



Kongetsu

West Michigan Bonsai Club Newsletter

Vol. 13 No. 3

April 2009

Mollie Hollar, Editor

2009 Schedule of Events

- Sat, April 18:** Repotting workshop
Sat, April 25: Field trip to Wavecrest and Huntree nurseries near Fennville*
Sat, May 9: Wiring and prep for All-State Show
Fri, May 15: Set-up for All-State
Sat & Sun, May 16 & 17: Michigan All-State Bonsai Show
Thurs, June 18: Ciment fondu form making
Sat, June 20: Making ciment fondu planters*
Sat, July 18: TBA – outside presenter
Sat, Aug 22: Annual silent auction & making muck*
Sat, Sept 19: Bring your own tree (BYOT) & repot bonsai mums
Thurs, Oct 15: 2010 planning meeting
Fri, Oct 16: Set-up for Club show
Sat & Sun, Oct 17 & 18: Club show
Sat, Nov 7: Possible marking of trees for 2010 collecting

All events are held at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park unless otherwise noted. Events marked with an asterisk * will be held elsewhere.

Meijer Gardens April Events

Artist Jonathan Borofsky exhibit through May 10
Foremost Butterflies Are Blooming through April 30

Spring in Michigan

I'm pretty sure you're all feeling as I am, that it's high time for warm temperatures to arrive so we can not only be doing all the usual yard and garden work that comes with the season, but also getting all our bonsai out of winter storage (yes, some of ours is still "put away") and starting spring repotting. I don't know about all of you, but I have an absolute *ton* of trees that have to be repotted this year or they're all going to revolt and depart for the great bonsai nursery in the sky. So I've begun my preparations: being sure I have enough soil for both conifers and deciduous trees mixed; preparing the pots with screen over the holes and anchor wires; and lining all the poor trees up in order of dire necessity, with the most needy in the front and the "we can wait a while" in the back. Someone should check with me regularly to be sure I'm getting this done. I absolutely can *not* put this off for yet another year.

April Workshop and Nursery Visit

Our next workshop on Saturday, April 18 should assist me in this endeavor. We'll be meeting at 9:00 AM in the Frey Environmental Room downstairs at Meijer Gardens. You'll need to bring a few of your neediest bonsai that need immediate repotting – or if you're better than I am at keeping up on this, a few that could stand to have their "feet" trimmed and the soil changed. We have three hours, and the procedure shouldn't take more than 45 minutes for each tree, so you will have time for more than two if you choose. Also bring the pots and your tools. The Club will provide soil, screening, wire and Superthrive (see glossary).

Be sure that, if your trees need it, you get the top trimmed and wired now. It's just too much stress on the tree if you do both on the same day, and if you wait less than two or three weeks to trim and wire the top you could be doing damage to the new hair roots that will be developing on your newly-repotted bonsai.

Also in April, on the 25th, is a visit to Huntree and Wavecrest nurseries near Fennville. Unfortunately I will be unable to attend this since I will be in Mt. Pleasant vending at a Master Gardeners' conference. You can check out Wavecrest at <http://www.wavecrestnursery.com/Garden%20Center> and Huntree at <http://www.huntree.com/>. They are very close together, with Wavecrest west of I-196 and Huntree east of it, both at the same I-196 exit, about 45-60 minutes from Grand Rapids. I've included a map to Huntree on page 5 and directions next to it to Wavecrest in case you would like to go on your own. If you would like to carpool, meet at the first parking lot at Meijer Gardens at 9:00 AM that morning. Your cars will be safe there for the day. The nurseries both know we're coming. Everyone have fun!

Mollie Hollar

616-754-2351

hollar@chartermi.net

520 W South Street, Greenville MI 48838

Bonsai Glossary

This month I'll give you terms used at this time of year.

Bonsai soil: a mix of organic matter and inorganic matter; mixes are as abundant as the number of people who do bonsai; you'll soon find what works best for you.

Repotting: the practice of taking a pot-grown plant out of its pot at regular intervals and replanting to refresh the soil and encourage renewed root growth.

Rootball: the mass of roots and soil seen when a plant is taken out of its pot or lifted from the ground.

Root pruning: the practice of cutting off the roots of a pot-grown plant to make room in the container for fresh soil and encourage new root growth.

Hair roots: those tiny thread-like, light-colored roots; these are the kind that should be kept when you trim roots because there is more surface area than on the big roots for taking in water and nutrients.

Bud break: the stage when a leaf bud has opened just enough to show a green tip.

Bud burst: the stage when the leaves emerge from the bud break and start to unfold and separate.

Pot-bound or root-bound: the condition of a pot-grown plant when the root growth has filled the pot to the extent of eliminating all air spaces.

Ramification: twigs and bushiness, the secondary and tertiary branches; the more ramification, the bushier your tree will be; on most types of trees, this is obtained by trimming the ends of the branches.

Anchor wires: aluminum wires that are put into the pot through the holes in the bottom and wrapped around the roots of the tree to anchor the tree firmly in the pot.

Superthrive: a liquid mix of vitamins and minerals used in repotting bonsai.

Bonsai Vocabulary

As I'm writing this, I find myself constantly reminded that we have members who are new enough to bonsai that even the term "anchor wire" is a mystery. I realized several years ago that, the more experienced I became in bonsai, the more I spoke in "bonsai-ese." There are so many terms that are common when we do bonsai, and a lot of these are Japanese terms. So I'll be beginning a new glossary column (see left) in our monthly newsletters to explain those words that are readily understandable to some of us, but literally foreign to many others. Remember that these definitions will be fairly general and will not contain specifics about technique or about any particular kind of plant.

March Meeting Notes

Due to the extraordinary amount of information given by Jon Holwerda at our March meeting at Jon's business, I will use more space than usual in talking about a past meeting, to share with those of you who weren't able to be there the valuable facts and tips that Jon shared with us. The topic was fertilizers, pests and diseases. I know everyone left with a much better understanding of what they need to do with their bonsai in these areas. Many thanks to Jon for a great lecture.

Fertilizers

Whether you're using organic fertilizers or inorganic/synthesized/chemical ones (which we all should steer clear of), you need some basic information on them:

There will be three numbers on the bag or bottle. The first is *N* for nitrogen, which promotes healthy *foliage* growth and good color. Nitrogen can be present yet unusable in your soil; it needs to be broken down by bacteria. Organic nitrogen is slower acting, lasts longer, and is less likely to burn the roots of your tree. Two sources of organic nitrogen are rapeseed and Milorganite, manufactured out of sewage sludge. (<http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/milorganite.pdf>)

The second number in fertilizers represents *P* or phosphorus, which is beneficial for the cell formation and division of *buds, flowers and fruit*. A good source for this is bone meal.

The third number is for *K* or potassium, which promotes stronger *roots*, aids in the absorption of nitrogen and phosphorus, and increases resistance to cold and heat.

If you remember *N-P-K* is for foliage-flowers-roots it should help you to decide which fertilizer is needed during the various seasons of the year.

Inorganic or synthesized fertilizer is highly concentrated so will probably need to be mixed with water. It's faster acting than organic fertilizers but that isn't always an actual benefit. You'll get a salt build-up with this, and it will most likely cause acid or alkaline build-up as well.

Organic fertilizer is less concentrated. While it is slower acting, you are less likely to over-fertilize, and it encourages bacteria in the soil.

(cont page 3 column 2)

More Glossary

Leaf pruning/defoliation: cutting off only the leaves on a tree to encourage smaller foliage. Do not do this just before repotting. *From the newsletter of the Lake Charles Bonsai Society in Louisiana:*

There are some bonsai that you don't leaf prune: broadleaf evergreens and ginkgo come to mind. Leaf pruning is especially effective on some tropicals with large leaves such as dwarf schefflera, Schefflera arboricola, and Ficus varieties.

Indoor and outdoor bonsai:

Indoor bonsai, also referred to as tropicals, have to be inside in the cold weather of late fall, winter, and early springs. Many of these are also called house plants. While many of them make excellent bonsai, they can't stand Michigan's cold weather. Plants that grow naturally outside (conifers, maples, oak, beech, ginkgo, etc.) must stay outdoors year-round.

More next month.

Soil Mix

It's the time of year again for stocking up on the ingredients for your bonsai soil. I will bring to the repotting workshop the two ingredients we have found most beneficial: aged pine bark and clay aggregate. They each sell for \$1.50 a pound, but you can buy them in large quantities. The pine bark will be about \$10.00 for a three-cubic-foot bag. The aggregate is \$25.00 for a 20-pound bag. Please let me know by Thursday, April 16 if you would like one of the larger bags and I will bring them to the workshop. Otherwise we will have enough at the workshop only for the repotting.

(March meeting continued)

Some basic rules for fertilizing:

- It is beneficial to fertilize more often with a weaker solution.
- Room temperature or warm water will help the plant to absorb fertilizer faster than cold water.
- Do *not* apply fertilizer to wilted, dry plants.
- Do *not* fertilize flowering plants once the flowers are opening or open. Fertilize them as soon as the flowers fall off.
- Roots absorb water slower on very hot days. Use liquid fertilizer only early in the day.
- A build-up of salts will inhibit the roots' ability to absorb water; therefore, you can have a situation where the soil is wet yet the plant is wilted.

For more information on fertilization Jon suggests *The Living Art of Bonsai* by Amy Liang.

Insect Pests and Diseases

I have been very lucky during my bonsai career to not have much of a problem with either bugs or diseases on my trees. However, I keep up on treatments for both since it could happen any time. I knew that Neem oil is a very effective treatment for both insects and fungus, which Jon confirmed. He offered this information as well:

Insects

Since many insects go dormant outside for the winter and come alive in the spring, keep a close eye on your trees and don't assume that, because you don't see anything when first taking them from winter storage, there won't be a problem later.

Air circulation year-round, indoors or out, is very important for keeping insects and diseases under control. Without air stirring things up they have a great opportunity to dig in before you know what's happening.

Be aware that older bonsai books recommend chemical treatments for insects. Look for insecticides at your local nursery or on the Internet. You should find more safe, non-chemical treatments as the "green movement" spreads. An example is Neem oil, which is available in many forms by various companies such as Schulz's Garden Safe. Straight Neem Oil will be available soon at www.basicallybonsai.com.

Aphids can often be treated with a spray of water. Take your indoor tropicals to the kitchen sink or bathtub and treat them to a good shower.

Scale, mealy bugs and aphids can all be treated with a Q-tip dipped in rubbing alcohol. You should dilute it for more sensitive plants.

The best treatment I know of is the following recipe:

Carl Rosner's bug spray SOAP solution!

Mix 1 to 2 tablespoons of dishwashing detergent and 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil in a plastic gallon jug and slowly add water to fill the jug. Pour this solution from the jug into a spray bottle.

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Upcoming Bonsai Events

May 22-24: Rendezvous 2009
at Brussel's Bonsai in Olive Branch, MS featuring Rodney Clemens, Arthur Joura, Marc Noelanders, Kathy Shaner, and Peter Warren. For details visit http://www.brusselsbonsai.com/about_us/rendezvous09.shtml.

June 19-21: Bonsai Clubs International presents **Survivors of the Storm** in the New Orleans Botanical Garden at City Park in New Orleans, LA, USA featuring Lindsay & Glenis Bebb of Australia, Willi Benz of Germany, Tedy Boy of Indonesia, Peter Chan of Great Britain, Nacho Marin of Venezuela, I.C. Su of Taiwan and Americans Richard Cranford, Guy Guidry, Dora Ross, Ed Trout and Bill Valavanis. Bonsai, Suiseki, Ikebana and special programs for kids. Invitational exhibition of Gulf Coast Bonsai. Registration and information at BCI2009@cox.net or telephone 504-832-8071.

July 7-13: World Bonsai Convention VI, "1st Bonsai Olympics" at the Condado Plaza Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico. For details visit <http://www.worldbonsaiconvention2009.com/>.

September 10-13: International Bonsai Symposium: Shohin Bonsai at the Airport Holiday Inn, Rochester, NY. Featuring Nobuichi Urushibata, Peter Warren, Julian Adams, Harvey Carapella, Sean Smith, Suthin Sukosolvisit, Erik Weigert, Jack Wikle, and Bill Valavanis. Contact WNV@internationalbonsai.com or <http://www.internationalbonsai.com>.

Also see page 6.

(March meeting continued)

Just before using, add 1 to 2 two caps full of rubbing alcohol and spray immediately on plants, covering all leaf and stem surfaces. Do not wash the spray off. I have seen no adverse reaction to the trees from this mixture.

You may have to spray three or four times with intervals of three days. I have eliminated almost any kind of pests that have attacked my trees, including scale.

If you do not use the full bottle of spray, the next time you are going to use the soap/alcohol solution, add the same amount of rubbing alcohol again, since the alcohol will evaporate.

You can store this soap/oil solution in the gallon jug for many months. It does not seem to go bad.

My apologies for not putting this in an earlier newsletter. It's what you need for all your indoor bonsai in the winter. But it also works very well on outdoor bonsai.

Diseases

Many if not most diseases that affect our bonsai are in the form of a fungus. Schulz Garden Safe Fungicide, which is Neem oil based, is a good treatment for fungus problems. Discussion about fungicides was a bit short at the meeting, so I'll share what member Mary Lou Wilker gave us a while back:

Foliar applications of compost tea provide many benefits. These can include no black-spot or powdery mildew. A foliar spray of the leaves prevents pathogens from infecting the plant tissues because infection sites on the plant surfaces are occupied by beneficial organisms.

And what, you ask, is compost tea and why should you use it? Excellent questions. But rather than give you a thorough answer now, I'll give you Mary Lou's brief version and will go into much more detail in later newsletters. My older son is going into the compost tea business so I have a great source for information. Here's the Cliff Notes version:

So why go to all the fuss and bother of making compost tea when there are so many fertilizers on the market? The purpose of spraying compost tea is to restore beneficial microbes to your soil and plants Every chemical-based fertilizer, pesticide, insecticide and herbicide tested harms or outright kills some part of the beneficial life that exists in soil. Compost teas, correctly made and applied, improve the life in the soil and on plant surfaces. Using compost tea will increase the beneficial soil microorganisms and reduce disease-causing pest organisms.

By feeding the soil, we are really feeding the microbes in the soil because it is the microbes that make nutrients available for the plants. The way you feed microbes is through the addition of organic material. If you feed with a synthetic chemical fertilizer you are feeding the plant, not the soil or the microbes. By using a petrochemical synthetic fertilizer we drive up the salt index in the soil and change the pH, which can have adverse effects on plants. More importantly, synthetic chemical fertilizers only feed for a short period of time. Organic fertilizers feed continually.

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All-State Show

At our May meeting we will be working on the trees we want to enter in the All-State Show exhibit. So you need to be thinking about which you'd like to bring. Please please please don't worry about them being "good enough" or "show ready." This is not a judged show, but rather a one that educates the public about all aspects of bonsai, including what beginners can expect to be doing. While we want our trees to look good, we are not obsessed with perfection. I'll include information about tree and pot preparation in next month's newsletter.

Driving directions to Wavecrest Nursery & Landscaping
 2509 Lakeshore Dr
 Fennville
 (269) 543-4175
44.2 mi – about 41 mins

From downtown Grand Rapids:

- MI
 - 1. Merge onto **I-196 W** via the ramp on the **left** to **Holland** 42.9 mi
 - 2. Take exit **34** for **MI-89** toward **Fennville** 0.4 mi
 - 3. Turn **right** at **124th Ave** 0.2 mi
 - 4. Turn **right** at **70th St/Lakeshore Dr** 0.7 mi
- Destination will

What can you do to get a head start on making compost tea? Start your compost pile **now**. Here's a quick break-down:

First, if you live in a city, check restrictions for open compost piles. In Greenville we can't have one, so we'll be using a plastic barrel-type. Chicken wire or even cement blocks can form the walls.

Second, once you have your area set up, get your mind geared toward saving those kitchen scraps instead of putting them down the garbage disposal or in the trash.

Third, lots of yard waste can and should be used in your compost. You'll also need a bit of good old-fashioned dirt to get started.

Actually, information on compost piles is abundant in gardening books and on the Internet. I found a good webpage which I would recommend to those of you with access; <http://www.kitchenwitch.com/compost.html> is an excellent source for getting started, from location to what to put in to how to keep it. Otherwise, check in your local library or your own gardening books. Our former compost pile years ago was used only for making compost to help out our house plants. The new one will be for bonsai.

In the coming months I'll continue to include information about composting and how you can use it with your bonsai, as well as house plants and outdoor potted plants. I know that this is one way we can all be more "green" without too much effort.



Shohin Bonsai Convention

April 24-26, 2009

Gateway Center

One Gateway Dr.

Collinsville, IL 62234

Featuring

Nobuichi Urushibata

President of the Shohin Society of Japan

He will conduct two demonstrations and two workshops during this convention.

National Vendors * Bonsai Exhibit * Workshops * Banquet

Sponsored By

Bonsai Society of Greater St. Louis

For more information or to register for this great event contact Bonsai Society of Greater St. Louis, at Stlshohin@sbcglobal.net or view our website: www.StlBonsai.org

Little Trees – Big Event

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