

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - April 2004

Repotting Season is not to be confused with procrastinating season, the warm weather in February has made my bonsai trees ready to repot sooner than any other year. Deciduous trees need to be repotted before the buds open. I had a few things that were ready the last weekend in March. Soon with a few more warm days it could be too late for the ideal repotting time. Conifers have also begun to show signs of breaking dormancy, so I jumped on the ones that I missed because last year when repotting season lasted about one day!

Many of my trees were root pruned and put back in the same pot as I wish to maintain their current size. This is also the perfect opportunity to put your tree in the pot you want to show it in, if it has been in a nursery or plastic growing pot. Failing to repot your trees will cause them to become pot bound. The roots become less efficient and the tree will grow weaker. If you don't know when the tree was last repotted, you may need to cut the wire that holds it in its pot and take a peek. If it looks like the roots are really packed into the pot, it's probably past due. Check to see if the surface or bark has decomposed because if it has, it will cause root rot

Despite the cooler rainy weather that followed the cloudy but warm Sunday, I couldn't have hoped for better repotting weather. Keith Scott told us the best repotting weather was cool and rainy, as this prevented roots from drying out. Also, I happened to have gotten a bag of mycorrhiza spores last year, so I sprinkled it into the soil that I used for my pines. Mycorrhiza are beneficial fungi that help pines take up nutrients from the soil. For my acid loving plants, Zack will be glad to know that I've been saving coffee grounds and I added it to their soil mix. In addition it adds an organic component and helps retain moisture in the summer.

When repotting, make sure that you position the "front" front of the tree towards the front of the pot. You may have had a change in mind, so hopefully you had put a nail or something on the side you thought made the best viewing point. I know that Linda and I have a Kingsville Boxwood that has been in a growing pot for three years so this year it made the jump to a bonsai pot. I thought I had the best front selected, but now I'm already having second thoughts. I hope to get to the Larch next, it was styled by Colin Lewis and he had selected a new front when he restyled this tree. I did spend over an hour pruning it back and removing wire on Sunday. This is also a major step in making sure your trees will be ready to show. While they may get a little light pruning a few days before the show, you'll want to do any major wiring and pruning now so that there aren't large new cuts that need to be hidden at show time.

While I am moving trees around now, I am not placing them up on their benches yet. I'm sure we're in for a cold snap or two before mid May and we may end up covering trees with a sheet to protect them. On the other hand, I did discover that I am the keeper of a number of Iron-Bonsai plants and other trees that may be offered for sale at the April meeting. In the meantime, I hope to get more days to work on my trees, and please buy some Alberta Spruces!!! - Ken

Coming Attractions

In April we will have one of our quasi annual club tree workshops. The club will be supplying trees from Oakland park in the \$5.00 retail price range and every member gets to work on one

and take it home. If you aren't a member you will have the opportunity to join. The club has done this several times over the years and it is always fun to see how the trees progress and in some cases change style. Several of them have appeared in shows after a couple of years of training. So come out and style a tree with us. Board members will be around to help if you aren't sure what needs to be done.

We will also be talking about what needs to be done for trees you are going to show in June. There are some maintenance chores that need this much time. If you are thinking about putting a tree in the show but aren't sure about it, bring it in.

By the way, take note of the styling contest: Alberta Spruce (*Picea glauca albertiana* 'conica') open to all Club members. We have beginner (styled less than 5 trees so far) intermediate (styled 5 – 25 trees), and advanced (more than 25 trees styled by you). The "Winners" will get their names in the newsletter - with a photo of them and their tree and a free bag of soil - value \$3. (Other prizes to be determined)

Judging in July.

And just where should you get your Alberta Spruce? From the Club. At the April and May meetings we will be selling Alberta Spruce, \$3 for 1, 2 for \$5, and 5 for \$10.

Then in May, Zack and Ben will take on the subject of Maples - but not just any bonsai maple - Garden Volunteers - practice on them, test ideas on them, learn from them, and then show some. What have you got to lose? They were just growing in the flower bed before you came along. And there will be information on getting trees ready for the show - If you have any questions about what you are showing this is the last chance to get advice.

That show I keep mentioning is the June show which is for all members to participate in. It is Fathers Day weekend and we are asking people to register their trees as early as possible. We want to keep last minute typing and printouts to a minimum so if you have the smallest intention of showing a tree, please go ahead and give us the information. We can easily make electrons disappear instantly.

Tree of the month

Setting the stage for Pine Trees - A Re-cap of Gary Woods on March 21st

Sooner or later, if you stay with Bonsai, you will have a Pine under your care. It is fairly inevitable. I began working with bonsai when I started a few Black Pine seeds for a friend. True to the nature of bonsai, you never can find just the information you need when you need it. I didn't but I figured keeping the seedlings growing would get me there eventually. Well, after many years of messing around and sheepishly asking questions, I finally got an understanding of the what, the why, and the how of bonsai pines when Gary Woods presented to the Club last month. It helped a lot to finally have a framework for all the snatches of information I have collected. I hope it helps others in the same quandary.

The Pinus genus is a large, old family of trees which have found a way to adapt to a variety of environments. The key distinction for Japanese bonsai is between trees acclimated to the high altitude mountains or the monsoon-oriented trees found on the coastal plains. The former group are the traditional 5-needle white pines (5-needles to each bundle sheath) and the latter are the 2-needle black pines. The management of these two groups are different. The management of other pine species rest somewhere in between these two management types depending on their natural environments. White pines bud one time a year only; they have naturally short needles (1 to 1 ½”), grow very slowly and require less water. Black pines are vigorous growers and will bud two times a year. It is possible to force them to bud three times a year with an acknowledged risk to the overall health of the tree. Adapted to monsoon existence, they expect lots of water which drains away quickly. The natural state of black pine needles are long (2 – 3”). A reasonable black pine bonsai can be developed from seed in about 10 years which is a reasonable time investment. Therefore, Gary spent most of the workshop identifying the management of Black Pines. At the end, he contrasted white pines briefly.

Gary stressed that one of the problems with working in pines is that all things are possible when you start from seed. You are forced to make three decisions before beginning.

1.) . Cutting the Seedling. One of the characteristics of black pine seedlings is to extend a branchless trunk between 8” to 12”. During the first month of seedling development, the seedlings are cut and re-rooted to alter that basic design and bring the branches closer to the ground. If they are not cut, your ultimate scale will need to be based on more than an 18” height with correspondingly longer development times. You create a smaller composition by cutting the seedling as short as ½” of the first needle cluster.

2.) The next decision you need to make is the final height you want. This will determine the overall scale of your composition and more critically the final size of the trunk you will need to balance your design.

3.)The third decision is the selection of your sacrifice limb(s). The nature of black pines is to grow straight up and they will not be tamed. Rather than fighting this tendency, you use it to build the trunk design you want and improve root development. Without sacrifice limbs, your tree may not grow at all due to poor root development. There are two areas to your pine: the area of sacrifice and the area of tree design. The sacrifice limb can grow to 3’-5’ tall but the design area is the base and includes only the finished height of your design. You shorten the needles and practice ramification in the design area. The sacrifice limb continues to carry the natural state of a pine tree, long needles and large internodes. The last step in your development plan is to cut off the sacrifice limb(s) and heal the wound(s).

To give you an idea of where to begin and where you are going, Gary brought in examples from his collection. If you can imagine 10 years down the road, a reasonable pine bonsai is about 18” tall with a 2-3” trunk when continuously grown in a pot. The final needle clusters will naturally only produce one candle per cluster. Gary stressed repeatedly that veteran bonsai designers actually have a full 10 year plan in mind and this plan extends to each bud maintained on the tree. Given the time taken to develop pines, he strongly recommended allowing yourself plenty of experimental space. This means starting as many as 100 seedlings and making different decisions to understand what will happen. You have to lighten up and play.

There are four tools which you use in the annual development cycle of your bonsai.

1. The time at which you work your buds in the spring. This determines the length of growing season for the tree. The growing season in turn determines the needle length. In Central Ohio, the time to work is May 15th thru June 15th.
2. Pruning of the candles and needles. Here you are balancing the energy of the tree within your design area and allowing for rampant growth in the sacrifice limbs. See description below.
3. Application of fertilizer and water. Pruning is very stressful for your tree. You need to build its energy to a high level to be able to handle it. A weak tree which is pruned will go into a full year of dormancy and thereby cost you additional time. Gary feeds heavily in fall and early spring with a premium fertilizer. He uses a time release fertilizer from "Nursery Special". Throughout the growing season, he feeds every two weeks with any standard fertilizer (Miracle-Gro or Peters). As previously mentioned, Black Pines expect monsoon rains.
4. Your tree design or 5 year plan for this tree, so you remember where you are going as perform candle and needle work.

Pruning of the candles and needles. In fall when the deciduous trees drop their leaves, remove all of the previous year's needles and part of the current year needle crop. If you are looking at a strong candle cluster, pull lots of current year needles to force growth back towards the center of the tree. If you have a weak candle cluster, pull just a few of the current year needles to pull energy into that cluster. That is, remove all of the current year needles in strong shoots; remove half of the needles in mid-strength shoots; and leave the needles alone on weak shoots. Remove needles with tweezers, not fingers. Ramification candle work is done in fall. Cut candles back to 2 buds per cluster. Remember a developed tree will only present 1 bud.

In spring (May 15th and later), you will begin by removing the first flush of candles to regenerate new candles of equal size all over the tree. Since the tree is in rapid growth, axons and sugars are highly concentrated in the candles. You want all pruned candles to use up their energy stores at the same time regardless of its initial size. Therefore, you cut large candles to 1/2" above the needle collar, the place where pre-emergent needles are absent. You cut medium size candles to 1/4" above the collar. You cut short candles flush with the needle collar. All candles will be on the same timing now and a new flush of buds will emerge.

Working with White Pines. We ran out of time and energy at the workshop. However, the basic differences in working with White Pines are as follows:

1. Eliminate the heavy spring feeding. Do not feed a white pine until the new needles are fully out and hardened off.
2. Cut the needles. Do not pull them when you are doing needle work in fall.
3. At the first hint of spring, look over your tree. If a candle has a run-away length in comparison to others on the same tree, break off the tip.
4. During the spring work period (May 15th – June 15th), the tree is not expected to create a

second flush of needles. Therefore, cut all candles to the length of the shortest candle to balance energy.

While we did not get all of our questions asked or answered at the workshop, we cleared up a great deal of confusion in the conflicting information we all have read about handling pine trees. No wonder we get confused. There is a lot of complexity to the process. Thanks to Gary we all got a good appreciation of what a master artist knows to produce quality bonsai. We also have a better chance of improving the results with our own trees. Happy growing!!!

By Shelby Conrad

Book Report

Japanese Black Pine, by Steve Pilacik

This book was reprinted in 1993...Soft Bound and was dedicated to growers of Japanese Black Pines in hope that it will assist both beginners to advanced growers.

Since I'm new to Bonsai & still learning from the more experienced artists in CBS, so I watch them & read a lot of books. So those of you who love your Japanese Black Pines this book will really help you. Here is a break down of the first two chapters. Chapter 1 covers Black Pine for garden use and talks about 4 different aspects, Description, Specimen Culture, Garden Training and Container Growing.

Chapter 2 covers developing Bonsai stock propagation from seeds, cuttings, air layering, to field grown stock , purchasing nursery stock plus developing stock from year 1 to year 3.

There are 10 chapters and forty pages with black & white photos from collections & clear black & white drawings to follow plus an introduction, glossary & index. The rest of the book covers all aspects of growing, training, styling, pots etc. plus the care & maintenance of Japanese Black Pines. This book has a lot to read & understand and is too much to cover in this short space. I bought it & It is in my library and will be referred to again & again.

There are two web sites I found and they only cover 8 aspect on Black Pines each. Very limited. If you're interested they are:

<http://www.bonsaisite.com/japblackpine.html>

<http://www.bonsailearningcenter.com/tips&advice/blackpine.htm>

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.

April 18 - Club tree workshop, \$5 trees will be available to develop our collective skills and to share in coming years. If you have trees from former workshops please bring them in so we can

see how they are developing. Bring a shohin sized pot if you want to transplant. Also help and advice on trees you are considering for the June show.

May 1 and 2 - The 2004 Michigan All-State Bonsai Show will be in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Check out the Frederik Meijer Gardens web site for more information about the venue. See: www.meijergardens.org - click Education, click classes, click special programs.

May 16 - Focus on Maples. There will be volunteers available and you are encouraged to bring your own maples for show and tell. Also - Getting a tree show ready, what the professionals do

June 5 and 6 - The Annual Dawes Bonsai show at Dawes Arboretum on SR 13 between Newark and I-71

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

June 18, 19, and 20 - MABA and BCI in St Louis, Mo

July 18 - Tropical weird and wonderful bonsai with hands on workshop for club members.

August 14-15 Workshop, guest artist to be announced.

September 19 - Club Picnic, TBA

October 17 - Saikei - (ground landscapes)

November 21 - Fall show and demo

December - Dinner TBA - and something else?

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