

## Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - April 2006

I have too many trees that need repotting this year. Need I say more? Its also pretty warm for this time of year, remember to water you trees. Its almost as if it were early summer in terms of how dry they can get. And that would be bad if you were counting on just the rain to keep them wet.

### Coming Attractions

No meeting on April 16, its Easter, stay home.

On April 22, the 4th Saturday, we have rescheduled the forest planting workshop featuring bundles of Trident Maples \$40, Larch \$50, or BYO-Saplings \$10 on our January workshop slabs and trays (or your choice of whatever else you have). The workshop is scheduled for April 22, the fourth Saturday in April, the weekend after Easter for those of us that keep track that way. The club will supply soil, and you should have pre-paid your tridents or larch by now, and if not, come with a check or cash. If you are going to BYO trees for \$10 get out there and prepare those volunteer saplings that you left in the ground last year. I will be using a batch of collected volunteer red maples that I have been training for 1 to 5 years, so I will have a good variety of trunk sizes to work with. I purchased a bundle of larch to grow on in a bed for next year or the year after. The bundles of trees have not been root pruned yet so be prepared to deal with long taproots. Some of them will come bare rooted. You might want to bring muck or a deeper tray to start them in in addition to the hypertuffa slab.

On the fourth Sunday, April 23rd we will be having Boon Manakitivipart as a guest Artist. We have ordered a 24" tall 3-3 1/2" caliper Black pine for the demo. Boon's start in bonsai was the result of a birthday gift: a small juniper bonsai. Before long, he joined the Bonsai Society of San Francisco, the club through which he took his first beginner class in the spring of 1989. Anxious to learn as much as possible about bonsai, Boon studied with as many teachers as he could find in California. Serious study began when he hosted Akio Kondo, Kihachiro Kamiya's first apprentice. Mr. Kondo arrived as what the Japanese call a first-year professional, and stayed at Boon's home for one year. In 1993, the Golden State Bonsai Federation awarded Boon a Teacher Development Scholarship; two years later, he received the Ben Oki International Design Award for styling a Sierra juniper. In 1995, Boon received several informal offers to study bonsai in Japan. Several months later he traveled to Japan where he studied bonsai for one year as an apprentice with Yasuo Mitsuya. Following his apprenticeship, Boon returned to Japan twice a year to continue his study with Kihachiro Kamiya until his passing in January, 2004. In 1998, Boon founded and became the teacher of Bay Island Bonsai, and started his business, Bonsai Boon.

And if you want to see the kind of bonsai that Boon encourages at Bay Island Bonsai, a coffee table style book is available at this link: <http://www.bonsaiboon.com/bib/book.htm> Its worthwhile going to the site to see the sample pages of this book. I have heard that members must have two show ready bonsai. The club description indicates they attend nine workshops a year and participate in all club events. I can only say the trees in the book reflect that level of dedication. They are magnificent. ~ ZAC

## Tree of the Month

Laryx species Copyright ©1996 Pine Garden Bonsai

Larch are best transplanted at the end of February or early March, just before their needles appear. The narrow planting window is this wonderful tree's only drawback and must be taken seriously. If your Larch has needles on it, leave it in the RootMaker pot in which it arrived for another year. However the tops of Larches (as contrasted to their roots) can be worked any time of the year. Larches are very flexible; they take wiring easily (meaning they stay where you put them); you can prune them any time of the year.

Because larches throw all their growth to the top of the tree, branches at the top of the tree need to be pruned quite short to redirect the growth to lower branches.

Larch love water. They are the perfect conifer for those who find watering an enjoyable occupation. Water every day from April through October, and two times a day during the heat of summer. Put them where they get morning sun and afternoon shade, or dappled shade all day. Protect Larch bonsai in the summer by placing them in the shade of a larger tree

Between April 1 and mid-July, fertilize about four times a month. with a mild liquid fertilizer, Peters 20-20-20, for example, diluted to one-fourth the recommended strength, and fertilize every week, after it has become acclimated to its new pot or new environment.

PLEASE NOTE Larch is a deciduous needle conifer. That means that it turns golden in the fall and loses its needles. It will remain dormant throughout the winter; then, at Winter's end "the light goes on" and the tips of the buds, that had been present as needle collars all year, get shiny. That is the time to repot or to transplant. Here in western Washington Larch "readiness" corresponds to the first growth of the daffodil leaves breaking through the earth. Pot from that time until the needles become clearly defined although still quite small. This is about a three week interval.

Success in transplanting bonsai, especially Larch, comes from timing your activity to correspond to the period of root growth.

### Style and Growing Tips

A Bonsai Artist's Guide to Pot Selection By Kenneth A. Schultz

Does the pot make the tree or does the tree make the pot? After all, bonsai means plant in a shallow pot. In my reading and in practice the pot is not the first consideration. Well, not always, I do have a collection of pots and occasionally I will look for "the tree" that will go into one of these pots. More commonly, I will be looking at a tree and wonder - do I have a pot for this? More rarely, I think is it the "right pot", more often my first consideration is its size. This article covers not only size and position of the tree in the pot, but also the color and shape of the pot.

To prepare this article, I riffled through my bonsai book collection to select the ones that have special tips and suggestions. Most books limit their discussion to a few short pages. Their focus

was on photographs of pots for sale, showing some store or factory. Others ignore the pot itself as a part of the artistic composition of bonsai, and talk about putting screen over the drain hole (eye) and advising to wire the tree into the pot.

What is so special about picking a pot? We have all heard the golden rules. Pines and Junipers in brown matte' pots and deciduous and flowering trees in glazed color pots. However, there is more to picking a pot than just whether its glazed or not, and sometimes these rules can be ignored. There is the issue of selecting the shape of the pot based on the growth style of the bonsai. Author and bonsai artist Amy Lang captures the importance of the pot stating that it allows the viewer to imagine the tree growing in its natural element. There are three elements to the art of the bonsai composition; the tree, the pot and the position of the tree in its pot.

But first there are a few general facts about pots that you need to keep in mind when you are pot shopping, avoid pots that rock on flat surfaces. There should be a number of drain holes, at the lowest point of the pot's bottom. Pots that have low points that don't drain may cause root rot. Don't buy "pots" without large enough drain holes (unless you can drill more), or pots that are glazed on the inside.

Quality pots have been fired at higher temperatures and for a longer period of time. Pots that are fired longer will have a "ring" rather than a thud or clunk when struck. Test them by wetting your finger and then rubbing it in the inside of the pot. If the clay readily absorbs the moisture, it may be low fired. Better pots will also have smaller wire holes to help you anchor your tree into the pot. Pots that are low fired do not fair well in our Ohio winters with freezing and thawing. Glazed pots that are low-fired pots will crack, and spaul, and the glaze will come off in flakes. Bubbles in the glaze idicate low quality. While tempting because of their lower cost, they will need to be replaced in a few years if used outdoors.

Inward curving shapes or an edge on the inside of the upper rim should also only be used with your indoor trees. In the winter, when the root ball freezes, it will catch under these rims and crack your pots. For growing outdoor trees you may want to use mica pots. High quality mica pots may pass for clay pots, but generally are not considered to be "show quality"; however, I confess to using a mica pot on occasion to show a tree.

Here's what some of the authors had to say about color:

Most evergreens and conifers are best in brown containers. Glazed and matte' finishes may be used for any species. Arid species are best in unglazed pots. Earthen brown pots – matte' or unglazed with sides curving outward are ideal for evergreens, especially those with slender curving trunks. (literati)

Colored containers present a variety of possibilities. White can be used for broadleaved specimens, deciduous trees that fruit, flower or having bright fall leaf color. The color needs to compliment the tree's flowers, fruit, bark or fall foliage. Dark colors are and should be used with bonsai that exhibit "strong character" (massive nabari in proportion to height, or formal upright). The use of decorated or multi colored pots should be limited to truly spectacular bonsai to keep the pot from taking more attention than the tree. With mame', brightly colored pots can be used as the enthusiast wants.

Light colors stay cooler. Remember this if your trees are in a sunny spot. Dark brown pots may actually get hot enough to bake roots that touch the pot. Also unglazed matte' pots absorb more heat.

Reddish pots look wild and strong, they can express rocky mountains or barren land.

Blue pots represent water. Subtle blue is a good color for azaleas or quince. I have seen many maples pictured in light blue pots. Dark blues are for plants with light colored leaves or flowers. Cobalt blue glazed rectangular pots are good for trees with red fall color or berries. Cotoneaster is mentioned as a good choice for cobalt blue, but avoid putting plants with blue flowers in blue pots.

Cream colored pots are recommended for elms and maples. At Franklin Park we have also used them for ficus. Beige stoneware (matte') pots are good with stout trunked conifers, oak, cork bark and hemlock.

Grey greens are for broadleaved plants and larch. The green color reminds one of a meadow.

Yellowish colored pots are for fall scenes and trees that turn golden yellow. While no species was suggested, I know that ginkgo put on a very yellow fall display. Mustard colors (with scenes) show well with figs, schefflera, tea and jasmine according to Gustafson.

#### Container Size:

Here again there are golden rules that govern a ratio of pot size to tree size. Most of us as Gustafson suggests, should ignore these rules for the reason stated in the next paragraph. But first the ratio: Length should equal  $2/3$  the tree's height. Depth should equal the diameter of the trunk on a mature bonsai (don't count the leg or foot height). Width should be slightly narrower than the tree's spread – as seen from the side.

Size may be ignored when using rocks and other decorations or for allowing growth or with certain species that need more water. Following the rules could result in a plant that needs to be watered four times a day. I know that I've over-potted a number of my trees because I only have time to water once a day. Consider the volume of soil held in the pot based on its height, curve and legs. Remember that smaller pots freeze quicker too, as do pots with longer legs. While these feet are needed for air and drainage they can aide in drying and freezing.

#### Container Shape based on Tree Style:

If you have antique pots you should save them for "very old" trees. Younger trees are OK in new pots. Again the shape of the pots also has associated locations. Deep pots suggest cliffs making them suitable for cascades. Semi-deep pots suggest hillocks suitable for slanting styled trees, and shallow pots represent plains. They should be used for upright trees or group plantings.

Square or rectangular pots - high mountains, angular trees or strong imposing trees. Generally trees in square or rectangular pots are formal or informal upright style including slanting. "Heavy trees" need massive pots. Heavy rectangular pots frequently have conifers, which have gin and shari. "Formal" groves and clumps may also be planted in rectangular pots.

Cascade Pots – round, square, hexagonal. The pot should be taller than its distance across. The height of the pot should be greater or less than the length of the cascade, not the same. However the depth of the pot should be greater than the height of the tree above the pot. A stand should be used if the tree extends below the bottom of the pot

Oval or round – represent river or lakesides, curved trunk trees or “softer styles”. Oval glazed pots are for deciduous trees, mame’ or shohin sizes. Shallow oval glazed pots are used for group plantings. Broom style is also recommended for oval but look best in round. “Delicate” fine pots (porcelain like) are best with twiggy trees like apricots, pistachios, plums and dwarf citrus. These also look good in round pots with a deep blue glaze. Windswept or slanting style trees should be planted in oval pots. Their oval pots are longer, narrower or smaller than normal.

Round “drum” style pots have literati, formal or heavy clump style trees in them. Normally drum pots are not glazed. “Flat-round” are for literati. Small round pots are ideal for accent plantings of grasses.

Literati – pots should be shallow, round or, hexagonal. The diameter should be equal to 1/3 of the height of the tree. Here colors tend to be earthy grays to browns.

Lotus shaped pots – Lotus pots and hexagonal and rectangular pots should be planted with the tree centered, as you would use a round pot. Generally, lotus shaped trees can be used with all the upright styles, but not clumps, groves or exposed root.

Placement of the tree in the pot:

Except for round or square pots the tree is never placed in the middle of the pot. The tree needs to have its mass balanced over the pots. Since bonsai with the exception of formal upright and broom styles are scalene triangles, they tend to have longer branches on one side or another. The tree is therefore, placed to the right or left of center.

Secondly the tree should lean slightly towards the viewer. This means most trees will need to be placed just a little behind the center axis. The reason we lean the tree forward is that it makes the tree appear taller and more impressive to the viewer.

Identify the “front” of the pot as well as the tree. If your pot has 4 feet, the feet should be right and left of center, even with a round pot. However if you have a round pot with only three feet, then one of the feet should be toward the front. With a cascade, one of the feet should be where the cascade is lowest.

If you are using an irregular shaped pot, the lowest point on the rim should be towards the front. Irregular shaped pots or slabs are frequently used for groves, clumps of multi-trunked trees.

Remember two things 1) The tree is the focus, the pot compliments the tree; and 2) You’ll eventually need to re-pot every tree, each time you do, you decide if the tree stays in the same pot or not.

Bibliography:

Chan, Peter; 2002 – Bonsai, Bonsai Pots, pages 104-105

Crespi, Luigi; 1989 – Bonsai: the Complete Illustrated Guide to Growing and Caring for Miniature Plants and Trees, Containers, pages 46-47  
Gustafson, Herb; 1999 – Low Maintenance Bonsai, Pots, pages 9-18  
Lang, Amy; 1988 – The Living Art of Bonsai, Choosing the Pot, pages 258-263  
Lewis, Colin; 1993 – A Step by Step Guide to Growing and Displaying Bonsai, Pots, pages 38-39  
Norman, Ken; 1996 – Step by Step Create Your Own Bonsai 50 Step by Step Projects, Pots and Containers, pages 16-17  
Zane, Thomas; 1993 – Instructor's Manual for Introduction to Bonsai – A Course Syllabus, pages 7.1 – 7.6

### The Bonsai Forest by Ruth Staal

Most bonsai are single plants, in a variety of different styles, that resemble old trees growing in their native habitat. A forest is a group of trees of one species, growing as they would in nature. It can be created from small purchased plants, either tropical or those suitable for landscaping. Bare-root hedging plants such as cotoneaster, are inexpensive and often perfect for a forest - they are only available in spring and fall. Seedlings could be collected from beneath native deciduous trees in your area, such as elm (*Ulmus* spp.), aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), maple (*Acer* spp.) or birch (*Betula* spp.). Some conifers, such as larch (*Larix*) or spruce (*Picea*) could also be suitable.

It is also possible to propagate little trees by cuttings from a larger plant. This would be appropriate with cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster* spp.), birch, maple, or ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*), for example. Tropical houseplants such as weeping fig (*Ficus Benjamina*) or ficus Natasha, Ming aralia (*Polyscias fruticosa*) or pomegranate (*Punica granatum* 'Nana') would also be good choices. They could be purchased plants from a nursery or cuttings from larger plants.

Smaller plants which alone would not be suitable for single bonsai can be used to represent trees growing close together. These trees do not naturally develop the strong trunks of a single tree. Each tree is competing with others for available light by stretching upwards rather than outwards, so trunks are thin. Only on the outside of a grove can lower side branches find enough room and light. Trees should be slightly different heights and have different trunk diameters, as they would be in nature. Roots should be trimmed and any tap roots removed, saving as many fine feeder roots as possible.

The pot used for a forest is oval or rectangular and very shallow. It is usually neutral in color and most often unglazed. The size will depend on the size and number of the individual plants. Five trees would be a minimum number, seven would be better, nine better yet. Uneven numbers are always used. The larger trees will be placed in the front, and the smaller ones in the back. This gives a feeling of depth - our minds perceive the smaller trees to be farther away. In a forest of many trees, one or two smaller trees at the front will look younger, especially if some of the lower branches are not pruned away, and add to the realism.

Start by placing the largest tree off-centre and slightly towards the front. The next largest should be placed to one side and slightly behind it. If you are planting five trees, the other three would be in a grouping towards the other side of the pot, slightly back in the pot from the first two.

Seven trees would be in groups of three and four. Each plant has an individual root ball, so they can be rearranged until you are satisfied with the appearance. Each tree should be able to be seen from the front, but some small branches may cross, as they would naturally. Space between trees should vary a little, and a small tree could lean somewhat away from a larger one, competing for light. Can you imagine walking into your little grove ? Could a glimpse of a deer between the trees make you want to look again?

Soil is added, working gently between the roots, and mounding slightly in the centre. Most of the lower branches are removed. Often tiny ground cover plants give the appearance of a forest floor, a rock might be added, and soil could be covered with moss or very fine bark. Keep the planting out of direct sun and be watchful of watering until plants are established. Once new growth begins, unwanted foliage must be trimmed off stems regularly, and tip growth pruned to maintain desired size. Because the pots are very shallow, care must be taken to prevent the soil from becoming too dry.

This bonsai style requires an imagination. If possible, take a walk through a grove of trees and look at the trees instead of the forest! Creating it in miniature brings the forest into your home.

Planning your Forest Planting ~Ken Schultz

Yose-Ue or forest plantings have always intrigued me. I have a few in my collection; the first one I planted is now about six or seven years old. I had purchased ten seedlings in a bare root bunch that the Club had ordered. At that time, I did not have an appropriate “forest tray” to plant them in; so I bought an eighteen inch plastic saucer that goes under a similarly red/terra cotta colored plastic pot and drilled about twenty ¼” holes in it for drainage and wiring.

The materials we are providing for this workshop are larch and trident seedlings. They will definitely need root training, so if the pot or tray that you made in January is shallow you may want to bring a “grow box” to start them in. After a year or two of training they can be repotted.

If you do plan to use a slab, or make your trees grow on a rock, you should make and bring some muck. Muck is a mixture of clay and peat moss. The correct formula gives it modeling clay like texture. DO NOT use modeling clay - it has oil in it to keep it soft.

Normally, in a forest planting, the stock are numbered largest to smallest. The number 1,2,and 3 trees are carefully placed, towards the front of the forest (to give the perspective, then the smaller trees are arranged around them. Sometimes the trees are all in one clump, or you can separate the trees into two groups. The number of trees in each group is up to you. The separation may be to simulate a road, path or stream passing through your forest. You may also want to bring a stone or stones. A large stone can be a mountain with your trees arranged around it. Or a series of flat stones can be a pathway. Turface or chicken grit can be used to simulate a stream.

To give your forest an “established” look collect moss to cover the soil after you have planted your trees.

While we are providing trees, you should bring soil and wire to ensure that you have what you need. 1 mm to 2.5 mm wire should be large enough. Since the Trident Maples are likely to be on

the small side a sharp pair of scissors are probably the only tools you'll need. The Larch are supposed to be a little larger. If you haven't paid, you'll need to bring your money too.

## Book of the Month

Bonsai Landscapes By: Peter Adams

This is one of the two books that I held up at our March meeting as a resource for forest planting information. Peter Adams is a well known English bonsai artist and author. This book was published in 1999. If you like forests, this book needs to be in your collection.

As the title of this book implies the term landscape means that it presents a variety of group plantings. Adams show plantings using Chinese Juniper, trident maple (5), Chinese elm (7), Seju elm (9), hemlock (5), Kingsville boxwood (11), Japanese maple (11), hornbeam (17), larch (11), Japanese maple (21), catkin elm (33), San Jose' juniper (13), and a second trident maple (11) forest. (This is the number of trees in the planting)

Since the book is about landscapes there is a chapter about accent plants complete with a list of suitable species. I found the chapter on shaping and placing the plants very educational. Chapter 5 shows making a forest from some cryptomeria. It is in the chapter that Adams shows using a bottom from a plastic flat as a grid to wire the trees into position. What a helpful idea, I have struggled with stock, trying to wire them into position.

Adams devotes Chapter 7 to creating miniature landscapes. He shows 13 of the forests being created that I listed in the second paragraph. The larch forest is project 9. He groups the trees into two clumps in an 18" x 14" x 2" rectangular pot with a muted yellow glaze. He says gray blue on unglazed brown would also work with larch. In his planting he says that he grew them in a temporary plastic pot for a year to train the roots. ~ Ken Schultz

The Spirit of Bonsai Design: Compare the Power of Zen and Nature By: Chi Tan

Linda gave this book to me two years ago after she watched me check out its wonderful pictures in the bookstore. I commented how unusual the book was; combining a good variety of photo gallery type photographs with some very nice case histories. It also contains a transplanting table, a cultivation chart and a listing of bonsai museums and parks.

This book was originally written in 1988 and was updated and re-released in 2003. A reference in the preface of the movie "Lord of the Rings", and the creation of a new "Hobbit" style bonsai is, to say the least, strangely interesting. Also, many of the photos cross from bonsai to Penjing and show common to very uncommon bonsai material. There are varieties of ficus I was not familiar with; some Saikai combined Buddhist statuary, others an abandoned abbey in a forest landscape. This is one of the two books I held up at our March meeting as a good reference to prepare for the forest-planting workshop.

Pages 78 – 85 show the planting of ten 1 – 3 year old larches into an attractive forest. Since the author is from Malaysia he shows some other interesting forest choices, such as, New Zealand

Tea and Pomegranate. A chapter follows the forest chapter on weeping style bonsai. I can safely say I am not aware of another book that devotes a chapter to weeping style bonsai. This is the book with a literati style rhododendron that I mentioned in the Azalea article.

I found the “how to” section on using carving tools informative. The examples were not overwhelming but were a cut above basic Jin bark peeling. Even if you aren’t a book buyer, I recommend checking this one out! ~ Ken Schultz.

## Bonsai Here and Beyond the Outerbelt

### The Bonsai Series at Franklin Park Conservatory

A comprehensive beginner's course on this ancient form of gardening. Students receive their own tree and learn the basics of bonsai in a hands-on repotting and styling session under the expert guidance of FPC horticulturist, Mark Ryan and members of the Columbus Bonsai Society. Learn the history of bonsai; compare traditional and American styles; and receive information on basic plant care including soil preparation, fertilizing and pest control. Times: Wednesdays: April 12, 19, 26 6:30-8:30 pm

Instructors: Mark Ryan, FPC Horticulturist and members of Columbus Bonsai Society

FPC Members: \$95, Non-members: \$105 Fee includes tools and nursery-stock tree

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 12: Beginning Bonsai 2 - Dawes

April 16: Easter! NO meeting see April 23

April 19: Advanced Bonsai - Dawes

April 22: Forest planting Workshop @ FPC, 2:00

April 23: 4th Sunday of the Month, Boon Manakitivipart

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

Black Pine workshop.

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

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