

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - July 2005

How did you do with the weather this last month? I went to Louisville the last week of June and I hear it was wild here for awhile. It was just hot there. I lost a new forest plating of volunteer maples, and a big elm has severe crisp on all the top branches - I'll have to see what recovers. I think that one has lost about three years of ramification.

I may have hooked up the Louisville club with some killer trees though. The place I was doing the mission work was an old church built in 1905 - with - You guessed it, some OLD landscape plants. Some of these had been whacked back out of the way for the sidewalk and entrance and have recovered, but look like not something you want out front of your house or church. They have healthy growth on one side and trunks about 9" caliper and 2 feet tall. They look good. The center director has been notified she may be able to get them replaced with new bushes in return for a club dig.

Coming Attractions

My apologies to any of the Club members that want to take part in both activities that will be offered on our next meeting date. I know it is a tough decision to make but I also recognize that some members are not able to block the amount of time it will take to go to Cincinnati and others may want to view the Andy Smith Ponderosa Pine DVD and participate in the regular Club meeting and go to Cincinnati too.

We began making arrangements to visit the Krohn Conservatory in Cincinnati right after the great response we had to the tour of our own Franklin Park Conservatory in January. The Krohn is also one of those great Victorian glass houses built around the turn of the century. I first visited the Krohn with my sons Boy Scout troop twelve years ago. That was about the time that I had started keeping bonsai. It was Christmas so I didn't notice too many bonsai; rather I noticed their Orchid collection and Cacti collection. Later after I had also joined the Greater Cincinnati Bonsai Society, the Schoenfelds, Linda and I went to their show at the Krohn which usually precedes our show by three to four weeks. They are a zone 6 in Cincinnati.

I have asked Dave Radlinski who is a Greater Cincinnati Bonsai Society board member and a BCI Board of Directors member to arrange our tour. Dave indicated that he maybe able to also add on a tour of one or two member's collections if we have enough time. Right now thirteen members have signed up for the trip. There would be room for about three more, first come first serve, and PLEASE if you signed up and are now not able to go, please let me know so that your spot may be filled, or so that we don't wait for you too long. Travelers should plan to meet near the "Beer Pavilion at the southeast corner of the regular parking lot (At least it was the Schmidt's Party house during Ameriflora.) at 10 AM Sunday July 17. WE should arrive at the Krohn about 12:15. Depending on other "side trips" we may be back by 5 or much later. - Ken Schultz

The Andy Smith Ponderosa Pine DVD is a new release and features the styling of three trees that even Andy classifies as "difficult" to find the bonsai within. For the Club member with a pine this is a must see. After I watched it I had to repot my Ponderosa, and Ken Schoenfeld who has three Ponderosas borrowed it to get some ideas. One of these was in our June Show. First V.P.

Mark Passerella will lead the meeting. The meeting will start at our regular time. He also said that all Club members should feel free to bring in a tree to work on or to talk about including getting styling ideas. Call it an open forum, anything goes so be prepared to shoot the breeze on tree topics or other subjects as the group decides. -Mark Passerello

In August we will all be back together for a Tropical Workshop. We hope to secure some \$25 dollar trees to conduct a hands-on workshop. Both ficus and pomegranate were mentioned so I will be checking their availability. Also August is the time for our annual elections. - Ken Schultz

Tree of the Month

A Windswept Moment By Ken Schultz

I have heard some people say that the windswept style is a cop out that you use when you can't decide what else to do with a poor pre-bonsai specimen. On the contrary, Windswept can be one of the most effort intensive styles to maintain once you perfect the look. There are several styles of windswept. Each conveys a feeling of movement and of a different strength of wind blowing. Think about it. The wind on most days blows fairly gently. This gentle wind will cause the leaves and smaller branches to move in one direction. The trunk and thicker branches will be unaffected. The species you select to show a gentle breeze will need to be very twiggy (lots of ramification) or be slow growing, perhaps a broad leaf conifer (rhododendron) where the leaves can be trained in a direction with wiring and clip and grow. With a gentle breeze, train the tips of your branches downward. If you want the wind to be stronger, then the twigs, leaves and some of the larger branches will need to be trained upwards...all in one direction. Remember, the trunk and the main part of the branches will remain unaffected by your wind. So it will be OK if they come out from all sides of your trunk and the trunk can grow upward – not leaning. The upward direction hints at a wind that is between one strong enough to turn your umbrella inside out.

At several shows I have noticed (I too have styled a tree or two this way myself) that there are “windswept” trees whose trunk leans one way, and the rest of the branches go in the other direction. This reverse direction phenomenon could be from a tree that is reaching for light, or has fallen and its branches are now growing towards the light.

As a part of the illusion, select a shallow, long pot. If you want your tree to look like it grows on a windswept coastline, mountain or plain, then the branches will need to be on one side. Also windswept trees tend to have jin, with few branches and foliage, to show how stressful their growing conditions are. Since a healthy tree will try to reach a balance, you will have to constantly trim it to keep your wind blowing.

Book of the Month

Book of the month: Herbal Bonsai – Practicing the Art with Fast-Growing Herbs By Richard W. Bender

This is a rather small book in mostly black and white written in 1996. I found it at the Village Bookstore in Linworth for \$6. I had previously checked this book out from the Library because it had dealt with rosemary as bonsai. I had seen an outstanding rosemary bonsai at the Cleveland home and flower show and thought...I'd like to try that!

This is the book that references the “new popularity” of bonsai in the United States after the Karate Kid movies. Bender, the author who was raised in St. Louis Mo., points out that we want pines, junipers, maples elms and holly, but they grow very slowly and out doors. Herbs offer a faster time scale. Some can be created in one season. And some, like rosemary, grow in a twisted gnarled manner without wiring. He suggests that this makes herbs a good media for teaching newcomers to bonsai.

About one half of the plants that Bender lists are shrubs; such as, sweet bay laurel, olive, pomegranate and rosemary. Herbaceous plants include tyme, lavender, oregano, sage and scented geraniums. Bender points out that tyme are difficult to transplant and geraniums are easy. I can attest to both facts as being true.

Bender suggests starting with a larger specimen, 1-3 gallon, due to their relative low cost and instant bonsai potential. Since many herbs are shrubs you may end up with a multi trunk bonsai. Wire will cut into herbs more quickly than normal bonsai as they grow more rapidly. Also, he warns that since some are prostate growers you may need to keep them from lying in the dirt. Field grown specimens can quickly become weedy. Many herbs thrive in alkaline soil. However salt build up can harm them, this includes fertilizer burn. Watch for brown leaf tips.

Field grown specimens should be repotted in the fall when the weather has cooled and growth has slowed. (The author lives in Fort Collins, Co. – so this advice should be OK) Since herbs are tender this will need to be before the first frost kills or damages them. While some herbal bonsai have high water requirements, Mediterranean herbs, such as lavender, rosemary and tyme, prefer well drained soil mixes. The author who grew up working in his parents greenhouse business in St. Louis Mo. is also a fan of adding good topsoil or some of the soil the plant was growing in – into the mix when repotting. And he advises to water the day before repotting to stimulate root growth. While repotting he says that you should spray the roots often to keep them from drying out. He also warns that you should only try to repot one tree at a time and to get your pot ready before you expose the roots. The pot you select should be deeper than one for traditional bonsai. As with bonsai trees, some patience needs to be exercised, gradually reshaping the root ball. Rosemaries in particular benefit from using an intermediate pot before placing it in a bonsai pot.

Indoors herbs need bright light. If you grow them in a window – he suggests any but north facing (I have a rosemary in our south facing window, but it gets shade from a tree in the afternoon.) If you use lights, he says to place them 4-6” below a fluorescent, or 5-6’ below a 150 watt gro-spotlight. He says these are good for about 3 square feet. To encourage flowering the length of the day needs to be extended and shortened for resting periods. Indoor herbal bonsai also benefit if the nighttime temperatures are 10-15 degrees cooler than their days.

When watering Bender suggests dunking the pot, at a minimum he suggests watering twice to make sure they are thoroughly watered. He says that you may be able to go 3-4 days between watering, unless they are pot bound.

The closing chapters discuss the use of rocks and ground covers in your bonsai pots. In the Afterword, Bender tells us about a “transcendental event that changed his life”. He reports that while he was at a bonsai show, he saw a Japanese bonsai master gazing intently into a saikai elm grove; tears were flowing down his cheeks. This is a moment in the art of bonsai that is so hard to tell a non-bonsai enthusiast – you have achieved that look of nature that you have strived for so long. Truly a labor of love ~ Ken Schultz

Late winter can be a tough time for a bonsai hobbyist. There is only so much that can be done with the indoor trees, the outdoor stuff is still outdoors, asleep, so there is time to fill and bonsai seems like the best way to fill it. It is a great time to read up and check out the library, but the only draw back is that if you have been in the hobby very long you have gotten familiar with every book and probably know most of them by heart.

While at the library recently I took a peek in the bonsai section, as I usually do, just to see what's on the shelf. I found a book I had not run across before, and though I was excited to see a new book, after I had read it I was actually sorry I did. The book is called Herbal Bonsai by Richard W Bender. Subtitled "Practicing the Ancient Art with Fast Growing Herbs", I was prepared to support Mr. Bender wholeheartedly. His basic premise, that many herbs will make very attractive bonsai is to my mind absolutely correct. As he points out, herbs are widely available and very hardy. They can put up with the adverse conditions otherwise known as bonsai culture and often times thrive while doing it. They often grow much more quickly than true trees so will make convincing bonsai fairly quickly, which is often a large consideration for a first timer styling up their first bonsai. The price of herbal material is often much less than specialized plants produced by bonsai nurseries.

Bender mentions more than once the herbs are not well thought of as bonsai material. That assertion is only partly true. Though not usually mentioned in the same breath as black pine, cryptomeria and Japanese maple, herbs are used as bonsai, and as more than just as an oddity. I will grant him that herbs are not as common in the hobby as they could or should be. When I first brought a myrtle bonsai to our show, another member struggled to identify it and wondered if it was a Kyoto serissa (the leaves are fairly similar) Do a Google image search for topics like "myrtle bonsai", "thyme bonsai" or "rosemary bonsai" you will get a few hits, and some of the examples might be simple seedling jammed in a pot type bonsai, but there are also some real show stoppers being made with these types of plants.

So where does the book go wrong? Basically it is an example of a good idea and good intentions not always adding up to good results. Bender is an adequate writer but does not always seem to have a good grasp on the nuts and bolts of bonsai or horticulture in general. This short, one hundred page book lightly skims most points a bonsai book should cover. This information has been covered more adeptly and in much better fashion in any number of other books. Even the specific information that Bender would supposedly be expert in, care and training of the various herb species is given short shrift.

The book has surprisingly few illustrations, most of which are photographs of plants that one assumes Bender has trained. Each seems to violate many of the rules about what is "Good" or acceptable bonsai: pots are too large and too deep, foliage is rank and wild and grown into one

large mass rather than defined clouds or pads, accent plants , ground coverings and especially decorative rocks are overused extravagantly. They hardly seem like the work of someone who has been in the hobby two decades.

In short, though the subject is an interesting one, this is a book that does it no justice.

- Mark Passerello

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.

July 17 - Club meeting is a Field Trip to the Cincinnati Krohn Conservatory for members not traveling to the Krohn, there will be a video of ponderosa pine techniques at FPC.

July 19 - Dawes - Jining/leaf pruning

August 21 - Club meeting at Franklin Park Conservatory. Elections. Tropical subjects w/cutting exchange

August 16 - Dawes - fertilizer making

September 18 - Picnic

Sept 20 - Dawes - Road trip/Demo

October 16 - Club meeting at Franklin Park Conservatory. Guest artist Keith Scott. Tentatively a Scotts Pine/Juniper Demo and tree critique.

Oct 18 - Dawes - Over-Wintering

November 20 - Club meeting at Franklin Park Conservatory.

Nov 15 - Dawes - Pot selection/Orientation

December TBA - Holiday dinner

President - Daniel Binder

Past President - Ken Schultz

1st Vice President - Mark Passerello

2nd Vice President - Ben William

1 year Board - Jose Cueto

2 year Board - Ross Lebold

3 year Board - Denny Sackett

Treasurer - Richard Gurevitz

Secretary - Chris Conomy

Librarian - Merida Weinstein

Newsletter Editor - Zack Clayton