

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - February 2003

I want to offer some thoughts on the pot making workshop this month. Think about the tree that you plan to use this pot for. What is its shape? Is it angular or rounded? Is it informal or formal? These considerations will help you make a pot that will look good with your tree and avoid making an ashtray or spoon rest.

Treat this as if you were commissioning a pot - you are - And, you are the potter. If I was commissioning a pot, I would be fairly specific about what I wanted in terms of volume, dimensions, and general shape or profile (flared, straight sided, tapered, etc.). I would realize there will be some variation from this as it is hand built, but the general shape is certainly a legitimate request. If you just ask for a pot, there's a good chance that is just what you'll get. The only time I would not be this specific is if I was dealing with an experienced bonsai pot artist and they had a picture of my tree.

Not knowing what kind of glaze will be used, I am going to assume that the clay body will be one of the generic Columbus Clay stoneware bodies and will make a pot that does not need glazing. The five clay bodies John is making available to us are from Moist White to a moist brown. Here is a list:

White Moist

Buff clay/ cream colored

Red Moist

Brown clay with manganese specks

Barbs Body/ tan clay with dark specks

Speckle clay

All of these will take a high firing and could be winter hardy pots. John was thinking of supplying about 5# to 7# for \$15 and 7# to 10# for \$20. This is good size, you can throw about two quarts capacity with 5# of clay on a wheel, so a slab built pot with 7 pounds will run about that size or a little larger if you know what you are doing.

You might want to bring a fork or butter knife for a construction aid - and the fork or a spoon or a pine twig can be used for a surface embossed decoration. If you have a container that is the right size and shape to mold a slab into, bring it. Just remember that when the clay dries and is fired, it will shrink anywhere from 10 to 20%. So plan on making your pot a little larger than you actually need. A medium size pill bottle makes a good drainage hole(s). We'll have a large nail for wire holes.

I would also assume that John and Jerrod will do the pre-firing clean up on the pots and take care of leveling the feet before firing. You should plan on adding your own feet or base rim to hold the bottom of the pot of the bench surface.

February Care

Take this time to study the ramification of deciduous trees while they have no leaves. This is the sub-branching on the main branches. Don't prune yet as they are brittle but plan what you would

like to do when the first signs of spring appear. Study the leafless trees in nature. It is always an inspiration to me to see the lovely shapes made by nature and how different trees branch. Some have just a few long branches and others are finely ramified. Evergreens also stand out this time of year. There is a stand of pines, probably from an old farmstead, that is a real inspiration for a group planting.

This is also a good time to check your records to see which trees need to be repotted this spring. Things seem to come fast and furiously in spring, it pays to be prepared. Check out our library too, we have a good supply of videos available.

Coming Attractions

In February we will all have the chance to make pots. This was one of our best attended programs 2 or 3 years ago and at the club picnic John showed us his son's workshop and kiln. We have prevailed on him to lead us in a Do It Yourself Pottery workshop. They will supply the clay and firing. If you want to try a larger pot for a grove or forest planting, that can be accommodated. See the sign up sheet at the end of the newsletter.

February 22 - Bonsai Workday at Dawes Arboretum - Come pot, prune, wire, and pinch. Oh, and buy. 9:00AM to 3:00PM or so. This is a potluck lunch. Beverage and table service provided. If you've never done this, it is a fun time. Meet in the Education Center behind the main building. For more information email jemason@dawesarb.org or call 800-44-DAWES.

In March we will have "Episode VI - Return of the Pots", our normal sales table with commercial pots and tools, and Soil and Fertilizer. The Hands-on program will be working with a small group of members on a tree provided by the club. We will have a knowledgeable person assigned to each group to explain the vision and plan for the tree.

April's meeting will be on week later than normal to avoid conflict with Easter. April's meeting will be Sunday the 27th. Please make a note on your calendar. The meeting topic will be . . .

MABA 2003 Convention - July 3-6

The convention offers an outstanding array of international and local artists along with a great variety of workshops and excellent raw materials. The tree exhibit should be tremendous with two levels of cash prizes. Check out the vendors area and join in the celebration. For information and photos visit our website, www.maba2003.com. Dave Radlinski, Chairman

A Book Report

Books, books, books...How does a tree grow?

At our January meeting one of our members asked, "what books would be good to help understand how a tree grows." This got me to thinking about the books in my bonsai library. So I looked through the 38 odd bonsai books that Linda and I have collected to see which ones explained how a tree works. I was surprised that all but three jump in without explaining how a bud actually grow, or the function of the cambium layer. Most do have chapters on propagation,

from seeds and cutting, and all deal with watering and fertilizing, but only three explained the physiology of a tree. Two of the books were by Colin Lewis, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Growing and Displaying Bonsai* and *bonsai: a care manual*. The third book was Simon & Schuster's *Guide to Bonsai*.

The Simon and Schuster book compares the functions of a normal sized tree to a bonsai. After explaining roots, trunks and branches and leaves, Simon and Schuster's book explains how fertilizer, watering, soil hormones and light affect them. This book also has a section on genera, something not common to bonsai books but to books about trees, like a tree guide. This book is one of my favorite references as it has 150 species of trees pictured with a short section on their care.

Colin Lewis explains in his "care manual" that bonsai live longer than natural trees because pruning keeps them from reaching their maximum dimension, and they are constantly encouraged to produce new healthy roots and shoots. In the *Step-by-Step Guide* Colin Lewis devotes two pages on "How buds work." Understanding about dormant and adventurous buds helps us to select those species that back bud as good candidates for bonsai cultivation. The *Step-by-Step Guide* is one that I frequently suggest to those who are just starting out in bonsai.

Ken Schultz

Tree of the Month

Oak Trees - *Quercus* sp.

Mention oaks as a bonsai subject and you will probably spark a debate that could last for hours. Some insist they just aren't suitable. That their leaves are too big, they have a coarse branch structure, that their root systems don't take to pots well, yada, yada, yada. This may be true in some species, but there are a lot of different oak species. Live Oaks and Chinquapin Oaks have small leaves that can reduce down to nice bonsai size. Pin oak, Red Oak and Black Oak have a reasonable branch structure, White Oaks have historical significance and visually interesting branching habits. One thing for sure is that almost all oaks have fruit that is in proportion to the larger bonsai sizes and it is long lasting on the tree.

Oaks have alternate leaves that develop from buds at the leaf scars. The ones I am familiar with tend to produce a whorl and dominant bud at the branch tip and these must be managed every spring. The young twigs can be green or reddish that darken to gray as the bark matures. The bark on many oaks will fissure and break into plates with age.

The leaf shape is an important identification key. White Oaks (*Q. alba*) have rounded leaf margins, These include Swamp White Oak (*Q. bicolor*), Bur Oak (*Q. macrocarpa*), English Oak (*Q. rober*), and Chinquapin Oak (*Q. muhlenburgii*). Of these, Burr Oak and Swamp White Oak are probably the least suitable as bonsai because of both very slow growth and leaf size.

The other main leaf characteristic is a spine or spur at the tips of the leaf margin. These would include Red Oak (*Q. rubra*), Pin Oak (*Q. palustris*), Scarlet Oak (*Q. coccinea*), Black Oak (*Q.*

ellipsoidalis and *Q. velutina*), and Shingle Oak (*Q. imbrica*). Several of these combine good leaf size with fine branching and reasonably fast growth for an oak.

If you are collecting volunteers to work on you are probably not going to get a pure strain. Oaks hybridize easily, and have a tendency to differentially prefer pollen from trees farther away instead of near neighbors. I have several specimens and I have collected all but my English Oak from fields or flower beds. Most of these are Pin Oak/Black Oak hybrids with a couple that have Red Oak leaf characteristics.

Generally oaks are tolerant of a fairly wide range of soils and moisture, but care must be taken to avoid water logging the soil. Although some grow in poor or sandy soil, they all will benefit from adequate humus and the white oaks tolerate a bit more moisture. The club soil will do fine and your favorite variations for your normal growing habits will probably be okay. Oaks prefer direct sun.

Repot in the spring on a two to four year schedule. Younger trees more often. A tree ready for display might only need repotting every five years. The first two or three repottings will be the ones to cut back the main tap root. This will encourage development of the nebari and allow the tree to fit in a normal bonsai pot. The tap root is mainly an anchor and not a feeder, but I have had bad results from trying to cut it back to much at once. Prune a week or two later after the buds start to show activity again. Oaks do back bud. I have completely topped 3 to 6 year old seedlings in years that I did not transplant, leaving only a stump with 3 or 4 buds on it. A well fed healthy tree will respond vigorously to this and throw out new shoots at every latent bud. Shoots can be pinched all growing season or they can be left alone to help thicken the tree. Again, deal with apical buds in a whorl before they all extend, unless you are planning it as a sacrifice branch.

The internet sources disagree as to whether leaf pruning does any good. About half say it helps, some say it wont, and one said it will make the leaves larger. I have a feeling it depends on the species. None of my bonsai books talk about oaks so I have no print references on this. since the longest I have had any of my oaks is 10 years (two White Oaks), I haven't worried about leaf reduction yet. On the Pin Oaks I have topped, the leaves came back smaller on the new shoots.

Fertilize throughout the spring and summer, slowing down as fall approaches. Oaks supposedly get a few blights and fungus infestations, but I have not had any trouble with these. One thing I am watchful for this year is Gypsy moth. The caterpillars will strip the tree of leaves in a short time and I don't know of any sprays I am willing to try. If you get brown leaves for no other apparent reason, check to see if the soil is waterlogged or if there is adequate air circulation.

Charles Herbert Otis, Michigan Trees, U of M Press, Rev 1972.

~ Zack Clayton

Thoughts on Fertilizing

I got this from the Iowa Bonsai Association newsletter.

" It's an old wives tale that fertilizing after transplanting potted plants will "burn the roots". About 10 years ago, SUNSET magazine published research on this to prove that immediate fertilizing had a very beneficial effect. They also tested vitamin B, and found it useless. I've found that a water soluble rooting hormone is much more effective. My repotting procedure is to soak the bonsai first in water and mild fertilizer. Wash the excess old soil off, and replace in pot with fresh soil. You will get a much faster recovery and new growth than with the old 4-6 week starvation program. Start your normal fertilizing procedure right away." - Mike Page.

This is an interesting issue. For years I was in the camp that said fertilization at repotting was not detrimental. I am still in that camp, but some interesting studies have been cited and I intend to do some double blind tests in the near future, as soon as the move is completed and things settle down. There is very little in the way of scientific testing on this question.

First let me point out my anecdotal experience. I have fertilized not just a few plants during and after repotting, I have done it to hundreds of thousands of plants (literally, no fish story here). I can't say I have never lost a repotted plant, but I have never been able to trace it to fertilizer. I have no axe to grind here, if not fertilizing works better, then I am all for it, live plants are money to me. On the other hand, I have no history of NOT fertilizing them, so my observations are limited to fertilization only.

FWIW, I have for years (ever since reading something Brent wrote quite a while ago) soaked newly potted and repotted trees in a solution of 20-20-20 fertilizer before putting them out on the shelves. I can't recall losing a tree from that action. Poinsettia are used for these kind of experiments, by the way, because they grow fast and root so readily, anyway. I doubt that extrapolation to bonsai is high. It's like using fruit flies for genetic experiments -- interesting, but not terribly useful without a great deal of work on organisms that are a bit close to the ones that would be targeted.

The absolute lack of efficacy of Vitamin B (and by extension, Superthrive) is well established, but their use persists because of marketing. There is a good deal of research that indicates the Vitamin B may even INHIBIT growth. And I repeat, plants MAKE vitamins, they do not USE them. Period.

I would question the use of a rooting hormone on a newly potted tree (except PERHAPS for the cut ends of LARGE roots -- as you would do on a cutting) because everything I have read in the literature indicates that the hormone actually INHIBITS root growth in existing roots.

Jim Lewis - jklewis@nettally.com - Tallahassee, FL

Editors note: ISU does not endorse the use of products containing B1 when transplanting . I must admit, however, that I have been known to use Superthrive along with a few muttered spells when repotting a bonsai. (Helen Magruder - Editor of Iowa Bonsai Association newsletter.)

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. The meetings are open to members.

February 16- John Hill & Son - Pot Making

February 22 - 23rd Annual Saturday workday at Dawes - Come pot, prune, wire, and pinch. Oh, and buy. 9:00AM to 3:00PM or so. This is a potluck lunch. Beverage and table service provided.

March 16- Soil & Fert. - Group Styling - work in groups with an "expert" on a tree supplied by the club.

March 31 - Last day to get the low price for attending MABA. On April 1 it will go up by \$50.

April 27*** - Pests (Mark) - Club Trees from the past - Note: Not on Easter. 4th Sunday

May 4 - Optional - Road trip to Huth's ??

May 18 - Guest - TBA

May 17 & 18 - All State Michigan Bonsai Show. Workshops for beginners and advanced artists, demos & retail items at Fredrick Meijer Gardens in Grand Rapids, Mi.

June 7-8 - Dawes Show, Dawes Arboretum.

June 21-22 - Show - BYOT to show off. Note: 4th sunday

July 4-5-6 - July 4th weekend of 2003. The Mid-America Bonsai Alliance and the Bonsai Society of Greater Cincinnati invite you to attend MABA 2003. The symposium starts on Thursday evening July 3rd with a demonstration by guest artist Salvatore Liporace. You'll find a full day of demonstrations on Friday and workshops on Friday evening, all day Saturday and Sunday morning. Check this Webpage: <http://maba2003.com> for the details.

July 20- Art Patznic - BYOT

August 17 - New Club Trees - (Clump styling??? lead by Jose???)

September 21- Picnic

October 19 - Fall Show

November 16 -4 stations - Pots/Trees/Tool sharpening/Winterization

December - Holiday dinner

Say welcome to:

New members are: Renewing members are:

Reed Blocksom Dennis Sackett

Drew Cawthon Jim Warren

David Cleesattle

Tobe Conn & Phillip A. Conn

Mike Gallicchio

Catherine Smith

President - Ken Schultz

1st Vice President - Dan Binder

2nd Vice President - John Hill

Secretary - Mark Passerello

Treasurer - Dick Guervitz

1 year Board - Jesse Welton

2 year Board - Linda Fields

3 year Board - Ben William
Librarian - Merida Weinstein
Newsletter Editor - Zack Clayton
Refreshment Coord - vacant

February, and Spring, is just around the corner!!!

Sign up now for the February Pot making Session. Cost is only \$15.00 with all clay and firing supplied. Bring tools if you have them, Club VP John Hill and his son Jerrod will supply tools if you don't have any. For an extra \$5.00 you can get more clay and make a bigger slab pot for that group planting you did last year.

Reserve your spot now, call John Hill today at 614-871-0298 or email JOHNJAP@AOL.COM

Spaces are filling up so call or email John for availability.

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NAME _____

REGULAR POT 5 to 7 # \$15.00 _____

SLAB POT 8 to 10 # \$20.00 _____