

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - September 2003

Its that time of year when memberships are up for renewal. If you get this mailed to you look at the number at the end of your name, If it says 03 you still need to renew. Just take a moment to fill in the attached form and send it with a check. If you already sent your renewal in, thank you, and why not take the opportunity to give it to an interested friend?

What are you doing to get ready for winter? It's not too early to start thinking about this. One of the articles this month deals with insect control and another mentions a plant several of you purchased at the show this summer. Check you pots to be sure they aren't chipped or cracked. If you find one that has a defect that won't survive winter you can still repot if you don't mess with the roots. Just over pot it with a good cushion of soil around the existing root ball. Or, you can put the pot itself down into another container and put soil around that, but you have to be a little more attentive to water if you go this route. The interior pot won't drain as well. Of course if something happens during the winter, this may be your only option. It's not too late to fertilize, just be sure there is little or no nitrogen in your mix. And dilute is the word of the day at this point in time. The object to fall fertilizing is to give the tree the minerals and elements it needs to prepare itself for dormancy, not to create growth. With the weather we have been having this summer, watch the weather report. We could have early unexpected frosts or just plain miserable cold snaps that go below the comfort range of our treasures. Do you have a place cleaned off for them inside? I know I need to clear off some shelf space and put in some other surfaces to accommodate my tropicals.

Affair of the Hort

September 27 and 28 marks our annual commitment to staff the Columbus Bonsai Society Booth at the Affair of the Hort at Inniswood Gardens. If you have never been to Inniswood you should mark your calendar now and plan to attend. Literally thousands of gardening enthusiasts will come to Inniswood Gardens on this last month in September to buy nursery stock, talk to a wide variety of gardening organizations and watch demonstrations on gardening. So far eight Club members have signed up to staff our booth.

Coming Attractions

September Fall Picnic, Sunday 9/21. The picnic starts 1:00 ish and continues until John kicks us out. Bring a dish to share and your favorite lawn chair. (John will have some chairs.) Thanks to John Hill for volunteering to be a host for the Picnic this year. Since only a few of us made it to last year's shindig due to the rain this is a second chance to see a really amazing private garden.

A new option for us this year is provided courtesy of Oakland Park Nursery. John was in the right place at the right time and got a great deal on some ficus too-little and we should have enough for everyone to style a nice mame tree. Bring along a suitable pot for this bonus workshop. Thank you Jodi, and thank you Oakland Park.

Its also a great chance to participate in our member sale. Bring in that tree with a lot of potential that you just never seem to get to work on and let someone else fall in love with it. They deserve

a chance on it if you won't and it gives you a little more space on your benches for that really great tree that will (fill in the blank) your collection Who knows, you may even find that perfect pot for the *Gymnodium sparsroxis* that you've been looking for. So bring in your extras and stuff you've given up on. Hope will spring eternal for someone else and who are we to deny them? The club receives 10% of all sales.

Who has the DOG? Another annual event of the club is the presentation of the Jing Gow Jiang, or Golden Dog award for the most completely hopeless tree style. The rules are 1. It must be alive. and 2. It must be in a bonsai pot. Now I must say that over the last several years entirely to much emphasis has been placed on rule 1. The object here is not to provide the most nearly dead tree possible. This is really for a hopeless styling challenge. So bring in your Healthy - cascade maple, your literati sheflera, and your broom style pine. The idea is that members bring their "doggiest bonsai tree". Each entrant is explained, and after all are introduced the "winner" is selected by applause. The trophy is a small ceramic Jing Gow with a branch that has the names of the winners from the past on it. If we have at least three entrants the contest will be on. One year I remember we had about nine. We do want to point and laugh, and commemorate you with our other winners from the past.

And our October 19 guest is Jack Wikle. Jack is widely known for his mame bonsai that he keeps indoors under artificial lights. He does not consider size, species, and all that to be big issues. Almost anything that has some bonsai potential or poses interesting design problems is a candidate and opportunity for personal growth. A lot of bonsai is about what one can do with what one has. His media presentation will not be a slide show, he will be using real bonsai he has been growing under fluorescent light, not images. The format is "show and tell" and response to questions from the group.

If you attended the MABA show in July, the outstanding *Pyrocantia* root over rock was from his collection.

Book of the month

Book Report: miniature bonsai
by Herb L. Gustafson

Merrida, our Librarian recently purchased eight new books for the Club library. Among them was this 1995 copyright book by Herb Gustafson. Mr. Gustafson is from Oregon, as I've noted in the other books that he has written, this can occasionally result in misleading advice for us Ohio bonsai artists. This book, however, is timely in that it covers truly miniature bonsai, a favorite of the guest artist that the Club has arranged for in October, Mr. Jack Wikle. Mr. Wikle is widely know in the bonsai world for his collection of mame' sized bonsai.

A rather large book (8.5 X 12" and 192 pages) on a small subject (mame) I cannot possibly do this book justice with a quick review. It contains nine chapters that cover the gambit of topics needed to keep your bonsai alive and healthy. However, what attracted me to this book (since I already own four Gustafson books) were the photographs of bonsai held between two fingers of one hand! One photo is a flower (lobelia) blooming in the cap of an acorn. (As Zack said to me

the other day, maybe we should do an article on accent plants.) Another is a ginkgo with just four leaves.

Whoever asked, what books can I read that tell me how a plant grows, and what do I do to keep my trees small, should read chapter 6 of this book. The time critical aspects of pinching, trimming and repotting are covered. An interesting comment on repotting is that you should never allow your trees to exceed a state of 85% pot bound, 50% is the recommended measure. That's when the amount of roots occupies 50% of the space in the pot. Gustafson also states that the soil content of a pot should never be more than 50%. In this range he states that bonsai will do their best. In this chapter he also has a few tips on growing moss around your trees. This chapter emphasizes the importance of using the proper bonsai soil. You have probably noticed that most books carry the author's favorite formula(s) for soil. Gustafson covers particle size, pH and components to avoid.

Chapter 7 features a number of photos that show how to create miniature bonsai from larger stock. To say that this is unnerving is not doing it justice. It has taken me over ten years to begin to look at bonsai stock ruthlessly as this photos show. Most of us cringe at the thought of taking off more than half of a plant's growth. However in the same chapter there is a nice section on creating a miniature landscape from three rooted cuttings in a medium sized tray.

As noted earlier, this book also features companion plants. All I need to say is – see the pictures! Chapter 8 covers care and maintenance and chapter 9 covers seasonal care. The Care and Maintenance chapter has a chart for emergency care. It presents the symptom, the possible cause and the treatment. This chart is very comprehensive. I especially appreciated the recommendation of using a pinwheel to keep birds and squirrels away. The seasonal care chapter is also timely. With the many new Club members, I know that the coming of the first frost and keeping your tropicals alive and healthy over the winter will be challenging. Some books, such as this one address the subject. I will also be teaching a class with Mark Ryan at the Conservatory on September 24 on this subject, and in November we will have a station at our four stations of bonsai November meeting, devoted to ideas on how to winter your trees. Gustafson covers a wide variety of activities that you can undertake in each season. One tip is early winter wiring of deciduous trees, with tips on letting them go a little dry to make them less brittle.

Near the very back of this book (pages 167-180 is a listing of plants recommended for miniature bonsai. The list has a number of familiar species as well as some unusual inclusions for the international audience; some I haven't seen in this country. The list also contains some of the accent or companion plants. Sorry, Nandina is not listed, but several narcissuses are. Also, asparagus fern is listed, as is rabbit's foot fern. This book truly illustrates the fact that we are only limited by our imagination. (See you at the Jack Wikle presentation in October!)

General Growing Tips

Sap Sucking Scale!

Do you see “honeydew” on your plant’s leaves? (Honeydew is partially digested sap; it looks like little sticky droplets) Are leaves turning yellow, and your plant seems to have stopped growing? If you peer closely at the tops or the undersides of the leaves, do you see small roundish brown bumps on them, randomly scattered, but mostly along the petiole. If you look closely on the twigs and stems near the tips of the branches some of what you thought were bumps of bark, may also be SCALE!! Outdoors ants may also be present as they find the honeydew tasty. Scale insects pierce the leaves and stems and suck the sap from plants causing them to lose vigor color and in severe cases lead to extensive leaf yellowing, premature leaf drop, branch dieback and death of the plant.

There are over 3,000 species of scale insects in North America. Scale are related to MEALYBUGS, but instead of being white and waxy, scale have a hard shell that is their exoskeleton. Color is most often brown but can be reddish or greenish. The females in the young stage find a place to feed. She will develop the protective covering and lose the use of her legs, remaining in one spot for the rest of her life. Males emerge as yellowish 2 winged insects with 3 pairs of legs and antennae. They move about and mate with the stationary females and then die. The females lay eggs (some species have live birth). The eggs hatch under the shell, and then crawl out to find a place to feed. This may happen as many as 6 times a year, May, June, August and September. That’s NOW! Indoors the cycle goes on unchecked. And they love warm humid environments like greenhouses. To make matters worse scale insects lay more eggs and survive better on plants receiving a lot of nitrogen.

Plants that are attacked include fruit trees, ash, camellia, cedar, crabapple, dogwood, elm, honey locust, juniper, lilac, maple, oak, pine willow, houseplants like hibiscus, holly, ixora and ficus, etc. Sounds like the meal ticket for the Tasmanian Devil in a Bugs Bunny cartoon.

Under outdoor conditions the population may be controlled somewhat by natural predators such as lady bugs, green lacewings, wasps, and parasitic fungi. Some insects can be mechanically removed by scraping them off with a fingernail, knife or washed off with a hose. But chemical control will be needed for most infestations. Dormant oils like Volck’s oil can be used in the early spring. Neem oil can be used to interrupt the life cycle. Because of their shell like body, it takes a good soaking to penetrate the shell and kill the insect. Some plants (like Fukian Tea) may lose all their leaves from treatment. Systemics can also be used with some success, but these usually are combined with a fertilizer, and right now it is too late in the season to be applying a fertilizer with nitrogen, so read the label before doing this on outdoor plants. You might get away with this on tropicals, if you don’t have leaf eating cats or other pets when you bring them in doors in October.

I have read that using a Q-tip with isopropyl alcohol works, but alcohol can also kill some plants leaves, so test an area first. *Sagaretia theazans* is one that doesn’t like this. Some sources say use insecticidal soap like Safer’s. These articles, if read closely go on to say frequent reapplications may be necessary; like after every rain to remain effective. This year would be a lost cause, but most soaps are safe around pets. And for indoor use, you can even make your own mixture of dishwashing soap, tobacco and cola.

Whatever method you choose, now is a good time to start to keep from bring unwanted hitchhikers from having a mid-winter population explosion on the plants you need to bring indoors.

Tree of the Month

Heavenly Bamboo – *Nandina domestica*
Tree of the Month by Ken Schultz

Several members have asked or talked about their Heavenly or Sacred Bamboo plants. I have seen them at some of the places where bonsai are sold, but truthfully I have never owned one. Therefore I searched my collection of 38 bonsai books and even checked the Internet. Generally, about one out of 3 of my the books has a very brief description and a few care tips on Heavenly or Sacred Bamboo. Several have the same photo of a very large and old specimen, estimating its age to be over 500 years. The plant is quiet spectacular, but nothing like I've seen offered for sale. It is 32 inches tall and is Chinese owned. It is multiple trunked and exposed root styled.

Heavenly Bamboo is *Nandina*. It is offered as an outdoor plant in zones 6 thru 9. My sources speculate that they are hardy down to 51 or 45 degrees depending on the author's experience. Reportedly they can take a light frost but are not able to be kept outdoors in a pot where they might freeze. *Nandina* are not bamboo. It does have compound bamboo like leaves. Their new leaves emerge red and will retain their reddish color in good light. Reportedly they have small whitish flowers presented in loose spikes; these maybe followed by bright red berries. Since its growth is reported as multiple shoots from ground level, I suspect that the spectacular Chinese specimen is an old plant whose roots were slowly exposed. One source reports that the stems tend to develop a bulge from pruning, so looking at the photo of the old specimen, I am guessing that the trunks and foliage are much younger than the exposed root mass. The bark reportedly become mature looking at a young age.

Other than not being hardy to zones 5 (ours) and below, and liking strong but not direct sunlight, it is suggested that they enjoy good air circulation and dew to keep their foliage in peak condition. They are native to China, India and Japan. If kept indoors, misting twice a day is recommended. As bonsai a glazed pot is suggested, my books show colors from dark blue to off white. Pick a color that doesn't clash with the red foliage. Interestingly, the pots are mostly rectangular, though I suspect other shapes would be OK. Proportionally the pots look shallow on the larger specimens, maybe 3".

Repotting is suggested as every three to four years in the spring. Because of its natural clump growth, they may be divided to keep from needing to large a container. Young plants are not as hardy as older plants, so care must be taken when repotting not to cause too much trauma. It is reported that pruning shoots back to old wood or the ground will result in many new shoots emerging, but it is suggested that you should thin these out to prevent over crowding and to maintain your composition. When pinching back the tips of the shoots, care must be taken to leave some, as the flowers emerge in early summer on last year's wood.

Water frequently as these are moisture loving plants, but avoid letting them become water logged. Feed them low nitrogen fertilizer throughout the growing season. High nitrogen reportedly causes them to become leggy and the leaves to become large.

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.

September 21- Picnic 1:00 to later.

September 27-28 - Affair of the Hort at Inniswood Gardens, 10-6 PM Saturday and 11-5 on Sunday. There will be sign ups for Volunteers

October 19 - Fall Show - Bring in your trees in their fall colors. Guest speaker is Jack Wikle on Raising Mame Indoors.

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

December - Holiday dinner

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January – Did your friend get a bonsai for Christmas?

February 28 - Dawes Work Day, 9:00 at Dawes Arboretum

March - Work session to make soil for the March meeting.

April 18 - Getting a tree show ready, what the professionals do - Also help and advice on trees you are considering for the June show.

June 19 and 20 - The Columbus Bonsai Society Annual Show. Yes it's on Fathers day again.

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