



Kongetsu

West Michigan Bonsai Club Newsletter

Vol. 13 No. 10

November 2009

Mollie Hollar, Editor

2009 Schedule of Events

Sat, Nov 14: Marking of trees for 2010 collecting

Some Thoughts on Wintering

Wintering your outdoor bonsai is largely a matter of personal experience and success. I've told many of you about our early method of wintering with a polyhouse into which we would carefully place all our outdoor bonsai every late fall, then reverse the process every spring. Then one November we didn't get our trees into shelter before a trip to Hawaii. We were returning on the day of one of the worst blizzards of the decade. By the time we reached our house (Skip still in sandals, Hawaiian shirt and shorts) 18" of snow was covering our bonsai.

We carefully uncovered our most tender trees – Japanese maples mostly and the smallest ones – and put them into the polyhouse. But we couldn't even get to many of our bonsai, including all the junipers that I had for my business. So there they all sat for the winter, blissfully unaware that they might be better off elsewhere, while we cursed the snow and cold.

But amazingly, when spring came and the snow melted, there were all our previously babied trees in great shape!

(cont page 2 column 1)

Last of 2009

This will be the last newsletter in 2009, and it's going to be quite short, partly due to a time shortage in my schedule and my desire to quickly get out the information you need at this point in the season.

Along with this newsletter, I will attach an amazingly thorough, very scientific article that I came across about indoor lighting for your tropical bonsai. While many of you can probably merely scan a large part of it, those among our members who are fascinated with such stuff will be able to learn a lot and determine exactly what you'll need for perfect lighting for your indoor bonsai. I decided to put the article in a separate document so that you could make the choice of keeping it, tossing/deleting it without reading, or reading then tossing/deleting. Whatever you decide, it is invaluable information that will help make winter conditions successful for your tropicals.

November Event

As I notified most of you earlier, the date of our November event has changed from this Saturday to next Saturday, November 14. We will be marking trees that will be collected in April of 2010.

The property where we'll be marking trees belongs to Selene Marsteiner and her husband, Club members for a few years. Skip and I walked the woods a couple weeks ago and found the following: red cedar, ironwood, river birch, white pine, hemlock, a wide variety of mosses, maples, and hawthorne.

You'll need to bring marking strips, something bright that will stand out in the woods, plastic or yarn strips cut into about 10" pieces, that will be easily seen in the spring. If you write your name or initials on them before you come you won't have to do that in the woods. Also, since the 14th is opening day of firearm deer season. I'd advise wearing something bright-colored. The Marsteiners' property is pretty isolated from any hunting land, but better safe than sorry.

Also, wear comfortable waterproof boots since part of the land is quite low (making it easier to dig in the spring), and there will be lots of walking. The ground is very uneven, making it even harder to get around. But I'm not in the best walking shape, and I had little trouble.

You will need to be at the Marsteiners at 10:00 AM. We'll do our marking, then meet back at their house for cider and donuts – that alone is enough to get me out there!

To get there, take US-131 to the M-57/Greenville exit. Turn east and go 0.1 mile to White Creek Ave. NE, where you will turn left (north).

(cont page 2 column 2)

Mollie Hollar



616-754-2351



hollar@chartermi.net

520 W South Street, Greenville MI 48838

Wintering cont.

Now we merely place most of our trees on the ground under their display benches in our backyard. Among these are pines, cedars, dwarf blueberries, elms, quince, and azaleas. We still move our more tender trees, such as dwarf lilacs, trident and Japanese maples and the smallest ones of other types, under the protection of a large burning bush on the east end of our house. Many of the maples, hawthornes, and various conifers in nursery pots in our "nursery" area at the east end of our backyard just get moved close to the fence. With this easy process we get through winters with very few casualties, maybe two or three out of close to 125 bonsai and pre-bonsai.

So, you ask, where does that leave you? If you are new to bonsai these are my recommendations:

1. Remember that anything that grows naturally outdoors *has* to go through the dormant period outdoors. Don't bring them inside.
2. Place your trees in an area that is sheltered from wind, ice, and heavy snow. This could be under a large conifer or other thickly-branched tree, under a deck, or in an unheated garage or shed that will stay cold.
3. Trees do not need light in the winter since photosynthesis is not taking place. But the roots do need to stay damp. *Be sure the roots do not dry out*, wherever you decide to place them. Just make sure there's a covering of snow over all the pots, or take a watering can out about once a month if there's no snow.

(cont next lower column)

Drive four miles to 18 Mile Rd, turn left, drive to Simmons Ave NE. Turn right and follow Simmons to the dirt road. Their house is at 16031 Simmons, the 4th drive on the left (the lane into the woods counts as one). You should be able to park in the drive as it's quite long.

This is a great way to gather unusual trees for your collection, so come next Saturday and take advantage of this opportunity. If you need additional directions that morning, Marsteiners' phone number is 696-4959.

October Meeting

At our October planning meeting we successfully solved the problem of my not having enough time to give to monthly Club activities. Mary Lou Wilker, our webmaster, has volunteered to take on the new position of vice-president, through which she will organize our events. Our by-laws will need to be amended, so I will send you the amended version before next February and we will vote on the amendment. This is quite a big step for our Club. Since its beginning we have had the same few officer positions, and this addition will definitely be a positive one for us.

Except for this addition, officers for 2010 remain the same as 2009. As soon as I get approval from Meijer Gardens on facility availability I will send out the schedule for next year. We'll be having some great meetings and workshops, including a panel discussion at our February 2010 meeting about what works and what doesn't. Come prepared!

Wintering cont.

4. Mulching over the pots/soil/ roots will help to hold in the moisture and help to keep the pots from breaking. Do be aware of the quality of your pots: if they're cheap ceramic pots take extra care.

Last year Skip made sure the soil on his trees was plenty damp, enclosed the pots white plastic kitchen garbage bags tied tightly at the trunks, then put them under the display benches. They all survived very well, without even much winter die-back.

All that said, I must share other wintering methods. You can build a cold-frame, but if you have part of it glass, be sure you have a way to let out heat on sunny days. If trees break their dormancy they could die. Some of our members have dug deep trenches with gravel or blocks in the bottom, and place their trees in the trenches. You would need to cover the trench with fine screening to let water/snow through but keep critters out.

Speaking of critters, to guard against mice, squirrels, moles, etc. from eating our bonsai for their winter sustenance, we simply place mothballs on the soil or mulch. This works wonderfully against our Greenville pests, but has not been successful in other areas. I have heard of using dryer sheets, or just enclosing your bonsai in wire fine enough to keep out mice. Remember that keeping them in a garage or shed does not guarantee that mice won't get to them.

Here are a few good websites to help you get more information:

http://www.bonsai4me.com/Basics/Basics_WinterCare.html

<http://faq.gardenweb.com/faq/lists/bonsai/1998104725026710.html>

http://www.brusselsbonsai.com/care/articles/winter_protection.shtml