees large or small, check out [www.saveyourashgr.org](http://www.saveyourashgr.org) for information about the new treatment, or call your county cooperative extension service.

## A Partial List of Gee Farms' Plants Good for Bonsai

There's no guarantee that all of these are still available but most should be. The woman who knew everything about everything at Gee Farms is no longer there, and I haven't been able to reach anyone who can give me answers. But whether or not these are available, there are many, many great plants that will make wonderful bonsai. *The smallest size for many of these is about pencil-size, but most also are available in larger sizes as well.*

Hornbeams  
Ginkgo – many varieties (mostly \$35 and up)  
Small-leaved elms  
Fanciful Forest miniature conifers and cotoneasters  
Japanese maples  
Weeping beech  
Weeping junipers  
Linden  
Larch  
European beech  
Hungarian/Italian oak  
Sophora (Chinese scholar tree or Japanese pagodatree)  
Dawn redwood  
Stewartia

available there are excellent starter plants and pre-bonsai, and there are many that can make very good bonsai in just a few years. And if you're interested in forest planting material, this is the place to go! We hope you can all make the trip.

## MAY BONSAI TIPS

by Alan Walker

(My comments appear in [ ].)

May is a busy month for bonsai growers. Spring growth is hardening off, and we must get serious about cutting back some of the long shoots on our deciduous trees and pinch back unwanted growth on junipers. You will need to prune the upper, apical area of your deciduous trees more thoroughly than the lower branches to provide more light to reach their inner branches. This allows photosynthesis (and, hence, budding and branching) to occur. Also, the upper branches tend to thicken quickly which would disrupt the taper and proportions your bonsai needs to maintain the appearance of age.

Add new soil to pots if soil has eroded due to rain or an increased watering schedule. Patches of moss can help reduce erosion problems. I'm still looking for a way to keep the blue jays from pulling up my moss and pecking at the trunks and roots of my trees. I used to think they were stealing it for their nests, but then I noticed that they are simply contrary and just leave the moss scattered on the ground under the benches. I once read that they are seeking cool moisture and that a nearby birdbath would distract them ... not so! A greenhouse offers protections, and I have found that placing screening cut to fit around the trunk and anchored by the pot is pretty effective as a deterrent. [This would also serve to keep squirrels from your fertilizer cakes.] Just make sure that it is a loose screen which doesn't deflect water.

It's hard to judge just how much water to give our trees, especially this time of the year. I've been at this for over thirty years and still have so much to learn. Too much water is as bad as too little. The key to watering is to touch the soil to see how it feels; visual observation can be misleading. Ideally, you usually want the soil to be loose, crumbly, and moist and feel cool to the touch. As a rule, when the soil feels dry, water enough to make the whole root ball moist, then don't water again until the soil feels dry again on the surface. This doesn't mean bone dry, and moist doesn't mean soggy or saturated. **You will need to recognize and acknowledge your tree's specific, individual needs.** [This is very important!] Bonsai will need less water when they are dormant or recently potted or repotted. They will need more frequent watering when they are in smaller pots or in sunny and/or windy weather. Try to group your trees on their training benches so that those with similar watering needs are together. Try to provide the best possible environment for each bonsai, taking into consideration that junipers and pines prefer less moisture than deciduous material. If you've let your bonsai become completely dry, resist the temptation to soak it, which would probably put it into shock. Instead, revive it gradually with misting and superficial watering along with wind and sun protection the first day until you can water it thoroughly the next morning.

Now that your azaleas are through blooming [Ours are just beginning here. This information will apply in a few weeks.], prune them severely. Don't forget to leave more growth at the apex where they are less vigorous. The spent blossoms should be removed completely, so that (cont on page 3)

### Driving directions to Gee Farms

1. At the Ionia/M-66 entrance onto I-96, go east toward Lansing.
2. Drive 24.4 miles, merge onto I-69, which is still I-96.
3. Drive 4.9 miles where, at exit 97, the road name changes back to I-96 toward Detroit.
4. Drive 9.8 miles. At exit 106A, take the ramp to the right onto US-127 toward Jackson.
5. Drive 8.2 miles. Just past Mason, take the ramp to Kipp Road. At the end of the ramp, turn left (east) onto Kipp Road.
6. Drive 2.0 miles, turn right (south) onto Dexter Trail.
7. Drive 6.5 miles, turn right (south) onto Williamston Rd.
8. Drive 7.9 miles, bear left (east) onto Base Line Rd.
9. Drive 0.2 of a mile, turn right (south) onto Bunkerhill Rd. In less than 0.1 of a mile you will arrive at Gee Farms at 14928 Bunkerhill Road.

Gee Farms phone: 517-769-6772  
 My cell phone: 616-302-3373

### Volunteer Needed

The Michigan All-State Bonsai Show has a functioning Advisory Committee that plays an important role in planning the show. There are at least two members from each club on the committee. We have one member, and are in need of another. Rather than meetings, this group functions mostly through e-mails and phone calls to decide on presenters and other details of the next show. If you're interested in helping plan the 2009 show, please contact Tim Priest, 2009 chair, at 616-247-7952 or [pretephoto@yahoo.com](mailto:pretephoto@yahoo.com) ASAP.

the azalea can use its energy producing new foliage rather than going to seed.

Fertilizing should be safe this month for most of the trees which you repotted earlier this spring. Try to stay up with your pruning schedule, so your trees don't get out of hand. Take time to study your pines and maples and other opposite branching trees for the proper pruning choices at each node. Don't leave both branches growing at any node, or you will have swollen, knobby areas which rob the branch of taper and grace.

New foliage seems to want to grow straight up, especially on material new to training. Rather than just clip off everything which is growing in the wrong direction (Lingnan style training), wire first, then prune. This will help you avoid wasting so many small branches. You'll need a lot of the smaller gauges of wire for this (#16-22 for copper or 1-1.5 mm for anodized aluminum). Use a sealant on the larger cuts to reduce the chance of infestation by insects or disease.

### MABA 2010?

Our Club has the opportunity to host the 2010 Mid-American Bonsai Association convention. I've been in touch with MABA and with the Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors' Bureau to pursue this possibility. This show would need to be in a local hotel, and we would need help from many of our Club members to make it a success. Please be thinking about this and what you might do to help. I'll have many more details after the MABA convention in June at Indianapolis.

### 2008 Membership Form

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

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

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

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

(Check one:)

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

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I prefer a snail-mail copy of my newsletter.

Please make check out to:

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and mail to:

Ed Spaans

947 Orchard SE

East Grand Rapids MI 49506

Or bring to any meeting or workshop.

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