

# Fort Wayne Bonsai Club Newsletter

Volume 10 Issue 11

November 11, 2006

## November Bonsai Club Meeting

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We had a good show last month. One new member paid dues and I am sending this newsletter to 6 more guests who we hope will join in the near future. At the end of the email version of this you will find pictures from Jack Wikle's and from the show. Hope to see you all at the meeting.

### Kathy's Korner

At the risk of being redundant, I have some bits and pieces to pass along regarding overwintering bonsai. Last month Darlene included a copy of article "Overwintering Bonsai" by Brent Walston from his website. The Autumn 2005 issue of Bonsai Journal of the American Bonsai Society includes an article in the Regional Bonsai Care column "Overwintering Tropicals" by Doug Hawley and Tom McCormack. There are recommendations from Paul Weishaar in Indianapolis; Mollie Hollar of Grand Rapids, MI; Todd Renshaw in Detroit, MI; and Mike Scheid in Cincinnati.

Each has their own emphasis and recommendation which could be confusing if you want it to be. But, you might also view the diversity of experiences as an open palate for your own experimentation. The "jist" of all of this is that different methods work in different settings when managed by different hands.

In the above mentioned article there is a reference to an article by Pauline F. Muth, "A Close Up on Indoor Tropical Bonsai in Northern Zones." That article is available on-line through the ABSbonsai.org website. For those who might not have access to the website, I have printed a copy of that article and included it in the Autumn 2005 article mentioned above. Mention is made of an article by Jerry Meislik in the Winter 2004 ABS journal. However, that particular journal is out of the library, so I am not able to directly reference it.

The journal from which I've written comments, as well as most journals from the last 3 years, is available for loan from your friendly traveling librarian.

While enroute looking for something else, I came across a portion of a paragraph that I think is important to know related to your deciduous trees. Some of you (me?) might get the notion to save a little time next spring by doing some rewiring now; especially, if you were inspired by the CD from Andy Smith at Golden Arrow Bonsai.

In ABS Journal Winter 2005/06 in an article on repotting, again by Doug and Tom, my eye was caught by these lines on page 6: *"Generally, most conifers should have been already restyled and detail wired over the winter. Tropicals can be wired and shaped a few weeks ahead, as they will already be growing in temperate areas by the time they can be repotted. However deciduous trees should generally not have major wiring and bending of*

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Well that is the whole paragraph, but aren't you glad I found it to share with you! That really is a good article and maybe I'll highlight the whole thing later on.

Kathy

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## **FW Bonsai Club October Meeting Minutes 2006**

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**Japanese Garden Update:** Lynda Heavrin Manager of landscape and horticulture of the FW Parks Department addressed the group with updated information regarding the Japanese Garden located at the FW Civic Center. Lynda said that the city has set aside money to remodel the Garden. She and Darlene met with the Sister City Committee to discuss the design drawn by Bonsai Bob. A few modifications have been made by Lynda and Darlene. The Sister City Committee's approval is needed for the renovation which includes pond removal and replacement with a rubber lined pond. The large trees that are not in keeping with the design will be removed. Some large stones and sculptures will need to be temporarily removed and then replaced when the construction is done. Lynda explained that a Memorandum of Agreement must be written and signed stating what the Parks Department and the FW Bonsai Club will do and what is needed from the Sister City Committee.

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**Member health reports:** Judy Ashby's husband is seriously ill. Strength and prayers are extended to that family.

Valesca and Harley are battling through surgeries and illnesses. Strength and prayers are extended to both of them as well. And our hopes that they will soon be back in our midst.

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Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:15 and people resumed admiring each others display specimens, welcoming guests, and answering questions.

Respectfully, Kathy Lee, Interim Secretary

# Pruning and Pinching

*by Brent Walston from Evergreen Garden Works*

## *Introduction*

Pruning and pinching deciduous plants is an integral part of bonsai. It is how we create and maintain the fine branch structure and the pleasing outline that is essential to the beauty of the plant. Most people learn how to do this by rote, not really understanding the growth principles behind the methods they practice. This article explains in inexcruciating detail the *why* of pinching and pruning.

**Pinching versus Pruning** First, let's discuss the role of 'pinching' as opposed to 'pruning'. Pruning is used (with reference to branches) to shape the branch, change the direction of the branch, and create taper within the branch. This is all done by pruning back to a bud aimed in the direction that you want it to go. This is usually done to a shoot with several internodes to be removed or with a larger lignified (woody) existing branch. It doesn't matter if you use concave cutters, your fingers, pruners, or chain saw, as long as you do a neat job.

Pinching can achieve the above for very small branches on some species, but for the most part, when we speak of pinching, we are talking about achieving ramification, or twigginess. When pinching the scaffolding of the branch is complete, it only needs detail work or ramification. This is done by removing the tip of the growing branch, usually removing two nodes of a three node shoot (a node is where buds appear or leaves grow). This does two things: 1) it shortens the branch. 2) it releases the buds behind it, interrupting apical dominance. The buds are held from opening by the release of a hormone (auxin) manufactured by the last (terminal) bud. Now the remaining bud is free to open *and* the buds behind this one.

The result is that by pinching out the terminal bud, or removing a two or three bud shoot, several of the buds remaining on this stem are free to open. Usually one or two will open before the new terminal bud starts forming the hormone and stops the process. Thus, where you once had a soft straight shoot with *increasing* internodes (usually), you now have two buds opening forming a forked branch with shorter internodes and achieving ramification.

**Achieving Shorter Internodes** I emphasized *increasing* above, because what most people have never bothered to observe (at least I never see it mentioned) is that the first two or three internodes of a released bud (achieved by pruning) are shorter than the internodes of the rest of the expanding shoot. By pinching back to one or two buds, we take advantage of this phenomenon, keeping the short internodes sections and discarding the strong shoot with the longer internodes. This is most important as we reach the outer portions of the branch which, like the branches on the trunk itself, should have leaves and nodes closer together as we approach the extremities.

Internode length is also influenced by the season and growth rate. Recently repotted plants will form longer internodes. Plants heavily fertilized in the spring, or pruned in the winter will also form longer internodes. Plants fertilized and/or pruned in early summer (but not spring), will form shorter internodes.

Armed with this knowledge, you will be able figure out how to achieve your goal. But of course you have to know what your goal is, and that is always the most difficult part, especially for beginners, who have not seen enough trees to know what they want to do.

**Alternate versus Opposite** In addition to this, some knowledge of the species is important, because not all woody species react in the same way to pruning (although in general they do). There is also the major distinction that divides the woody species, those that have alternate leaves (buds), and those that have opposite. Alternate species are in general easier to work with, since *the last bud will open before the one before it*. This creates a strong main branch extension from the last bud and a weaker, smaller branch fork (secondary) from the next to last bud. Just keep this in mind and nature will do the rest.

In opposite species, the two buds are directly opposite each other and will often open simultaneously with equal strength. If not corrected this will give a fan pattern rather than a strong branch, weak secondary pattern usually desired for bonsai. If one bud is nipped out as they expand, one can mimic an alternate species. The same thing is achieved in the training of Black Pine, where great care is taken to make sure that all the branches fork, whereas in nature they would form whorls. Only after many years of wear and tear would they be reduced to forked branches.

**Creating Branches** You must form a branch before you can ramify it. It doesn't matter how many internodes are in the first section of the branch, the only thing that matters is whether the branch will sprout from where you cut it to form a bend or create a secondary (side branch) and a new main extension. In general, if you remove the end of a branch, or otherwise prune it, you will change its direction, since a bud on the side of the branch will break and start the new extension in a different direction. The same is true for chopping the trunk. If you want a straight branch, don't prune it. Pinching buds at the end of the branch, means just that. Remove the *one* terminal (and its leaf) and leave the other buds and leaves alone. The bud at base of the next leaf will be the first to open and form a new shoot in a new direction. The rest of the branch may or may not have leaves, it is of no concern to us here. A branch for pinching purposes constitutes one straight section, or twig, with buds and possibly leaves but with *no* side branches. Each branch, twig, or shoot if you prefer has only *one* terminal bud, at the very end of the shoot.

**Consider the Species** The other thing that you need to know, is how each species grow. For example, how *Ulmus parvifolia* grows in response to pruning. This species is dense with dormant buds embedded in the bark as well as the single bud contained in the leaf axil. When you prune this species, you get branches all over

the place. This is the beauty of this species for bonsai, and also the reason I tell folks not to worry about branches until the trunk is formed, since you can easily get branches wherever you want them by simply pruning it hard.

Pruning this species hard will give you a little fuzz ball of branches. These are very soft and succulent, and there are very many more than you need. If you begin to prune them off as they emerge you weaken the plant and many of them will die back. Let them grow out about six to eight inches, or more, so they can harden and have a better chance of surviving. Then you can remove the ones you don't want and start thinking about what to do with the ones remaining. If you want one to fork at a certain location, prune it there. You can see that you must have an image of the tree that you want to obtain before you can proceed.

One the other end of the spectrum you have species like beech, *Fagus*, that have strongly determinate buds. Beech will usually only form one set of buds and leaves a year, although an occasional hard pruning will force dormant buds to break. Since you can't rely upon buds breaking wherever you want them, you must plan ahead and rely upon pinching as your main tool of branch formation as well as for ramification.

*And finally* In a beginning bonsai book, you might get the advice, "let a shoot grow three sets of leaves and pinch it back to one or two". While this, in fact, may be good advice, you can see from the above that it's not quite that simple. Knowledge is power.

## The 'Rules' of Bonsai

*by Brent Walston of Evergreen Garden Works*

*Introduction* As in all arts, bonsai usually conforms to a set of conventions, guidelines, or 'rules'. Rules is probably the worst word of the three to describe what most artists do to create bonsai, but it is the word that most people use. These rules are not cast in stone and are frequently broken as the situation demands, but they are excellent guidelines for the creation of beautiful bonsai, and are invaluable to persons learning bonsai. They simplify what otherwise would be a bewildering set of decisions.

These rules mostly come from the Japanese culture of bonsai over the last few centuries. They are an analysis of what 'works', and what 'doesn't work' in the creation of bonsai. Almost anyone can create a decent looking bonsai by following these rules, whether or not one has any native talent. That is the beauty of this distillation. Of course, very good bonsai will still depend upon talent, experience, inspiration, and serendipity, as well as a general conformity to the rules of bonsai.

### **Trunk and Nebari Rules:**

1. Height should be six times the caliper of the trunk.
2. Trunk should lean slightly toward the viewer.
3. Trunk should flare at base to visually anchor the plant.
4. Roots should radiate from the flare.
5. No eye-poking roots (directly at viewer).
6. Apex should lean toward viewer.
7. Trunk should taper as it ascends. No reverse taper.
8. Grafts should match understock and scion so that they are unobtrusive, or be placed low enough to disappear into the nebari.
9. Curves in trunk should not result in 'pigeon breast' (roundness toward viewer).
10. Apex should finish in the direction set by the base. 'Flow' should be maintained.
11. Trunk line should not move 'back on itself'. This is one of my rules and difficult to explain. It

- relates to the flow of the tree. A trunk line that moves back on itself creates a 'C' curve.
12. For formal and informal upright, the apex should be over the base.
  13. In informal uprights, too many 'S' curves will be tiresome.
  14. As a tree ascends the curves should be closer together (related to branch placement).
  15. A tree should have only one apex.
  16. Twin tree trunks should divide at the base, not higher up.

### **Branches:**

1. No crossing branches, or branches that cross the trunk.
2. No eye-poking branches (pointed directly at viewer).
3. First branch should be placed approximately one third the height of the tree.
4. Succeeding branches placed at one third the remaining distance to the top of the tree.
5. Branches go on the outside of the curves (No belly branches).
6. Branch caliper should be in proportion to the trunk. Branches that are thicker than one third the trunk caliper will be too thick.
7. First branch should be left (or right), second branch right (or left), third branch should be back branch.
8. Branches should visually alternate, no parallel branches.
9. Branches should diminish in size and caliper as they ascend.
10. There should be space between the branches to 'Let the birds fly through'.
11. First and second branches (Left and Right branches) should be placed forward of the mid line to 'invite' the viewer.
12. First, second, and third branches are approximate 120 degrees apart, with the back branch not directly behind the tree.
13. Only one branch per trunk position, no 'wheel and spoke' or whorled branches, or bar branches (branches directly opposite each other).
14. Branches should create an outline of a scalene triangle with the apex representing God, the middle corner man and the lower corner earth.
15. Secondary branches should alternate left and right and follow the rules of main branch placement, except there should be no secondary branches moving up or down. This creates the foliage pad.
16. To create the illusion of an old tree, wire the branches down. Young trees have ascending branches. The branches near and in the apex can be horizontal or ascend since this is the young part of the tree.
17. Branches for cascades generally follow the rules for uprights, except that the trunk moves down.
18. In twin trees, there should not be branches between the trees which would cross the trunks. The outside branches of both trees creates the triangle of foliage.
19. A jin should not be hidden in foliage.

### **Pots:**

1. The tree should be placed behind the mid line of the pot, and to the left or right of the center line.
2. The depth of the pot should be the caliper of the trunk, except for cascades.
3. Colored glazed pots should be used for flowering and fruiting trees and the colors should complement the flower color.
4. The width of the pot should two thirds the height of the tree. For very short trees, the width should be two thirds the spread of the tree.
5. Style of the pot should match the tree. Uprights without much movement should be in rectangular pots, informal uprights with a lot of trunk movement should be in oval or round pots. Massive trees should be in deep rectangular pots.

**Culture:** 1. Soils should be uniform, not layered. (New rule, you will still find controversy).

2. Fertilize full strength. (New rule, there will be controversy).
3. Water from above, not by submerging the bonsai, this will prevent the buildup of salts.
4. Increase humidity by using a tray of pebbles and water or by keeping the area under the bench wet, not by misting. (This is my rule, there will be controversy. Misting increases the salt buildup on the leaves, and does practically nothing to raise humidity.)

5. Remove most of the 'fines' from any soil mix, using only coarse particles.
6. Water when the plants need to be watered, not by a fixed schedule.
7. Keep temperate climate plants outside. Only tropical and subtropical plants (for the most part) are suitable for indoor bonsai. Temperate climate plants must be given an appropriate period of cold dormancy if they are to be kept indoors.

*And finally* John Naka's book Bonsai Techniques I, 1973, Bonsai Institute of California, is by far the best treatise on the 'rules' of bonsai that I have found. Anyone can create convincing bonsai by following these conventions. Once they are mastered, you can begin to create without thinking about 'rules'.

## The club has the following items for sale:

**Wire assortments:** club members \$40.00, subscribers \$42.00, non-members \$45.00

**Micromax micro-nutrients:** \$5.00 for members, subscribers \$6.00, non-members \$7.00

**Bonsai soil,** shopping bag of 2 scoops: \$5.00 for members, subscribers \$6.00, non-members \$7.00

**New Fertilizer blocks.** ½ lb bag \$2.50 for members, Subscribers \$3.00, non-members \$3.50    1 lb bag \$5.00 for members, Subscribers \$5.50, non-members \$6.00

We also have bonsai slabs for forest plantings. Prices range from \$25.00 to \$50.00. Call Darlene or Ed regarding purchase.

All these products are great buys and priced much lower than retail if they are even available in this area. Call or email Darlene or Ed if you want products brought to this meeting.

**See you at the meeting!!**

**Membership Roster and Subscribers** The Membership roster will be printed again in the December issue

**Michael Himes New Rocky Mountain Juniper from Andy**



Pictures from the October show.



Pictures From Jack Wikles





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Armed with this knowledge, you will be able figure out how to achieve your goal. But of course you have to know what your goal is, and that is always the most difficult part, especially for beginners, who have not seen enough trees to know what they want to do.

**Alternate versus Opposite** In addition to this, some knowledge of the species is important, because not all woody species react in the same way to pruning (although in general they do). There is also the major distinction that divides the woody species, those that have alternate leaves (buds), and those that have opposite. Alternate species are in general easier to work with, since *the last bud will open before the one before it*. This creates a strong main branch extension from the last bud and a weaker, smaller branch fork (secondary) from the next to last bud. Just keep this in mind and nature will do the rest.

In opposite species, the two buds are directly opposite each other and will often open simultaneously with equal strength. If not corrected this will give a fan pattern rather than a strong branch, weak secondary pattern usually desired for bonsai. If one bud is nipped out as they expand, one can mimic an alternate species. The same thing is achieved in the training of Black Pine, where great care is taken to make sure that all the branches fork, whereas in nature they would form whorls. Only after many years of wear and tear would they be reduced to forked branches.

**Creating Branches** You must form a branch before you can ramify it. It doesn't matter how many internodes are in the first section of the branch, the only thing that matters is whether the branch will sprout from where you cut it to form a bend or create a secondary (side branch) and a new main extension. In general, if you remove the end of a branch, or otherwise prune it, you will change its direction, since a bud on the side of the branch will break and start the new extension in a different direction. The same is true for chopping the trunk. If you want a straight branch, don't prune it. Pinching buds at the end of the branch, means just that. Remove the *one* terminal (and its leaf) and leave the other buds and leaves alone. The bud at base of the next leaf will be the first to open and form a new shoot in a new direction. The rest of the branch may or may not have leaves, it is of no concern to us here. A branch for pinching purposes constitutes one straight section, or twig, with buds and possibly leaves but with *no* side branches. Each branch, twig, or shoot if you prefer has only *one* terminal bud, at the very end of the shoot.

**Consider the Species** The other thing that you need to know, is how each species grow. For example, how *Ulmus parvifolia* grows in response to pruning. This species is dense with dormant buds embedded in the bark as well as the single bud contained in the leaf axil. When you prune this species, you get branches all over

the place. This is the beauty of this species for bonsai, and also the reason I tell folks not to worry about branches until the trunk is formed, since you can easily get branches wherever you want them by simply pruning it hard.

Pruning this species hard will give you a little fuzz ball of branches. These are very soft and succulent, and there are very many more than you need. If you begin to prune them off as they emerge you weaken the plant and many of them will die back. Let them grow out about six to eight inches, or more, so they can harden and have a better chance of surviving. Then you can remove the ones you don't want and start thinking about what to do with the ones remaining. If you want one to fork at a certain location, prune it there. You can see that you must have an image of the tree that you want to obtain before you can proceed.

One the other end of the spectrum you have species like beech, *Fagus*, that have strongly determinate buds. Beech will usually only form one set of buds and leaves a year, although an occasional hard pruning will force dormant buds to break. Since you can't rely upon buds breaking wherever you want them, you must plan ahead and rely upon pinching as your main tool of branch formation as well as for ramification.

*And finally* In a beginning bonsai book, you might get the advice, "let a shoot grow three sets of leaves and pinch it back to one or two". While this, in fact, may be good advice, you can see from the above that it's not quite that simple. Knowledge is power.

## The 'Rules' of Bonsai

*by Brent Walston of Evergreen Garden Works*

*Introduction* As in all arts, bonsai usually conforms to a set of conventions, guidelines, or 'rules'. Rules is probably the worst word of the three to describe what most artists do to create bonsai, but it is the word that most people use. These rules are not cast in stone and are frequently broken as the situation demands, but they are excellent guidelines for the creation of beautiful bonsai, and are invaluable to persons learning bonsai. They simplify what otherwise would be a bewildering set of decisions.

These rules mostly come from the Japanese culture of bonsai over the last few centuries. They are an analysis of what 'works', and what 'doesn't work' in the creation of bonsai. Almost anyone can create a decent looking bonsai by following these rules, whether or not one has any native talent. That is the beauty of this distillation. Of course, very good bonsai will still depend upon talent, experience, inspiration, and serendipity, as well as a general conformity to the rules of bonsai.

### **Trunk and Nebari Rules:**

1. Height should be six times the caliper of the trunk.
2. Trunk should lean slightly toward the viewer.
3. Trunk should flare at base to visually anchor the plant.
4. Roots should radiate from the flare.
5. No eye-poking roots (directly at viewer).
6. Apex should lean toward viewer.
7. Trunk should taper as it ascends. No reverse taper.
8. Grafts should match understock and scion so that they are unobtrusive, or be placed low enough to disappear into the nebari.
9. Curves in trunk should not result in 'pigeon breast' (roundness toward viewer).
10. Apex should finish in the direction set by the base. 'Flow' should be maintained.
11. Trunk line should not move 'back on itself'. This is one of my rules and difficult to explain. It

- relates to the flow of the tree. A trunk line that moves back on itself creates a 'C' curve.
12. For formal and informal upright, the apex should be over the base.
  13. In informal uprights, too many 'S' curves will be tiresome.
  14. As a tree ascends the curves should be closer together (related to branch placement).
  15. A tree should have only one apex.
  16. Twin tree trunks should divide at the base, not higher up.

### Branches:

1. No crossing branches, or branches that cross the trunk.
2. No eye-poking branches (pointed directly at viewer).
3. First branch should be placed approximately one third the height of the tree.
4. Succeeding branches placed at one third the remaining distance to the top of the tree.
5. Branches go on the outside of the curves (No belly branches).
6. Branch caliper should be in proportion to the trunk. Branches that are thicker than one third the trunk caliper will be too thick.
7. First branch should be left (or right), second branch right (or left), third branch should be back branch.
8. Branches should visually alternate, no parallel branches.
9. Branches should diminish in size and caliper as they ascend.
10. There should be space between the branches to 'Let the birds fly through'.
11. First and second branches (Left and Right branches) should be placed forward of the mid line to 'invite' the viewer.
12. First, second, and third branches are approximate 120 degrees apart, with the back branch not directly behind the tree.
13. Only one branch per trunk position, no 'wheel and spoke' or whorled branches, or bar branches (branches directly opposite each other).
14. Branches should create an outline of a scalene triangle with the apex representing God, the middle corner man and the lower corner earth.
15. Secondary branches should alternate left and right and follow the rules of main branch placement, except there should be no secondary branches moving up or down. This creates the foliage pad.
16. To create the illusion of an old tree, wire the branches down. Young trees have ascending branches. The branches near and in the apex can be horizontal or ascend since this is the young part of the tree.
17. Branches for cascades generally follow the rules for uprights, except that the trunk moves down.
18. In twin trees, there should not be branches between the trees which would cross the trunks. The outside branches of both trees creates the triangle of foliage.
19. A jin should not be hidden in foliage.

### Pots:

1. The tree should be placed behind the mid line of the pot, and to the left or right of the center line.
2. The depth of the pot should be the caliper of the trunk, except for cascades.
3. Colored glazed pots should be used for flowering and fruiting trees and the colors should complement the flower color.
4. The width of the pot should two thirds the height of the tree. For very short trees, the width should be two thirds the spread of the tree.
5. Style of the pot should match the tree. Uprights without much movement should be in rectangular pots, informal uprights with a lot of trunk movement should be in oval or round pots. Massive trees should be in deep rectangular pots.

**Culture:** 1. Soils should be uniform, not layered. (New rule, you will still find controversy).

2. Fertilize full strength. (New rule, there will be controversy).
3. Water from above, not by submerging the bonsai, this will prevent the buildup of salts.
4. Increase humidity by using a tray of pebbles and water or by keeping the area under the bench wet, not by misting. (This is my rule, there will be controversy. Misting increases the salt buildup on the leaves, and does practically nothing to raise humidity.)

5. Remove most of the 'fines' from any soil mix, using only coarse particles.
6. Water when the plants need to be watered, not by a fixed schedule.
7. Keep temperate climate plants outside. Only tropical and subtropical plants (for the most part) are suitable for indoor bonsai. Temperate climate plants must be given an appropriate period of cold dormancy if they are to be kept indoors.

*And finally* John Naka's book Bonsai Techniques I, 1973, Bonsai Institute of California, is by far the best treatise on the 'rules' of bonsai that I have found. Anyone can create convincing bonsai by following these conventions. Once they are mastered, you can begin to create without thinking about 'rules'.

## The club has the following items for sale:

**Wire assortments:** club members \$40.00, subscribers \$42.00, non-members \$45.00

**Micromax micro-nutrients:** \$5.00 for members, subscribers \$6.00, non-members \$7.00

**Bonsai soil,** shopping bag of 2 scoops: \$5.00 for members, subscribers \$6.00, non-members \$7.00

**New Fertilizer blocks.** ½ lb bag \$2.50 for members, Subscribers \$3.00, non-members \$3.50    1 lb bag \$5.00 for members, Subscribers \$5.50, non-members \$6.00

We also have bonsai slabs for forest plantings. Prices range from \$25.00 to \$50.00. Call Darlene or Ed regarding purchase.

All these products are great buys and priced much lower than retail if they are even available in this area. Call or email Darlene or Ed if you want products brought to this meeting.

**See you at the meeting!!**

**Membership Roster and Subscribers** The Membership roster will be printed again in the December issue

**Michael Himes New Rocky Mountain Juniper from Andy**



Pictures from the October show.



Pictures From Jack Wikles



