

Fort Wayne Bonsai Club Newsletter

Volume 9 Issue 7

July 15, 2006

July Meeting- Picnic At The Kittles

You can't miss this month's meeting!!! This month our meeting will be our traditional picnic and auction on July 15th at 11:30 am. Spouses or friends are invited. The address is 17725 Lima Road, Huntertown, IN 46748, if you need directions email me or call me at 260-637-5104. This will be a carry-in **and please call or email me with what you plan to bring.** Please bring chairs for yourself & spouse or friend. We will have our Off Mosquito lanterns going like last year so you should not need mosquito spray. After lunch we will have our traditional auction. Members may bring anything they would like to sell. The club will receive 10% of the proceeds and the seller will get 90 %. You can bring trees, starter trees, anything bonsai or even houseplant or gardening related items. Pots, books, anything will sell! If you don't want it someone else will. Bring your check book, there are always some great buys here.

Jerry and I did not get to attend the Maba Convention in Milwaukee on June 24th because our friend there got called to NJ because her mother was very ill. I have hopes of attending the Midwest Bonsai Show at Chicago Botanical Garden but that is the same weekend that Cheryl has invited us to her home for the picnic with the Elkhart study group. Perhaps we can go up just for Sunday, I will have to check on their hours on Sunday.

Jerry and I were on vacation all last week at the Wing Ding (Goldwing Convention) in Nashville, TN at the Opryland Hotel & Convention Center. It has a 9-acre of glass-walled conservatories filled with 50,000+ tropical plants and a skylighted indoor area with a 44 foot waterfall, water cascades and a half-acre lake. I was in heaven! Everyday I saw things I had missed the day before. We also visited Cheekwood Botanical Gardens in Nashville and had a wonderful walk thru their Japanese garden. Needless to say I will have pictures to show off at the picnic.

Japanese Garden Update

Still no update on the Japanese Garden. We have not yet received the new plan from Bonsai Bob. He has been busy repotting. I will try to talk with Lynda Heavrin before the meeting and report then.

Discussion of Soil & Watering provided by Kathy Lee

From ABS online Forum Posted by: "dezertrats@aol.com" dezertrats@aol.com [dezertrats](mailto:dezertrats@aol.com) Wed Jul 5, 2006 11:48 pm (PST)

G'day Jim...

I don't know where "here" is...however.....The Southern Arizona desert is my home, and I seldom water twice a day.

"Bonsai soil" doesn't really mean a thing...without knowing what goes into the mix, or knowing a brand name that one has had experience with, it's just impossible...well, just about impossible...to classify your soil as good, bad or ugly.

The three most important requirements for bonsai soil are, (1) it must be fast draining, while at the same time, (2) it must be able to retain some water, and, (3) it must allow space for oxygen.

My soil mix contains (1) high fired clay (Turface or Profile or OilDri), and (2) Pumice (or lava rock)...in equal parts. To this I add from ZERO to 10% Orchid Mix (bark). The amount of bark varies from one species to another.

This is what works for me. There are many, many, many, many, many, many (enough, says I) bonsai soil mixes...they all work for someone, somewhere, sometimes.

Now, here's some information on watering...

The following information assumes that your soil mix is free draining. Water each individual bonsai only when it needs watering...and every time you water it, give it a thorough drenching! To determine when a bonsai needs watering, check the water content of the soil at 1½-2" below the surface. I place a small "chopstick" (a bamboo skewer works well) in the soil to get an indication of watering needs. Daily, for each individual bonsai, I pull the "chopstick" out of the soil and check the moisture. If watering is NOT needed, I return the chopstick to the soil. If the bonsai needs watering, I do not replace the "chopstick" until after watering...no "chopstick" means water now! With experience you may be able to tell when a plant needs water by lifting the pot...goodbye "chopstick"!

How do I determine whether or not the soil needs watering? If the "chopstick" comes out with damp soil hanging on to it, it is not yet time to water. However, if there is no damp soil...or...the "chopstick" appears to be dry, then, it is time to water. If you are not certain of the state of damp/dry, wipe off the dirty end of the "chopstick" and draw it lightly across your cheek (or the under side of your wrist). That will give you a feel for how much moisture is in the soil. If, in your judgment, the soil will dry out before you are able to check it again... now is the time to water. The accuracy in your judgment will come in time...with experience. Now, on to the actual watering...the Three Step Watering Process.

(1) Always water from the top; get the top of the soil thoroughly wet without watering until water runs out of the drain holes. Wait 5-10 minutes, then; (2) water until water runs freely from the drain holes. Wait 5-10 minutes, then; (3) water until the water runs freely from the drain holes. Watch how fast the water starts draining from the bottom of the pot. If it is almost instantaneous, it is likely that water has flowed to the edges of the pot, drained down and out...bypassing the soil and rootball. This bonsai may be rootbound. If "standing water" takes more than 1 minute to drain the soil is not draining freely enough...watch for root rot! You are now ready to return to the beginning...on what ever your schedule is. I hope this can be helpful. Pat

Secretary's Report- June 17, 2006

The May meeting of The Fort Wayne Bonsai Club was a self-guided walking tour of the trees in Lindenwood Cemetery. Before the "treasure hunt" we had a brief business meeting in the old chapel.

The subject of the Fort Wayne Sister City Japanese Garden was brought up to date by Darlene Kittle. Lynda Heavrin of Fort Wayne Parks Department reports that a quote on redoing the landscape came in at \$22,000 (ed. Comment: Geeeee, that's probably about what it cost to build the whole thing back when!oh, but INFLATION is under control?) Two large trees remain with sundry other stumps. There is apparently still talk of our Club conducting a work day on the garden.

We will have our TRADITIONAL picnic in July. Cheryl Owens has invited us to picnic at her home in Elkhart with the Elkhart Bonsai Discussion Group in August if her and Charley's health will permit.

Aug. 17,18,19: Midwest Bonsai Show at Chicago Botanical Garden.

Aug. 12: Franke Park Garden Show.

Refreshments in June furnished by noir.

The walk used an identifier map furnished by Lindenwood, listing 64 species of interest. We managed to locate one surviving American elm, but not in total health. The canopy was thin. Despite the hostile climate here in northern Indiana, it is amazing how big and old these can get.

Well, gotta run. The Japanese beetles are BAAAAAACK, and after my sweet cherry, grape vines and, their very favorite, my persimmon. Organic, schmorganic; get out the SEVIN!

Sincerely, Rod Schueler, secretary

Kathy's Corner Bonsai Club Library Book List Contact Kathy Lee @ 637-6242 to Check out books.

Sunday, June 16th is the Iris Rhizome Sale. (Bot. Conservatory)

Saturday, Aug. 12th is the Flower and Garden Show (Franke Park Pavilion #1)

Saturday, Aug. 26th is the Master Gardener Plant Sale and Garden Walk (Allen County Ext. Office)

I would be grateful for 2-4 loaner plants to display at the MG Garden Walk. I've taken mostly my things the last two times, so the visitors would probably enjoy seeing some others. Since it is an outdoor setting, I've opted for larger rather than smaller specimens. Also, if any club member would like to sit with the plants in the Zen Garden and answer questions or give Bonsai Club and October display information, that would be well received by that garden's group as well. The time is 1:00 to 4:00. If an individual only wanted to be there part of that time, that would be acceptable too.

2006 Calendar of Local or Nearby Events

July 15th 2006- Club picnic at Kittle home. 17725 Llima Road, Huntertown, IN 46748 Don't miss this!!

August 19th- picnic at Cheryl Owens home in Elkhart, IN. Caravan from Kittles. Don't miss this!!

September 16th 2006-Meeting-Field trip to Jack Weikle's home.

October 21st 2006- Fall Bonsai show at the Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory

November 18th 2006- Meeting, location & Program to be announced.

December 16th 2006- Christmas luncheon, location to be determined.

June 2007- Ben Oki workshop.

This first article is because this month we celebrated the 4th of July and what better time to discuss All-American bonsai styles!

American Bonsai Styles *by Brent Walston*

Introduction

Styling in bonsai refers to the 'form' of the work, such Cascade, Slanting, Formal or Informal Upright. It can also be used to describe the particular the type of representation. For example, the basic round headed Pine tree 'style'

is in current vogue. With the introduction of bonsai to the West, there is now the possibility of other styles using other species. This is the natural evolution of the art.

Styling goes hand in hand with the training methods and the materials used. I'm not very knowledgeable about such things, but it is my understanding that styling trends have gone in and out fashion for the last few hundred years in Japan. The current pine tree look has been around for a long time, and with the rise in popularity of bonsai in the West, I think emulation has prolonged its fashion reign. Folks new to bonsai want plants that look like the ones in the books which are mostly pine tree style.

I am a great believer in American bonsai. I don't mean to denigrate Japanese styles and work, they still style some of the most beautiful trees in the world, and they have such a rich heritage that it would be sacrilege to diminish their work. I feel that learning all their rules and studying their compositions is the best pretraining for most bonsai artists. I learned this way. Fortunately for me I learned without a sensei, and this has allowed me the freedom to experiment with growing techniques and styles. In almost any batch of plants I throw in a few off the wall wild things just to see what they will do, it makes life much more interesting.

Since bonsai is a representational art, it is bound to be greatly influenced by the natural environment of the artists. This is an important concept that is little discussed in books or lessons. Bonsai trees are not at all miniature versions of magnificent ancient full grown specimen, no more so than a baby is a miniature version of an adult. Early paintings of babies as small scale adults demonstrate how ludicrous an idea this is. The tiny heads make them look pea brained. Bonsai is the same thing. If the leaves and branches were truly proportional, you would have to get out your magnifying glass to see individual leaves, and the tree would be so dense that it would just look like a shrub. The trick is to *represent* ancient specimen, to give the feeling and flavor and experience of such plants. This is where the true artistry comes in, since we are not simply mimicking nature. If that were the case, anybody could do it by copying photos of trees.

American bonsai should represent the American experience of trees. As I said, this is greatly influenced by the plant material, different species with different growth habits from the species of the East. I see this from trees of the West and I read about it from others who prefers to work with native material from the South. We are attempting to capture the flavor or essence of the beauty that these native trees give in their natural setting.

I am greatly influenced by the Sierras. I was raised on the East Coast and spent the first half of my life there, having never been to the West or even experienced *real* mountains. When I came to the West I was completely overwhelmed by the awesome and austere beauty of the high country. I will never forget my first hike to the top of Yosemite Falls. At the very top, where there is little soil on the smooth hard granite dome, there were hundreds of dwarfed Jeffrey pines, a zillion dollars worth of bonsai in every direction growing out of almost sheer rock. You can see the impact of this experience in my landscape designs. They are always open and spacious with the individual plants occupying their own space, attaining their own beauty, never crowding their neighbor and usually forming the tight dome so prevalent in the high country due to the high winds. The plants there hunker down for protection.

My bonsai has been influenced too. Most of my pines, even after fifteen years, are still in training, but many show the characteristics of high country pines. The most prevalent feature is that the trunk is formed by a series of leader diebacks due to wind and snow. Close to the ground, usually at the point that the first major branches grew, there is a severe, almost ninety degree bend, because the leader died and a side branch took over. From this side branch another leader developed and it too was destroyed creating another severe bend and so on. These trees do not look like what you see in books and do not have that wild look of Western Junipers, but it is a natural orderly style. By studying the trees as I have, you can learn the rules of development and create bonsai to represent the real thing. I am sure that the American Sierra pine tree look will become a new style, a truly American style.

Another American style that is sure to happen is the California Oak. There is nothing else like them in the world and each species has its individual quirks, that will vary from region to region, sometimes in as little as forty

miles. This is not a tree of Asia, this will be a new style based on our experience of this tree. Naka has already done some of the analysis of what makes this tree give us the experience that it does, and has translated this into training techniques. The man is a true genius when it comes to this kind of analytical study. This doesn't come from studying the rules, it comes from studying the real trees. I have begun growing California Oaks for bonsai in anticipation of helping create this style.

And finally I am sure all of us can work to make bonsai an even greater art, a changing and growing art, by taking the time to see what it is that makes *our* trees so great.

(While in Nashville last week Jerry and I visited the Hermitage, the home of President Andrew Jackson, and admire it's very old and large cedar trees, what a beautiful sight!)

Cedars for Bonsai by Brent Walston

Introduction

Cedars! I love cedars. One of the very first plants I purchased for bonsai, over fifteen years ago, was an Atlas Cedar, *Cedrus atlantica*. It is still with me and now is a two foot tall, four inch trunk, two man cedar with well developed foliage pads and very short needles. It will go to its first show this year. These trees make spectacular formal upright and cascade bonsai.

Cedrus in general

My *Cedrus atlantica* has a nice deep green color typical of the species, but not typical of what you find in nurseries. Unfortunately almost all the *Cedrus atlantica* seedlings available today come from *C. atlantica* 'Glauc', so that what you get is neither the powdery blue of 'Glauc', nor the deep green of the species, but rather a pale blue green very much like *C. deodara*, but with shorter needles than deodara.

Growing Cedar from Seed

Seed from isolated trees has been very hard to get. Seed from all the cedars is very easy to germinate, but extremely sensitive to water and will damp off in an instant. Soak the seed overnight in warm water, pour off the water and dry the seed just until the husks become papery again, it should not be wet to the touch. I put mine in the sun on paper towels and it takes about fifteen minutes to reach this stage. Put it in a thin plastic bag with no paper towels or other medium, just the seed alone, it has adequate internal moisture. Fold over the top of the bag do not seal. Put it in the refrigerator at forty degrees F for thirty days or less if it begins to sprout. Take it out of the fridge.

As the radicles of the seeds emerge, remove them and plant in a good well drained medium. Regular bonsai soil works well. Plant it by sticking the radicle in the mix, leaving the bulk of the seed out of the soil. This will help reduce damping off. Usually two or three planting sessions is necessary to plant all the seed because the radicles emerge over about 2 weeks. At the end you can just stick the ungerminated seeds in the mix by pushing them in point down with the seed sticking in the air.

Water very carefully, waiting for the surface of the mix to dry before re-watering. Keep the humidity down, don't cover them with those little domes or plastic covers, this will only invite fungal problems. I have lost lots of cedar seed; this is all necessary, unless you want five or six plants out of a whole quarter pound packet. I plant directly into cells (plug trays) to avoid disrupting the roots when transplanting. Once the needles emerge they are pretty safe and easy to handle. This applies to all cedar seed.

Formal Upright Cedars

Large trunk cedars are very hard to produce by any other means than the 'broken top' method. This involves growing out the tree as rapidly as possible to about fifteen gallon size, a process that takes ten to fifteen years. The low branches must be preserved during this process, since cedars, like most needle conifers, are loathe to

form new growth on old wood. Very weak spindly branches can be coaxed back to big healthy major branches if they are still alive. Such was the case of my big cedar. It was in a fifteen gallon can when I bought it and was probably already ten to fifteen years old. Nursery stock in fives or fifteens is just fine if the low branching is still alive. Such material can usually be purchased for \$25 to \$65. This can save you five to ten years.

Next decide how tall you want your tree to be, six times the diameter of the trunk is ideal, but you can give yourself some leeway because it will increase in diameter while in training. Also formal uprights very often violate this guideline and are taller and slimmer than this ratio implies.

Next, look for a likely spot to cut the top off. I look for a set of close internodes around the height I want; this will give a good apex. About six inches above this point make a forty five degree angle cut on the BACK of the tree about halfway through. Grab the top of the tree and break it, pulling it down and ripping the wood and bark on the front of the tree. You can pull it down as far as you want exposed wood to show, all the way to the crown if you like, but not into the roots or rot will result. When pulled down to the right position twist and break it as much as possible to get it free at this point. You may have to do some cutting, but breaking it free looks more natural.

At the cut portion of the top, split the wood vertically with branch cutters and pull down bundles of fibers with pliers until no saw cut marks are visible. The effect that you want is that of a lightning struck tree. I grab the fibers with the pliers and roll the pliers down the trunk rather than give a straight pull, you can exert much more force this way.

All this is done while still in the original can. If it is good health, leave it in this can while you do the branch selection and begin pad formation. Cedars can stay in containers for very long periods of time. Mine was in the same fifteen gallon can for over ten years. Once pad develop was nearly complete, I cut off about the bottom two thirds of the roots and put it in a large bonsai training pot. All root work on cedars is best performed in spring before the new white roots appear, usually Feb thru April depending on your location.

Cascades

C. atlantica 'Glauca', Blue Atlas Cedar and *C. atlantica 'Aurea'* Golden Blue Atlas Cedar are the two most common species used for the popular cedar cascade style. Both of the cultivars have very short needles, and will form superior foliage pads when trained properly.

One gallon and five gallon nursery plants are generally used as starter material. One gallon size plants are still flexible enough to be bent downward into a cascade or semi cascade with little difficulty with traditional wiring techniques. Five gallon stock with one to two inch trunks calls for the big guns.

Large trunk stock plants are first protected with raffia. A bundle of wet raffia is placed lengthwise along the trunk as close to the branches as possible. This is secured by occasional wraps of raffia. Next, a thick copper wire is placed in the bed of raffia. The wire is secured by wrapping the trunk with raffia, changing direction every few inches by placing the raffia under and around the wire and going the other way. This locks the wire in place. Then another thick copper wire is placed around the trunk on top of raffia in the traditional coiled manner.

The bending is then done by hand or by bending jigs until the trunk goes straight down. It is often necessary to also anchor the trunk to the nursery pot to hold it in position. Next, bends are made at the selected branches so that each branch is on the outside of the curve.

This work is best done in August, with the wire left in place until the fall of the following year. The bonsai can be root pruned and potted the spring following. Thanks to Mas Imazumi, our club sensei, for this procedure.

Other Species of Cedrus *Cedrus libani* Cedar of Lebanon, *Cedrus libani*, has short needles of medium green with new growth of very bright light green. It is slower growing than *C. atlantica* and *C. deodara* and takes longer to form a decent trunk size, but the color is very good and the needles are shorter.

As far as I am concerned there is no finer cedar for small bonsai than *C. libani* 'Green Prince'. This is a real gem, rather rare and hard to find, it is extremely slow growing, reaching about eighteen inches in ten years. It has very short needles of a magnificent dark green, almost black color, the deepest green of any cedar. The new growth, like the species is lighter green, making a superb contrast. It grows in a soft upward spiral and practically makes bonsai by itself. I get more comments about the one in my rock garden than other plant. It must be grafted properly for bonsai since the understock will quickly out grow the scion and make a horrible union. Look for low grafts that can be buried so that the union can be hidden in the nebari. If it is high grafted, forget it unless you are willing to air layer it. Be prepared to pay big bucks for this rare dwarf.

Cedrus deodara This cedar has little bonsai potential in my opinion. The needles are longer and tend to grow along the stem rather in clusters like the other cedars. It is rugged, easy to grow and faster growing than the others. It has a very fibrous root system and is universally used as cedar understock. If you find a big specimen plant with potential at a reasonable price, then go for it. But, as a long term project, starting out with young plants of the other cedar species is preferred.

Cedrus brevifolia *C. brevifolia*, the Cedar of Cyprus was formerly listed as a variant strain of *C. libani*. It is now considered to be a separate species. Its only native habitat is the island of Cyprus. This is the shortest needle cedar of all the species. They are about one half inch long and of a rich blue green color. Until recently, it was only possible to obtain this species as grafted plants, but now it is available as seedling stock at a few nurseries. This species is highly prized for bonsai because of its short needle length, but has been little used due to the difficulty in finding nursery plants.

Culture All cedars need full sun and sandy well drained mixes both as bonsai and landscape plants, although deodara seems to thrive under all sorts of adverse conditions in any Mediterranean type climate. They are not very cold hardy, but this is not much of a problem for bonsai, since they would need the same winter protection as most other temperate climate woody plants. They are not particularly heavy feeders and suffer from few diseases. The biggest problem with young plants is probably root rot from poor soil.

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.

Membership Roster and Subscribers

A new membership roster was in the May newsletter. You will receive it twice a year with any changes. See last May's newsletter for Roster or email me and I will email it to you.

See you all at the picnic !! Bring a Friend!!

Ed's pictures of last month' walk.





See you at the Picnic!