



Kongetsu

West Michigan Bonsai Club Newsletter

Vol. 15 No. 4

May 2011

Mollie Hollar, Editor

2011 Schedule of Events

Fri, May 13: Set-up for All-State Show

Sat & Sun, May 14 & 15:
All-State Show

Thur, May 19: BYOT

Sat, June 4: Field trip to Arrowhead Nursery

Fri, July 22: Blended mame demonstration by Pauline Muth

Sat, July 23: Blended mame workshop with Pauline Muth

Sat, Aug 20: Potluck & silent auction

Thur, Sept 15: Prep for fall Club show

Fri, Oct 14: Set-up for fall Club show

Sat & Sun, Oct 15 & 16: Fall Club show

November meeting: Date TBD

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

Thursday meetings are from 7:00 to 9:00 PM, and Saturday meetings/workshops are from 9:00 AM to Noon unless otherwise noted.

Other Area Shows

20-22 MAY ST. LOUIS
SHOHIN CONVENTION—ST.
LOUIS, MO

27-30 MAY BRUSSEL'S
RENDEZVOUS

16-19 JUN ABS/BCI—Bonsai
in the Bluegrass □ —
LOUISVILLE, KY

May, the Busiest Month

Where did April go? It managed to slip right on by without me getting any repotting done. Now I'm busier than ever trying to get everything done in May. And I really can't wait another year to do some of my trees, since many were let go last year because I missed doing them in April. If anyone is really bored and wants to drive to Greenville, come on up!

And of course this is a busy month for the Club as well, with the All-State Show this weekend and our meeting May 19. I sent you all the information with last month's newsletter for All-State, but if you have any questions or needs let me know. I expect they can use some help setting up if anyone wants to come in Friday between Noon and 9:00 PM. I'll be there setting up my vendor booth and checking in a couple of trees.

For the 19th, we're doing a bring-your-own-tree workshop from 7:00 to 9:00 PM in the lower level at Meijer Gardens. You'll need to bring your tools and two or three trees to work on. These can be trees that you're just beginning, or established bonsai that you want some advice on, or anything in between. I will bring a small amount of soil mix if you want to repot something, but you shouldn't repot if you're going to be working on the foliage – too much stress on the tree. If there's anything else you need, come this weekend and I'll have everything for sale there.

New Venture

I am absolutely thrilled with my newest group of bonsai students. They are residents of the veterans' home in Grand Rapids. I got a call from the greenhouse woman last week who told me one of their residents had his eight bonsai delivered to him there. His wife is having surgery so could no longer care for them. He has been working on these trees for from five to 40 (yes, 4-0) years! They are really outstanding trees. But no one at the home had the vaguest idea how to take care of them. So they called me, I visited last week, and we're starting mass classes. It could be quite a large group within a fairly short time, so if any of you have any extra time during the days, talk to me this weekend or e-mail or call me. Bob Goddard has volunteered to help already. We will probably be meeting officially twice a month until we get them started on new trees and get the eight trees repotted. I am really excited about this new venture and look forward to working with these people to whom we all owe so much.

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An article of interest I found in another club's newsletter:

Nursery Shopping for Bonsai Material

by Brent Walston of Evergreen Gardens

Introduction

I used to go to nurseries all the time in search of material for bonsai. Now I just go out to the growing grounds and pick up whatever strikes my fancy. I could never completely work it all by myself in a hundred years. For most of you, nursery shopping for potential bonsai material will be the way that you acquire your collection. The following article offers some guidelines for effective shopping, or what to look for.

First, don't be afraid to get dirt on your hands and knees. I can always tell the real aficionados by how much dirt they get on their knees grubbing around the surface of the pot looking for a good nebari or trunk characteristic. The foliage and the branches are of our little importance, in most cases they will be discarded anyhow.

Look for a good nebari, the crown and surface roots of the plant. This is the single hardest element to obtain, if a tree has a good nebari and nothing else to offer, buy it, grow a trunk, and then grow branches. Nobody said this was going to happen overnight. Look for a radical swelling at the base that soars into a tapered trunk. Look for surface roots that smoothly merge into this crown. The roots should come out radially. Circular roots can be problem and usually will have to be discarded.

If a tree lacks a good nebari, it still may offer other qualities too good to pass up. The second element to look for is a good trunk. Traditional 'masculine' trees will have thick trunks and mature bark. The more taper you can get the better. A thick trunk with no taper can be dealt with, but one with taper is better. The usual rule for such trees is that the height of the tree will be six times the diameter of the trunk at the base. So already, you must form some sort of picture in your head of what the final tree will look like. At least picture how tall it will be with this size trunk. Will this work? Is there a branch that can be bent upward for an apex? Can the top be broken and a jin apex carved? Will the tree need to be grown out some more before it has sufficient trunk or height?

Trees with smaller trunk proportions are perfectly acceptable; they usually have a more feminine appearance, softer and more sinewy. It just depends what you want and what the tree has to offer. If you are looking for immediate gratification, or pretty quick bonsai, you must analyze the branching. If this thing is going in a bonsai pot soon, under one year, then some existing branches must be used. The first branch is usually one third the height of the tree. Does the tree have such a branch? It should be one third or less than the diameter of the trunk at the point at which it is attached, or it will be too fat.

Skinny branches can be grown out, fat branches are a serious problem and can only be solved over a number of years by growing out the trunk. Choosing or finding a second branch must also include a decision on the front and back of the tree. Usually the first two branches are at the left and right of the tree and slightly toward the front, they make an angle of

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Other Area Shows cont

**23-24 JUL NASHVILLE
REGIONAL SHOW—
NASHVILLE, TN**

**19-21 AUG MIDWEST BONSAI
SHOW—CHICAGO, IL**

Care Notes from the Columbus Bonsai Society Website

April - Mid Spring - temps 62/40

- This month, most deciduous will have buds swelling and leaves emerging. Be ready to repot if needed.
- Repot pines and juniper this month, after the candles (pine buds) begin to swell.
- Start balanced fertilization as new growth begins. Continue fertilization until mid summer.
- Spray to control pests that feed on fresh, early growth.
- This is a good month to take pine and juniper cuttings.
- Allow new deciduous growth to extend to 3 leaves or leaf pairs, and then cut back to 1-2 leaves or leaf pairs. Continue through summer.
- Most non-tropical trees should be outdoors by the end of April.
- BEWARE: There always seems to be a late frost from April-May. Watch for frost advisories and protect your trees by bringing them into a garage, basement, or by using a cloth netting. All new growth is susceptible to frost damage.

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somewhere around 120 degrees. The third or back branch is usually 120 degrees from the first or second branch but not directly behind the tree. The back branch may also be the second branch but only rarely the first. The other branches can usually be grown out later.

PATIENCE! Ok, you have analyzed the tree and it has good possibilities, buy it and take it home. If it is not spring with the sap running, you can go ahead and do some styling, remove unwanted branches, wire and bend others, remove some surface soil to expose the nebari, reduce the top. In general, have a good time. If it is an evergreen, do not remove more than half the foliage while playing with it. Slap your fingers if they itch to remove just one more little branch. If it is deciduous and it is dormant, have at it. If it a species that buds back nicely, and most do, you can work it down to the trunk alone. Check with someone to make sure the species will support this. Beech, for instance, usually will not. If it is the growing season but not early spring you can easily remove half or more of the foliage with your manipulations. If it is less than six weeks until the end of the season, wait until it goes dormant or you risk throwing new growth that will not have time to harden off.

What about the roots? My advice is to leave them alone. This is where beginners get into trouble. They work a plant too much, too soon, and it

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cannot support all the changes. Do as much top work as you can and leave it in the existing can or put it in a larger can without disturbing the roots if it needs to grow out some more. Wait for the next opportunity to do root

work. You can continue to clip and trim and wire branches and have a good time watching your little tree progress. It will be very easy to care for

branch is usually 120 degrees from the first or second branch but not directly behind the tree. The back branch may also be the second branch but only rarely the first. The other branches can usually be grown out has excess root capacity compared to the canopy. It will not dry out easily and it will be easy to water and fertilize.

If you worked on the top during the winter, wait at least until the following fall to do root work. If you worked the top after the spring flush you can work the roots in the fall, but it would be safer to wait until the following late winter or early spring. If you work on the top during the summer, wait until the following fall. In other words, give the plant an entire growth cycle before root pruning. I have used this formula many times and it has rarely failed me. Every time I lose a tree it is usually because I don't follow my own rules and do too much too fast. Learn to enjoy the tree in the nursery pot. I know the fascination for beginners

is to get the tree in a little pot, but just having a tree in a pot is not bonsai. I have thousands of little trees in nursery pots and I enjoy them every bit as much as the ones in the bonsai pots.

Now that I have given you all the things to look for in nursery plants, I will try to make specific suggestions for what to do when you get to the nursery.

Take a plant species description book with you, do not rely on what the sales help tell you, unless you have dealt with this nursery before, and you know for a fact that they have honest, knowledgeable help. In the west any nursery worth its salt will have a copy of Sunset's Western Garden Book right on the counter for you to use, but it is better to take you own so you

have it with you when you are actually looking at the plant.

If you live in the west you can use the maps in the front of 'Sunset' to find out what zone you live in to make proper plant choices according to cold hardiness and other factors. The 'Sunset' system is far to superior to USDA zones, and they do not correspond. Sunset's maps are much more detailed and consider far more information than the blanket USDA zones. If you do not live in the west take some time to read through this section to find the zone that most closely matches your area and use this number to aid in plant selection. Since the book includes zones from San Diego to the mountains of Washington almost the entire country should be able to find a comparable zone except the Deep South and the upper Midwest.

Armed with this kind of information about plant material, you can make intelligent choices about the cold hardiness, watering

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requirements, and growth habits of any particular plant that strikes your fancy.

Since this is mostly for beginners, I suggest that you look for deciduous material, or hardier evergreens such as juniper. Stay away from pines unless you have several years of experience under your belt. Some may disagree with me, but I do not consider pines other than *Pinus mugo* to be beginner plants. Most pines in nurseries are already wrecked anyhow for bonsai. For the most part stay with one gallon material since this will be inexpensive and no big deal if it succumbs to over ambitiousness. Also, stay away from grafted material unless you know what to look for in grafts and the pitfalls of high grafts, ugly grafts, mismatches.

Go for seedling material and cuttings. This will also be the least expensive material. Bargain basement areas are often a great resource for bonsai shoppers. Here you will find the large trunked root bound material at good prices already dwarfed for you. However, pass up stuff that looks like it is on its last legs unless you have some experience.

Take root bound material home and immediately pot it up to the next larger size regardless of what size the final bonsai will be. This will insure the survival of the plant and invigorate the top, so you can do some work on it the following season. Do not overwork root bound material because it has no reserves, you must reinvigorate the plant first. Look for plants with small leaves and twiggy branching; they will make the best bonsai candidates.

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In general, stay away from plants with compound leaves. These are plants that have leaves that are usually large with many small leaflets. These plants will usually not ramify (create small twiggy branches). If you want evergreens, stay with tough plants like juniper and cedar, if you are in an appropriate area. Broad leaf evergreens may or may not be easy; you will have to consult your text.

Deciduous material such as maples, hornbeam, hackberry, elm, hawthorn, linden, *Malus* (apple), *Prunus* (plum, peach, apricot), and *Liquidambar* are easy to work with.

And finally

Remember, the strong impulse to have that little tree in a bonsai pot will become a very boring experience if that is your only interest in bonsai. Most people have much more fun with their collections of pre-bonsai and bringing their trees along, watching them grow, planning their future, and finally potting them up as bonsai. These trees, born of love, are much more valuable than mall bonsai.

HOMEMADE PESTICIDE SPRAY

At Jack Douthitt's workshop in April he mentioned his pest spray. Here it is:

Fill a gallon jug with water and add one (1) or two (2) tablespoons of dishwashing detergent and one (1) tablespoon of vegetable oil (or Neem oil). Shake up the gallon jug to mix the ingredients.

Pour this solution into a spray bottle and just before using, add 1 to 2 two caps full of rubbing alcohol and spray immediately. The alcohol will evaporate, so if you do not use the full bottle of spray, add the same amount of rubbing alcohol again next time you are going to use the solution. You can store this soap/oil solution in the gallon jug for months on end. It does not seem to go bad.

Spray on plants covering all leaf and stem surfaces. You may have to spray from three to four times at intervals of three days. I have eliminated almost any kind of pest that has attacked my trees, including scale.

I do not wash off the spray and have seen no adverse reaction to the trees from this mixture.

Chrysanthemum Bonsai

Off and on through the years, the Club has bought a special kind of mums for us to make into bonsai. They come as cuttings and do take a while to get to any size, but at least one of our members, Lorena Chambers, has had some of hers for a number of years – unlike me: I manage to get just into winter before they croak.

There was a small amount of discussion earlier this year about the Club buying some cuttings for anyone who might be interested. I will bring the catalog to the All-State Show this weekend, and to our workshop next week, so you can pick out three or four kinds of mums you would like to try. You can also check on www.kingsmums.com and look at the Cascades

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Mums cont.

and the Gnomes. These are the smallest of the mums and are perfect for bonsai.

For those of you not familiar with the history of bonsaiing chrysanthemums, the Japanese have been doing it for many centuries. I believe we have the book *The Art of the Chrysanthemum* in our Club library if you'd like to check it out (full members only). It's a wonderful book with some stunning photos. I love this line from its Forward:

“The aim of this book is to reveal the techniques that enable the Japanese grower to make the Japanese chrysanthemum show the envy and despair of every American who has seen one.”

Now, if that's not a challenge I don't know what is. Let's give it a try!

I also have quite a bit of printed information about bonsai mums that I can provide to you. I had collected quite a few articles when we had done the mums previously.

The biggest challenge we all have had with these mini-mums is getting them to bloom for our Club show in October. There is a process called black-clothing, in which you cover your mums or put them in complete darkness for a certain number of hours starting in the Fall to try to fool them into thinking it's later than it really is. I've tried it, as have several other members, with little luck. I'd love it if some of you would take on this challenge and teach the rest of us what we need to do.

If you would like to try these unique bonsai, let me know in the next few weeks, at All-State or our May 19 workshop, and I'll get them ordered.

Basically Bonsai Website

In another few weeks I hope to have the “Grand Re-opening” of my website, basicallybonsai.com, after a major reconstruction that's taken several months. There will be special prices on just about everything. Check it out now for a huge variety of pots, tools and books. I'll be finishing up the clay figures in the next couple of weeks – need to take lots more photos.

2011 Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

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E-mail: _____

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