

# Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - January 2006

Echoing my reminder from the November newsletter. After the cold snap in December, it is again warm. Hope you have kept your plants moist as bone dry pots now will yield bone dry sticks in spring. I have put chickenwire around the legs of my benches, and so far, I am not having vermin problems. I understand from Ken Schultz that he has had active deer pruning on some of his trees and may be developing a "sprouting stump" style this spring. Stand by for breaking news.

With the weather the way it is I don't know what to expect before traditional bud break, but keep an eye on you trees. If they do start to swell and act like they are going to break dormancy be very aware of the weather forecast and the state of the buds. In some ways, this winter, though mild so far, may be harder on our bonsai than last winter was.

## President's Column

### Coming Attractions

January will feature a hypertuffa slab workshop. We have done this workshop in the distant past and every time one of those slabs shows up people comment on it and want to know how it was made. Well here's your chance to learn by doing. Be sure to bring any tools you want to use and a flat surface a little larger than the slab you want to make. Some waxed paper to lay on top of it will keep the cement from sticking to the form for easy removal. Remember that on the way home you are going to want this to be nearly horizontal while the cement is still setting up.

These slabs (or one of your own devising) will be used in April for our grove planting workshop, so plan ahead and think big. This is a chance to control every aspect of your creation, including the pot!

February will feature growing from scratch - seeds and cuttings - plus tropical wintercare.

### More on Hypertuffa Construction

### Do-it-Yourself Stone Pots: Hypertufa

For our January meeting we hope that you will join in making a Hypertufa pot that you can use for the forest planting that we have planned for our April Meeting. Pots large enough for a forest planting can be quite expensive. A hypertufa pot that you make yourself can be an economic alternative.

What is hypertufa you asked? You may have seen troughs made for alpine or miniature conifers that when planted are fairly expensive. Even the empty trough pots for these uses can be expensive at your local garden center. However, the cost is in the labor. If you are willing hypertufa pots can be made for a few inexpensive ingredients; Portland cement, peat moss and mason's sand. Some formulas call for the use of perlite rather than sand to make them even lighter, but some strength is sacrificed in doing that.

The Club will bring pre-mixed Hypertufa to the meeting. Tobe Conn offered to provide some latex gloves, as cement can be very drying to your hands. What you will need to do in preparation is to think about the style of your pot. Look through your bonsai books for do-it yourself projects that show making containers. Your container can be square, oval, irregular, island shaped, it can have a stream channel or a cave. One book I have even shows putting a water pump in the base and creating a pond with a waterfall. The book features Chinese styles not Japanese. Another book showed making a mountainside. Remember forests grow in a variety of locations.

Will you need a prepared mold to spread the hypertufa mix on? It is possible to spread the Hypertufa mix like plaster over a screen mold. One article suggested using a piece of screen on the bottom to improve strength. Your screen or wire may need to be cut so bring your snips; you won't want wire poking out of the cement when the pot is dry. I have seen dowel rods used for lateral strength while the mixture dries. The sides and bottoms will need to be at least 2" thick for strength. If you are planning to use boxes for your molds the smaller one should be 4" smaller than the larger one to maintain the thickness you need for strength of the finished pot. One thing you should definitely bring is a bucket or plastic dishpan to put some hypertufa mix in to work from like the hod of a brick mason.

You will also need a piece of plywood or tray (some may be available) to make your pot on to carry it home and a piece of visqueen (we may provide) so that you will be able to separate your pot from the board after it dries. The mixture will take several days to dry, especially in cold weather. Actually this is good, because slow drying reduces cracking and makes the pots stronger. You can use short pieces of dowel rod to create drain holes or you can drill the holes with a masonry bit after the pot dries. The holes will need to be about 3/4" to an 1" in diameter, spaced 3"-4" apart. While dry to the touch, it will take a month or two for the hypertufa to "cure" all the way. When it is completely dry it will make a slightly "hollow" sound when tapped. So be patient, this is why the Forest Planting workshop will be April 23. Some of the "tooling" of the surface should wait until your pot has dried for a day or two if you want it to look rougher. If you want a smoother surface you should bring a water spray bottle to wet the material while you trowel it.

The dry color will be cement like. Because of the craggy surface algae or moss can be grown on its surface. If you want a different color - bring some mortar dye to mix in. One ounce of dye per gallon of mix is the ratio. Because cement has a good deal of lime in it, the pots will leach alkaline; this is not good for conifers, azaleas or any acid liking plants. So after your pot cures you have a couple choices. Put it out in the yard to let the elements leach the alkalinity out, or douse your pot with vinegar or a light solution of muriatic acid (4 parts water to one part muriatic).

If you want a rougher surface or you want to "carve" the pot bring tools like a wire brush, chisels, trowels or just a large nail. The hypertufa mix will have the consistency of cookie dough or as one article said - "the consistency of moist cottage cheese." The mixture used to make troughs is a bit thinner since it has to be pressed into a mold.

You should also bring an old dry cleaning bag or piece of plastic to cover your creation on its ride home; that will protect your car and your clothes. While dry hypertufa is lighter than stone or concrete remember that a 15 " square pot will have about 3 gallons of mix, and a wet gallon will weigh about 8 pounds. ~ Ken Schultz

I have seen a variety of formulas - we will probably use one with perlite, and or one with Masons Sand. Also one of the recipes calls for adding 2 cups of Acrylic bonding agent to the water to improve strength

Here's a recipe: Makes a trough 8"x12"x12"

2 parts Portland Cement (30 pounds)

3 parts sieved peat moss (1 cu ft)

3 parts vermiculite, or sand (1.5 cu. ft.) - Mason's sand makes it look more like stone.

1 cup color

1-2 cups acrylic bonding agent (Gardenweb recommended)

Add liquid until it is like stiff cookie dough. - Allow mixture to "rest" 10 minutes after it looks "right".

Here's another: Makes 8-9 containers 12"x14"x6"

1 bag portland cement

1 bag sand

2 cu ft peat moss

One container takes 3 quarts Portland cement, 3 quarts of sand and 6 quarts of peat moss. 1:1:2. For a sandstone texture - change the ratio to 1:1.5:1.5. Add water to a cottage cheese like texture. This one says let it dry for 24 hours then see if its dry enough to handle - and work to give it a stone texture.

Formula #3:

3 parts perlite

3 parts peat moss

2 parts Portland cement

concrete colorant - 1 oz/gallon of mix

one handful of fluffy Fibermesh per gallon of mix

This one says 3 gallons of mix makes a 15" square trough. This one also says to coat your mold with linseed oil as a release agent. However the fibermesh fuzz has to be burned off with a torch. I favor the acrylic bonding agent - I can pick up a few gallons at the Tile store on Morse Road. It makes tile grout and motar flexible so that it resists cracking.

Other tools needed:

Steel chisel, file, or nails to carve with

Mason's trowel

wire brush

Mixing trough

rubber gloves  
dust mask (Doc says he has old surgical masks)  
dowel or pill bottle to make drain holes.  
a dishpan or large pot  
plastic drop cloth or old dry cleaning bag to line your mold  
chicken wire - 3/4" mesh or screen/hardware cloth - Dan B. said he would have some screening.  
spray mister - to keep your work from drying to quickly  
linseed oil, or cooking spray  
Vinegar will help keep your hands from drying out if you get any on your skin.

~ Ken Schultz

Tree of the Month

No article submitted

Book of the Month

A repeat - but seasonal.

Ortho's All About Bonsai

This might be the newest book about bonsai you find at your local library or book retailer. Copyrighted 2004, it bears the Ortho imprint and is put out by Meredith Books of Des Moines, Iowa. Authorship credit is given to Penelope O'Sullivan, not a well known name in the area of bonsai. Bonsai books may be divided into two general categories, those written by an expert as a summation of the writer's experience and personal experiences in the field, and a book like this one crafted by a writer who learned about the subject by research. Some books of the later type that I have seen leave a lot to be desired, and could easily steer new bonsai hobbyists off the track with misleading or incomplete information.

This book bears direct comparison to a very familiar and well regarded bonsai publication, The Sunset Guide to Bonsai. Both books are meant to be introductory publications, giving basics of the artistic and horticultural practices that are part of bonsai. Bound in paper and modestly priced (\$14.95) the Ortho book is illustrated with color photographs and clear illustrations. The section on various bonsai styles is especially clear and concise because each style has several paragraphs of text with a clear photograph of a tree or planting in that style. The topic of pests and diseases has the same advantage, with photo illustrations making it clear what each symptom is and how to identify it readily.

Almost half the book is dedicated to what seems a standard fixture of bonsai primers, a listing of plant species suitable for bonsai training. Each plant is given at least one page, and the more popular types get two pages. There are the expected notations about watering, fertilizing and repotting, along with other care guidelines, as well as recommended cultivars for bonsai growing. What separates these species guides in my mind is that the publishers have made an effort to find good examples for each species, rather than using the first one that might have been available.

At 128 pages, Ortho's All About Bonsai is not an exhaustive treatment of the topic, but it is an

effective and highly readable introduction to the hobby. It would make a fine first purchase to begin a personal bonsai library, or as a gift for the new bonsai grower.

## 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.

January 15: Hypertufa slab workshop. This will provide everyone with a slab for the grove planting workshop for April.

February 19: Seeds, and keeping your tropicals healthy indoors.

March 19: Soil workshop, repotting, pot selection.

April 16: Easter! NO meeting

April 23: 4th Sunday of the Month, a forest planting workshop.

May 21: Refining your Styles - getting ready for the show. How to judge lecture.

June 17-18: Ohio Bonsai Show at Franklin Park Conservatory.

July 16: BYOT workshop - maybe that tree you got at the show.

August 20: Tropicals - NOT FICUS

September 17: Field Trip to Adena and garden tour.

October 15: Chamaecyparis and Off Beat Junipers - Perhaps a guest master.

November 19: Ramification and Fall wiring.

December : Holiday Dinner

President - Daniel Binder

Past President - Ken Schultz

1st Vice President - Mark Passerello

2nd Vice President - Ben William

1 year Board - Denny Sackett

2 year Board - Ross Lebold

3 year Board - Wendy Fissel

Treasurer - Richard Gurevitz

Secretary - Chris "Pootsie" Conomy Librarian - Merida Weinstein

Newsletter Editor - Zack Clayton

Resident Advisor - Jose Cueto

Refreshment Coordinator - Vacant

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