

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - March 2003

Winter Blues? Shop for Japanese Maples to Bring in the Sun

Linda and I have been busy renovating the kitchen – the trees in the basement have suffered, but never fear, we've noticed the buds on the maple behind the house have begun to swell in anticipation of spring. At Dawes, John Hill saw some robins. And with the rains melting the snow, spring can't be too far off.

A good number of Club members were at Dawes enjoying the Annual Bonsai Workshop. It was good to see such a nice turnout, even with the fog and rain. Many bonsai were created that will be sold at the Dawes Show in June. Art Patznik announced that the Arboretum has authorized the expansion of their space to display bonsai. Due to recent donations, Art reported that about thirty new trees will be displayed. To fund the expansion Dawes has established a Bonsai Fund. About \$7,000 is needed.

If you are getting seed and plant catalogues from nurseries, don't forget to look them over for bonsai candidates. I saw some wonderful buys. And the digging season has started in the south. In the April issue of "Horticulture" magazine I found two Japanese maple nurseries (along with New England Bonsai and a listing for a bamboo nursery). So last week, I explored their offerings.

www.miyamaasianmaples.com in Laytonville, California offers truly "mountain grown" maples. They are 3,300 feet above sea level. There were over 100 varieties listed on their web site. Some noted that they had extra low grafts to make them suitable for bonsai. For the species I checked prices ranged from \$30 to \$90, but I didn't check shipping costs.

www.mountainmaples.com was the other site I checked. Their site is searchable by climate zones. So I checked on species that are hardy to Zone 5. There were 38 listed, with notes that they were suitable for bonsai. They have 4 beech species. Prices on the ones that were available for shipping were \$40 – 60. However, a number of species that I checked said there was a "Reserve" with no price listed. The site had photos of all offerings and close ups of the leaves. Miyama Asian did not.

Our Show

Plans are underway! Vendors have expressed interest. For some, it will be possible to show at Dawes, our show and MABA. Think about what pot your tree will look best in as you repot this spring. Late March to early May will be potting season for most out door specimens. I need to remember not to over prune the trees that I want to show, last year I eliminated a couple of my favorites by pruning too late and the tree never had a chance to recover before the show.

Bonsai Classes

Franklin Park Conservatory will be conducting a three class series on bonsai. May 7, 14 and 21, 6:30 – 8:30PM. Mark Ryan, Dan Binder, Zack Clayton and Ken Schultz will co-teach. Course content will include; the history of bonsai, proportion and balance, styles, selection of plant material, care, potting, wiring, and a tree to style and pot. Sign up will be through the Conservatory. I believe the cost will be \$100 with a 10% discount for Conservatory and Bonsai

club members. We estimate that about half the cost will be in the materials that will be provided.
~ Ken Schultz

Coming Attractions

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 1 of four groups 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, join Mark Passerello, Zack Clayton, John Hill or Ken Schultz in styling the hidden bonsai!

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 on April 27, will be Mark Ryan, FPC, on controlling pests and diseases. Then we are asking club members to search their collections for those trees they created in Workshops gone by. We would like to see both your successes and failures. Unfortunately, Ken thinks he may have thrown out his dead Scots pine. That's okay Ken, I have a dead one from the snow trek dig that I can give you.

Speaking of which, this years field trip is scheduled for May 4 to Ken Huth's place. He has promised to have the barbecue hot with goodies to eat and plants priced to sell. He has shared about some of the plants he is getting in this year and they sound pretty nice. Ken's nursery is about 2 hours away near Akron. Plans are already under way for our show. I anticipate that we will leave from the Polaris area at about 10 AM, I suspect we won't be back until about 6:00 PM. Ken Schultz has started a sign up sheet, so please let him know if you want to come along.

For our May 18 meeting, an azalea workshop featuring Tom McCormik has been confirmed! This will be a "bring your own tree" workshop. Spaces are limited to 12. The cost is \$25. These are filling up quickly. All members should plan to attend this session, which will start at NOON. Tom will start with a lecture on azalea care and training. He said he will bring a couple of his trees to illustrate his presentation. Tom is a teacher by trade, and is well know in the bonsai world. Tom is the current president of MABA, the Mid America Bonsai Association, (our club is a member) and he serves as a director on the American Bonsai Society Board. I am really excited about this session; I don't believe the Club has featured azaleas in over 7 years. You should plan to attend, even if you aren't planning on participating in the workshop. Please contact Ken Schultz or send an email to the club address if you want to participate, this will be first come, and spaces are limited.

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

The Living Art of Bonsai

By: Professor Amy Liang

I was lucky enough to purchase this book a few years ago and continue to find it a worthy addition to my bonsai library. I brought it with me to the pot making session because it had a pot similar to the one I wanted to create for a Korean Hornbeam forest that I am working on. I am sure you would recognize this book immediately, it is oversized and has an exposed root azalea covered in red blooms on its cover. It is also 288 pages long; therefore, it covers quite a number of topics. There are numerous color photographs of very high quality trees in well suited pots, many are on display stands. The only drawback is that the author lives in Taipei and therefore the materials you see the author working with in this book may not be readily available.

Due to this book's length this report cannot do it justice, but I will attempt to highlight a few of the sections that I found interesting. The first 87 pages are in a chapter called Bonsai Appreciation. The photographs are of real show winners, in fact several show the phot and then a postage stamp that was produced to honor that tree. There is a chapter on Chinese rock planting, with a section on how to create your own planting. The chapter on Styles is an unusual presentation of photos of actual trees and color "chalk style" drawings, which gives them a soft look. One of my favorite chapters is the one on Group Planting. It is this chapter that has the tray that I tried to copy. The group planting chapter also has a "how-to" section.

The next several chapters go through how a tree works, care, training, transplanting, selecting a pot, creating jin and shari, and finally, Appreciating Bonsai. Each chapter has interesting advanced techniques. In the Training and Dwarfing of Bonsai chapter there are tips on correcting defects of roots and how to make a trunk thick. Thickening the truck tips include trimming top branches and allowing lower branches to elongate. One of the tips under the creation of shari is to do your carving in the winter when the flow of sap is slow, but to cut trunk canals between March and may when the sap is active and the tree will heal more quickly. The chapter on selecting a pot includes a page that shows actual tree stumps positioned in different style pots to show proper planting positions for each. Only the square pot had a tree in the center! ~ Ken Schultz

Tree of the Month

Maples - A Deeper Look at Technique

When you think of maples as bonsai what do you think of? A tree with the growth potential of a controlled weed, inexpensive volunteer stock for experimentation, the japanese maples with delicate foliage, huge leaves, an easy tree to work that back buds readily, or a tree that will stay small for practically ever as a mame?

Wait a minute. Say that last one again.

A lot of books and magazine articles advise that you should let the shoots elongate and then pinch back to two or three buds. Repeat with the new growth. This is generally what I do and it works nicely to get the basic structure in place. But, if I kept that up then every year I would be adding two to four leaf nodes at the end of every branch. How long will it take a mame to

outgrow itself at that rate? I grow mostly larger trees but even on a two hand tree it adds up over time.

I don't usually think about mame size trees at all, let alone mame maples, but there are ways to grow and maintain small maples with tremendous ramification. The key word here is maintain. And I started to think, if its possible to maintain the size and shape of a mame maple for 30 or 50 years, why not apply those techniques to the shohin and larger size trees that I grow? I have them in the size I want and the branch structure is basically defined. Now, what do I do to maintain them for the long term?

Most of these are not instant gratification techniques. For those use the styling and care suggestions in the other Tree of the Month articles that focus on maples. Those articles mention how to thicken trunks and rapidly develop branches and ramification. The methods detailed here will take time to achieve results. But then, they are techniques to hold the line on style and size for our lifetime.

First, be sure that you do everything to maintain the vigor and health of the tree that you can. You will be stressing it with these techniques but they should be okay if they are otherwise in good condition.

In the spring, let the tree grow for 6 to 8 weeks. Then, before the new growth starts to lignify, cut them back to the original bud location and leaf prune everything that is left. In about 2 weeks, you will see new buds forming at the branch ends. Pinch these off also, don't let them develop. In about another 2 weeks, you will start to see small buds at most of the branch and twig junctions. Take off any of these that are growing vertically up or down, but leave the horizontal buds alone. They will be the basis for your style maintenance. Select the buds that support the form you desire and pinch off the other buds after they leaf out. At some point you will start removing some of the older branches and just use the younger wood/buds for the style and foliage pads. Always arrange to leave one bud on the tip of a branch. This severe pinching is how these trees are kept to a minimum of growth.

If you are preparing the tree for a show, try to time this so that you have new bud and leaf growth about a month old for the display. This whole cycle can be repeated again for central Ohio. Areas with a longer summer or very early spring may be able to push this to 3 times a summer. Just watch out for August and dry heat. These conditions would not be good for this treatment.

If you want to create more branch buds or encourage growth near the branch tips then you can defoliate the entire tree. If you want to let the ramification develop at the tip do nothing more. If you want to force ramification back on the branches, then pinch out the tip buds as they start to develop. To defoliate a tree cut the leaves off at the base of the leaf where it attaches to the stem (petiole). Leave the stem attached to the branch until it dries and falls off. This protects the potential bud and allows the tree to adsorb some nutrition out of the stub as it dies back.

What if you want an area of "weaker" growth to regain its vigor? There are a couple of ways to do this. Just pinch out the stronger leaders and leave the weaker sprouts alone. When you defoliate or do the less severe leaf pruning leave the smaller leaves on interior or weak branches

alone. The other method is to continually take off the larger leaves on the tree. If you figure out the average leaf size then pick off the largest 5% of the leaves. You can do this anytime you see large leaves developing and it can be safely continued though out the life of the tree.

Either of these techniques serve to let light and air in to the interior of the tree. Light on the interior leaves means they are producing more sugars (food) from those leaves and this feeds the cambium layers supported by them. Remember that mineral salts and water flow up the sap wood to the leaves, they produce the sugars that the cambium and roots actually feed on.

If you want to increase the girth of a trunk or branch, use sacrifice branches. Leave these branches alone and do not defoliate, leaf prune, or pinch them. They are growth engines and will be removed when they have served their purpose at the end of the season. A sacrifice branch can be left on for more than a year or two, but my experience tells me that for the Red, Sugar, Black, and Norway maples that I work with most of the time, a new branch will give me more growth at the next season plus the pruning scar will be smaller. Since they are maples, there will be plenty of available sprouts on a vigorous tree.

To thicken a whole trunk chose a sprout near the apex, or a sprout that will be part of the future trunk line. To increase taper choose a sprout near (below) the point you want the taper to start decreasing. For a thicker branch, treat it as if you were working on the entire trunk with that branch as the apex. The important thing with this procedure is to select sacrifice branches and sprouts that you can delete without trashing the design. This will usually mean something coming off the back of the trunk or the bottom of a branch. As you get to about 10% of the final height of a tree's size, but you still want it thicker, try to choose several branches as the sacrifice(s). This will keep you from having one heavy scar or branch stub far up the tree where it would be out of proportion. Two or three smaller scars up there will be much easier to hide.

Wire or pinch for your growth habit as soon as the branch or trunk will hold the shape. Its much easier to shape a 1/8" whip than a 1/4-1/2" stick. The whip isn't as apt to break and you have more time for the bark to heal if the wire scars it. Actually try to get your wire off before the branch scars. I can't show data to prove it, but branches that are scarred always seem to take longer to develop. When ever the bark is scarred the tree is stressed in that area and development seems to slow down as a result.

~Zack Clayton

References:

The Secret of Maple Creation. Keiko Harris and Jean Smith. Bonsai Magazine. May/June 1995. pp 8 - 11. (Translated from Bonsai Sekei. Issue 7.)

The History of the Reshaping of a Trident Maple. Yoneia Zuyo. Bonsai Today 32. 1994-4. pp 58 - 62.

The Handy Dandy Guide to Shopping in a Garden Center

So - you've been hearing us talk about how we got started in Bonsai. How we got a tree as a gift, or started playing with volunteer maples (elms, spruce, etc.) Growing in our flower beds. But

what about those nursery plants showing up in the workshops? Ahh, any one could go and get one of those - right?

Right. And any of them could be potted up and reduced as a bonsai. But - will it be a bonsai you want to look at? Can you get from a place of, "This is a tree in a pot. . ." and get to "This tree will make a nice bonsai." And can you get there in your purchase decision?

I see quite a few trees come in to the meetings that are very nice garden stock. When I ask "what style do you see for this?" I get the deer in the headlights stare and a muttered, "Umm, I don't know, what do you think?" I will have to admit I have been guilty of this myself. I think most of have been at one time or another. What led us to buy that plant? We paid good money for something - What was it? I suppose we could take notes, but I don't usually go into a garden center specifically to buy a new tree. I have more than any rational person needs, so my tree purchases tend to be impulse buys. What did I see in there to make me buy it?

Now that said, any tree can be reduced and kept in a pot as bonsai. Some are easier than others, a few will look better than the rest. How do we select out those few? How do we plan to come home with that tree that will make other club members say, "Oh, that's a nice tree."

Get a tree that is suited to your talents. I have been whacked on the nose by my statuary enough times to know I need to stay away from tropicals until I can get a greenhouse added on. At least if I'm not planning on using the trunk for a phoenix graft next year. I hope that my workshop chinese elm came from the northern end of the range. Its outside under my benches with the rest of my trees. It may survive the winter. But I KNOW that it would be dead if I had brought it into the house.

How are your horticultural skills? If you have a green thumb that can keep anything alive you can go for more material than the rest of us. I see advice in a lot of books that the discard pile is a good place to get interesting trees. Well - anymore, those trees are not going to be healthy mis-shaped and interesting trees. The healthy trees get sold to the people who don't care about shape or are put into special "Prebonsai" (read as expensive) areas. The discards are usually sick or dying. There may be some interesting things there, but can you keep it alive?

How much time do you want to spend for something that looks good? If you want a nice looking instant bonsai look for a tree that is already "bonsai-ish". They are out there, you just have to look at more plants to find them. Don't be afraid to look at plants that aren't traditional bonsai material. Some bushes adapt very well to a bonsai style.

Okay, now you have some ideas about what to stay away from, but what do you look for?

Look for a nice trunk. Try to find a trunk with some taper built in. If there is no taper but the rest of the tree has good potential, are there branches low down that could thicken the trunk and then be sacrificed? Does the trunk have movement or is it a straight stick? A straight stick might be okay for a formal upright, but that is a difficult style. If it bends and turns, is there a pleasant movement or rhythm in the motion? If you think you can bend the trunk with wire, is it really big

enough to form a nice tree in your time line? Above all remember, an ugly trunk will thicken, heal scars, sprout, or do other things, but if the shape is ugly, it will just get bigger ugly.

Branches are a good thing to have on nursery stock. You can always cut them off. But if they aren't there does the species backbud? Can you graft a new branch on and hide the graft scar? Some people can and do, but I'm still a way off from that kind of advanced technique. Also, do the branches look normal? I'm asking about big branches at the bottom and thinner, smaller ones at the top. A big thick branch at the top is hard to keep and have it look good. Cutting it off is an option, but how will that affect the rest of the top? Beware of cultivars. Some nice species have been developed for street planting, and that usually means the branches will try to grow straight up. You can still develop a nice bonsai with these, but be prepared to wire it down every spring.

This touches on another aspect of the branching, does the growth habit support the tree you see in the plant? I don't see many *J. procumbens nana* or green carpet junipers as formal uprights, and I don't remember seeing any cascade maples. They probably exist, but they don't show up in coffee table books.

Lastly check the roots. I say last because you can reject 95% of what you don't want with the above checks. Once you start messing around with finding the root base you are getting close to buying the plant. Some places really don't like customers pulling the plant halfway out of the pot or digging down into it to check the nebari. Also, if you are looking for bigger stock, this can get tiring and messy after the 3rd or 4th tree. Do the roots match the trunk? Read up on this one, there isn't space left here.

Do think of the size of the tree you want. Something moderately too big can be cut back with okay results in a short time frame. Small trees will only grow so fast and if it is really too small then maybe that is the size you should plan for the specimen. Small trees that are super fertilized may bolt and create internodes that are much too long to look good on anything.

Buy local stock. You may not have the exotic bristlecone pine, but what you do get locally will probably stay healthy easier and longer. You can probably stretch a zone 6 tree to Columbus, and Zone 3 and 4 will probably do just fine, but if it comes from too far away. It may be used to different fall conditions and spring ramp up/bud break. At my old house I had a magnolia in my back yard. It tried to flower every year. I think it kept flowers once in the 14 years we lived there. The rest of the time they got frosted or snowed off.

Look at the tree. If you don't see your bonsai in there someplace, put it down, step away from the plant and look at the next one. Don't buy something "really neat" if you don't see the bonsai in it, leave it for the next person. They may see the potential tree.

If you go to the nursery looking for "something", you'll probably find it. The question will be "What is it?" If you go looking for bonsai, one of the plants there will speak to you. When Ken and I went looking for the \$5 trees for the workshop last Spring, we sometimes went through entire rows of pots to find one or two for the workshop. If you are looking for your own, be at least that picky. Don't be afraid to leave without a plant. They'll have more next week.

~Zack Clayton

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.

March 16- Soil & Fertilizer - 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 - Road trip to Ken Huth's gardens. possibly in conjunction with the Sandusky club. Meet some new friends!

May 18 - Meeting starts at 12:00 noon. Tom McCormick Workshop on Azaleas.

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 Patznik - 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

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

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