

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - April 2002

In March I said I expected to get grief about my coffee soil mix. That was before I brought in the tub of *Acer gennalia* for the forest workshop. Ken Schultz and I bought a couple of packs of these bare rooted by mail order last year from a newspaper insert. I lost one over the winter and I used the bunch as my forest planting. Oh my word. I think I cut off more roots than the rest of the workshop trees had to start with. It could have been just the maples response to life, but I have seen the same results from other species as well.

The forest workshop went well, we had 30 participants and some very nice things came out of it. Everything from formal beginnings to initial training for a future reassembly with shallow rooted trees. We had a mix of new members to past club presidents and everybody seemed to have a good time.

Get ready for the Colin Lewis Workshop!

Colin Lewis is coming to Columbus Sunday, April 21, 2002. He will present a morning Chinese Elm Workshop starting at 10:00. It will feature some nice Chinese Elms that we are getting from Ken Huth. These have been brought into warm shelter to break dormancy earlier than normal so they have long leggy growth and active roots. The afternoon Demonstration at the regular club meeting will be a 30 to 40 year old landscape *Taxus* with a 5 or 6 inch trunk.

This should be an excellent Morning Workshop and even though we have 15 paid participants, there is still plenty of space for silent observers to listen in on the styling tips and techniques. A \$10 fee has been set for the silent observers. For the workshop participants, be sure to bring your tools!

The March meeting - See Above

Colin has indicated he will be happy to sign any of his books that we bring to the meeting. Go out there and buy some. I have noticed that the stores here in town are getting a little picked over though.

Tree of the Month

Chinese Elm or *Ulmus parvifolia*

Since we have a workshop on this tree coming up this Sunday with Colin Lewis, it seems to be the right time to highlight *U. parvifolia* as our tree of the month. Chinese Elm has a wide climate range, being native to northern China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea, the Chinese or Lacebark Elm generally has a broad, vase-like shape (Broom style) with pendulous branches. In warmer regions it may be evergreen, never shedding its leaves, and can reach heights of 60 feet. The small, leathery, dark green leaves are smooth and shiny on top and have small blunt teeth. The fruit matures in fall much later than most other elms.

The bark of this elm can have different textures depending on the variety. It can be rough barked, smooth barked, or exfoliating to show orange or tan under-bark. Varieties commonly used as bonsai include the dwarfs Yatsubusa and Catlin, and varieties Hokaido, Seiju, Cork Bark, Korean Weeping, and Semper Virens

Growth care for the Chinese Elm seems to be full sun and high light levels for indoors. Chinese Elms prefer full sun when outdoors or bright light when indoors. The smaller leafed varieties, like Seiju, must have full sun or they will not thrive. Use caution when moving from indoors to outdoors. Two or three weeks in shade when going outside will prevent sunburn. do not leave Chinese Elm in the shade or densely ramified specimens may start to lose interior branches through die back. Too much shade will also lead to larger leaves and longer internodes. If summer temperatures are way to hot then some shade may benefit some individual trees. you probably should not put them where the air conditioner will blow on them. just shading the pot may help by keeping the soil temperature lower, or you could plunge the pot in mulch or a growing bed. Hot temperatures may cause a growth check.

If you plant them directly in the ground, Chinese Elms grow quickly and can increase trunk caliper and height in a short time. You can use this to produce very stocky specimens by alternately growing and sacrificing the apex over a few years. One need only be concerned with the trunk during this time as branches may be formed later after the tree is planted in a bonsai pot. In a bonsai pot, their trunks will not thicken very quickly, but the shoot growth can be remarkable if well-fed.

Chinese Elms will grow in nearly any soil medium and their roots should stay moist, but they will get root rot if they are continually wet. An open, granular medium which allows for good drainage is best. The more inert grit used in the soil means that much more attention to the moisture levels. Our club mix should do well for these trees.

These elms may be repotted in either Spring or Fall, but Spring is always best. If you do repot in Fall, you should have a place ready for it inside that Winter. At a Spring repot, do so just before the new buds open when one can be quite ruthless in cutting back the roots, especially the big ones. Elm roots can thicken up quickly and it is therefore wise to repot at least every other year. Repotting every year may be necessary in some cases. You can wash the rootpad clean so that you can see everything that is in the root structure and make your cut selections with a clear plan.

When pruning the roots, use cutters that are very sharp. The roots of Chinese Elms are pulpy and can be crushed if care is not used. Crushed roots can lead to root rot. When cutting away very large roots, it is usually advisable to then clean up the initial cut with a sharp grafting knife so that the wound edges are smooth and clean.

Imported Chinese Elms often have really bad structure of the surface roots. I don't know if this is a cultural esthetic or if the exporters just think Americans don't give a rat's ass about nebari, and send us the rejects. You will often find these trees with ugly, tangled masses of ropy roots well above the soil . This is a common trait with imported elms and one to be avoided. If a nice nebari is not present, it can be manufactured by air layering or ground layering; an operation that is

quite easy with elms. If you don't have a reverse taper problem you can always try starting the root cuttings from these as a way of increasing your stock.

Water daily throughout the growing season. If the tree is maintained in a warm climate or indoors where it acts like a tropical, this will be year round. If the leaves have dropped, water sparingly but do not allow soil to become completely dry. DUHH! Start daily watering again at first signs of new growth .

Chinese Elms should be fed monthly or every two weeks (more or less depending on the organic component of your soil) from the time the first spring leaves harden off through early Autumn. When new leaf buds are in abundance, and in the spring for outdoor trees, fertilize every two weeks. A good water soluble all purpose fertilizer is fine, slow release fertilizer tablets are also acceptable and can be used to supplement regular feedings. Keith Scott recommends a dilute weekly application from mid May to October for our climate in Zone 4 or 5. More developed trees should be fed less to keep the twig ramification in balance. Keep track of the moisture uptake for the tree. If the soil begins to take longer to dry out in hot weather, cut back on the fertilization. It probably means the tree is having a growth check.

Chinese Elms may be maintained outdoors year round in zone six or above, however, some sources say they will tolerate temperatures down to 20 degrees F. The fleshy roots can be damaged if they are allowed to get too cold or have to endure a regular freezing and thawing cycle. If the tree gets too cold for too long, loss of some of the fine ramification may result. In any case, in Columbus this means some serious winter protection or greenhouse care. In Winter, they may keep some or all of their leaves. If this is the case, be sure to keep them in good light to avoid losing their finer shoots. It has been suggested that even if they are bare, shade may contribute to shoot dieback. If the tree is not completely dormant there is some photosynthesis in the twig bark so this could be credible.

Shaping may be done with clip and grow or by wiring. Prune all new growth to two or three leaves. Remove undesired new growth completely. Either method will work well as they bud profusely and, once wired, will hold their shape in a short time. Although wiring may be used to train Chinese Elms, the clip and grow method is preferred due to the fast growth rate. If you do wire the branches, keep close tabs on the growth of the branch as Chinese Elms can thicken quickly, causing the wire to begin to cut in less than a few weeks. It is best to wire shoots just as they harden off if you know what you want at this point. Wiring after leaf drop is often effective as you can easily see what you are wiring and growth will have slowed to nothing at this point. If you wire in late fall, you will need to bring it in for the Winter. Be sure to remove the wire just before the new buds break in the Spring or whenever it starts to move indoors..

Chinese Elms have an alternating leaf pattern and naturally short internodes making nearly any styling aim possible. The trunk form on a smooth barked Chinese Elm bonsai will look convincing with both a tall, thin upright form and a more compact form. The rough barked varieties often look best with larger trunk diameters to account for the coarser bark texture. Like most deciduous trees, it is often grown for its Winter silhouette which can be stunning, so keep this in mind as you do your styling.

Chinese Elms are mostly pest free, but are subject to black spot fungus. This usually occurs when the tree is kept constantly too moist or in times of a wet Spring. Any of the several common fungicides will work, but those with an oil base may burn the leaves, so use sparingly and keep the tree somewhat shaded. Root rot is another water issue.

Keith Scott says Chinese Elms are a magnet for leaf cutters, red spider mite, and aphids. they will attract the beetles that carry Dutch Elm disease, but don't seem susceptible to that. These pests will usually attack only in times of stress for the tree. Aphids are attracted to new, soft growth and scale insects may be found on woody branches and shoots. Either may be removed by hand or one may use a mixture of vegetable oil and dish soap mixed with water, sprayed onto the tree to remove the pests. Chinese Elms seem to dislike systemic insecticides and may drop their leaves. The leaves will be replaced shortly in most cases. Hmm - wonder if white flies like them?

If you want to increase your stock, elms grow extremely well from seed, but will grow well from hard wood cuttings as well as root cuttings.

Raffle Updates

Ross Fillmore got the Helen Brabander pot from the last June show. There were a lot of entries for this and when we went looking for someone to draw Ross declined as he didn't want to risk drawing his own name. Okay, Ross, we're on to you now so no backing out next time.

Bonsai Here and Beyond the Outerbelt

Unless otherwise noted, The Columbus Bonsai Society meets the third Sunday of every month at 2:00 pm. at the Franklin Park Conservatory. Board meetings are held the first Tuesday of the month at 7:00 in the Franklin Park Conservatory library.

April 18, 2002 - Lecture / Demonstration and Workshop by Colin Lewis - Cincinnati Club

April 21, 2002 - "Regular" CBS Meeting at Franklin Park Conservatory - Colin Lewis

Demonstration and Workshop (full day)

May 4-5, 2002 - Franklin Park Conservatory's Spring Plant Sale 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

May 16, 2002 - Lecture / Demonstration and Workshop by Roy Nagatoshi - Cincinnati Club

May 18, 2002 - Erie, PA and the Buffalo, NY Club are sponsoring Roy Nagatoshi from Fuji Bonsai in California

May 19, 2002 - 2:00pm Regular CBS Meeting at Franklin Park Conservatory - Matching Your Pots and Trees - Jose Cueto

June 1 - potential road trip

June 15 - Erie, PA -Bill Valvanis will lecture/demo AM and workshop PM on Styrax Japonica

June 22-23, 2002 - CBS Show - Note, this is one week later than our normal meeting.

June 27 - 30, 2002 - Milwaukee 2002 - ABS Symposium at the Four Points Sheraton Airport Hotel - we have programs and registration forms for anyone interested.

July 13 - 14, 2002 - Grand Rapids, Michigan All-State Bonsai Show 2002. Ben Oki, Ivan Watters, Jack Douthitt, Jack Wilke. Registration information at the meeting.

July 21, 2002 - 2:00pm Regular CBS Meeting at Franklin Park Conservatory - Overview of

Japanese Maples, Many Varieties, One Species - John Harris
August 18, 2002 - 2:00pm Regular CBS Meeting at Franklin Park Conservatory - Tropical
Workshop
September 15, 2002 - Annual Picnic
October 20, 2002 - 2:00pm Regular CBS Meeting at Franklin Park Conservatory - Fall
Show/panel judging
November 17, 2002 - 2:00pm Regular CBS Meeting at Franklin Park Conservatory -
Winterization/Wiring and Pruning that can be done Now
December 15, 2002 - Columbus Bonsai Society Holiday Dinner

Members are encouraged to add events to this list. We probably should focus on events that are
within 250 miles and the majors such as MABA, BCI, and ABS.

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