

December, 2006 Columbus Bonsai Newsletter

Random Thotz

We have another December newsletter. Since there is no particular meeting that these fit with other than good food and fellowship, I add stuff that didn't make it into the newsletter for other months. Good stuff from other clubs, general growing information, styling, etc. This edition can be a little on the thick side, so the editing is not quite as imperative deadline wise as the normal monthly edition. I hope you enjoy the bonus.

Coming Attractions

December we have a meeting date for dinner at Hong Kong Buffet on Tuesday, December 5. Gathering at 6:30, Dinner at 7:00. Hong Kong Buffet is at 1831 W Henderson Rd - in the plaza on the SW corner of Reed and Henderson. We are planning a Speaker on Suiseki - Viewing Stones. Several of the discerning board members have been here and recommend it.

President's Message - Mark Passerella writes a tree of the month.

Tree of the Month

Rosemary - *Rosmarinus officinalis*

If you have ever considered a rosemary bonsai, this might be a good time of year to get started on one. The hardy and adaptable herb is often turned into holiday themed topiary that are available at mass market retailers for fairly modest prices. Material available in the spring is often small, fairly new starts in four inch pots, and sizable material can be pricey.

Avoid wreath shaped topiary and select the kind sheared into a "Christmas Tree" shape. With some judicious pruning to expose the trunk and eliminate extraneous branching, the makings of a formal upright or similar styles could be developed fairly rapidly. The pruning will be the quick part of the process. Rosemary creates a bonsai that is quite pine like in appearance, even from close up, and the potential for shaggy bark and a gnarled appearance further enhance the appeal for this type of plant material.

Waiting till after the holiday means a lower, clearance price on your potential bonsai, but also brings the risk of a poorly cared for plant that may be badly stressed and in trouble. Shopping now means paying full price, but gives a better selection of potentially more healthy plants. If you choose to wait for the clearance bargain, bring the plant home and pamper it a bit and don't subject it to the additional stress of pruning until the spring.

Rosemary is one of a group of plants that are hardy to the extreme outside, but some times finicky indoors. Growers often report that indoor specimens just peter out during the winter. Clues to indoor care can be found in the native habitat of the plant, which is common in many locations around the Mediterranean Sea. The summers are very warm and sunny, and tending towards the dry side. In winter the temperatures lower but rarely if ever dip to freezing. Winters are much wetter, as the area gets most of its rain fall in the winter months. The reason this large quantity of concentrated moisture does not cause root problems is because the soil is rocky and drains well.

A good growing mix is three parts well sieved bark chunks, one part Turface, one part swimming pool sand and a handful of crushed limestone. Most sources say the plant prefers an alkaline growing medium, so avoid peat. Most references also recommend against fertilizer of any kind, and when growing in the ground for herbal use that may be good advice. But in a bonsai situation some careful use of a balanced fertilizer is called for, but with a light touch because rosemary seems to bolt and get leggy very easily.

I have had very good results keeping rosemary, both in training pots and bonsai pots in bright sun outdoors, and moving them inside sometime in October. The ideal indoor spot would be an east window in an unheated garage, patio or breezeway, were the light will be bright but temperatures will stay below 50 degrees Fahrenheit. I have used both an unheated garage and a spare bedroom with the heating vents closed that had a South window-such a situation requires attention to moisture levels and a missed watering can is a problem.

My “pride and joy” rosemary has been in a bonsai pot for about three years, and prior to that started out as a typical nursery start that spent at least 7 years in various terra cotta pots parked in full sun during the summer and getting some root pruning and shaping every so often. Rosemary can be a bit touchy about having their roots disturbed, so take the switch from growing pot to bonsai pot more as several small hops rather than a big jump. Ficus type massive reductions are to be avoided. There were times while in training that it stayed outside until December and survived some frost and freezing temperatures quite well, though only for a night or two. At the same time it would sometimes get very dry on occasion, and would come back with some nurse-maiding.

Rosemary has a very long history of cultivation, and a seemingly endless variety of cultivars. There are wide range of flowering and leaf forms, several color phases as well as upright and prostrate forms. Obviously the weeping varieties are best suited for leaning and cascade styles. In all cases it is difficult to do massive restyling, since the wood is brittle and a set form will be nearly impossible to change radically. Rosemary has opposite growth, so when pruning always cut back to a set of buds that will sprout side to side. Rosemary tends to favor the vertical buds, especially the uppermost buds along the top of the stem. Be ruthless in removing these uppermost buds, so they do not get out of hand and suck energy from the more desirable buds else where. ~ Mark P.

December Care Tips

In Central Ohio now is the time to put your trees down on the ground. The vermin have denned up for the winter and should not be looking for that warm mulch surrounding the smorgasboard of delicious bonsai bark. Other than that, keep an eye out for drying winds and make sure the soil is moist, not wet.

Clean and repair any pots for next year, I run mine in the dishwasher with a cup of tang to clean off any mineral deposits. The citric acid in the mix will take off calcium any won't hurt glazes. It won't hurt your dishwasher either. The appliance doctor recommends this as a way to clean the machine every so often. Take inventory and dream of what spring will bring.

Book of the Month

Book reports are on hiatus until January.

Growing Tips

This month's growing tips come from Dave Bogan from the Greater Evansville Bonsai Society. Dave has been elected to the Board of the National Bonsai Foundation in charge of the National Bonsai Collection.

Surface Roots

Surface roots are many times overlooked or not pruned correctly, if at all, and rarely encouraged to achieve the desired results or design. We become so focused on the tree, branch structure and overall style that we mostly overlook the surface root system. I know during repotting, I have to force myself to focus on an design the surface root system. Sure, we understand the importance of the root system as a collective system, and we always clean and prune the roots to fit our pot, but seldom do we take the time to work on the surface roots. Without strong supporting surface roots the entire design and health of the tree will be incomplete.

Lets start back at the initial potting or transformation to a bonsai. Once you have the root system cleaned, switch next to the surface root area. Do not simply cut off a bunch of roots to length. You must determine the strength and placement of the surface roots and how they divide and become the root ball. First observe balance. Very important, if a trees strength is one sided, you must prune the roots accordingly. Roots are very similar to branches when pruning. Trim on root and it will slow its growth temporarily. Leave a root long and it will continue to become stronger and gain in size. This applied mainly during the first pruning of the root system but can be used to our advantage in successive plantings.

So, first, we attempt to balance the root system and the surface roots. The perfect tree will ultimately have surface (exposed) roots of equal size radiating all the way around the trunk.

Sure, you say, this ol world is not perfect. But, with due diligence early on, you can greatly improve this area.

Prune the root system for overall and individual balance. Prune it with a future shallow system in mind. Prune it as if they were branches you wanted to ramify, lengthen or increase in size and strength. The size of the surface roots should be balanced. They should “dive” into the soil gradually. They should have an aged texture and appearance.

To achieve this, don’t hesitate to wire all or some of the surface roots. As with branches, watch the wire closely so it doesn’t cut in. Now, you may wonder about the wire below the soil surface. I don’t worry about it. I cut off the exposed wire and wire leading an inch or so below the soil surface if it starts to cut in, but any remaining wire is simply left, at least until the next repotting session. The wire below ground is simply twisted around the root just as on a branch. It does not encircle in a loop. Thus, it can’t strangle the root. If it cuts in, it will be along the sides, which will never show. Actually, if it does cut in, it will potentially create new side roots from the cuts, which is potentially good. Just be sure to remove the wire at the next repotting.

Make sure they enter the soil at an angle and as if they flow into the soil naturally. No openings under surface roots and they should all be equally exposed [sic]. For the majority, try to expose ½ the roots diameter.

Now, to achieve an aged or texture on te roots try this. As much as possible, keep the trees canopy open allowing sun to reach the root surfaces. Keep moss from growing on top of the roots. The fastest way to achieve nice heavy or strong surface roots is through using a shallow pot. By not allowing the roots to gain a lot of length in a deep pot, they will increas in size. This should also be done in conjunction with heavy grit soil, which also promotes root growth.

When finished, ALWAYS trim away all the small unnecessary surface roots. Walk in any woods, and you will not see a lot of small roots growing on or across the main surface roots. Keep this area clean and strong looking.

Collecting Trees

Materials needed: Sphagnum moss, root solution, coarse soil grit, wire, a tree and a pot. Fall is a great time to collect IF you have the proper area to winter the trees. I have had great luck with fall collecting if it is done after the first frost of fall. When collecting a tree, of course be careful, collect as many of the roots as is possible and do not allow them to dry out prior to transplanting them.

Generally, once I get my trasure home, I first wash off all the old soil. Any left now will be a problem later. Once clean, I carefully inspect the roots. It is very important that you recut all the roots which were cut using a shovel. These will have jagged edges and may even be smashed some. Cut back to clean wood without any tears or splitws. Usually I keep all the

roots for now. I may remove a taproot or a real ugly surface root if I can be assured of a good system without them. Any cut which is over 2 inches I will apply a thin coating of cut paste, making sure I don't apply right next to the edge of the wound.

Next prepare the container. Add several tie wires so you can secure the tree. Next add some coarse soil. Now I believe a lot of my success with collected trees is the use of long fiber sphagnum moss. First, I soak some sphagnum in a root hormone or Superthrive. Squeeze it removing most of the water. Now, spread a thin layer on the soil. If you have any major cuts, place a small amount of sphagnum on the cut end when placing the tree in the pot. Next wire the tree in securely. Now, I again sprinkle a little sphagnum around the roots. Since it is already moist, you may need to work it into the roots slightly with your fingers. Once this is done, finish filling the container with coarse soil. No fines are used in this process.

Soak the tree and allow it to drain. Now, depending on the time of year place it in an area where it will receive sun. Once the weather starts to cool (no freezing or even a frost) place it in your cold room or cold frame. The tree will grow new roots as long as the soil temperature stays warm. The sphagnum moss will retain moisture around the roots especially since we're using heavy grit soil. Plus, the sphagnum helps avoid any root fungus.

Remember, take extra precautions during the first potting and your tree will have a lot better chance of survival.

Positive and Negative Space

Space as used in design, is empty or unfilled space and is distinguishable from mass, which occupies space. Empty space is referred to as negative space. Opposed to the positive space occupied by mass. The skillful (and essential) use of negative space adds great beauty to bonsai.

Negative space is found in the interior and along the exterior of a bonsai. It occurs wherever space is partially or completely enclosed by line or mass. On a bonsai, the distance between branches, indentation on the silhouette, openings in the foliage and the shape of the container all contribute negative space. Typically, harmony is created as the negative space between branches becomes progressively smaller towards the top of the tree.

Negative space is created generally where two bottom branches are located at distinct distances from the top of the container. The dissimilar or asymmetrical space between these two branches creates a far more interesting space than those higher up.

Negative space becomes most effective in a design when it reappears in various sizes and locations throughout a composition. When a shape is repeated, it may be upside down, sideways or in other unexpected positions. It is a playful element in the creative process because the artist knows that negative space that results from their composition may be felt or experienced by the viewer without consciously being noticed.

Sources of Negative Space in Bonsai:

Openings in the foliage,

A variation in branch length,

The angle formed at the juncture of the trunk and a branch or fork or two branches, and placement of branches at unequal distances apart and varying the space between branches.

By utilizing this concept, you avoid mirror symmetry and don't have a "mushroom" look.

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.

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Holiday Dinner – Hong Kong Buffet - Gathering at 6 PM – Dinner at 7,
Presentation 7:30 PM

Suiseki

The Bonsai Board held a special planning meeting to plan out 2007. There are still invitations to confirm, so until then, "Speaker" note will indicate that we are inviting a special artist to present.

January 21	Back to Basics – Soil, Fertilizer, Pests, Problems, Pesticides
February 18	Pot Selection – Hypertufa II – another chance to make a pot
March 25	(4 th Sunday) Speaker
March 31	Delaware Garden Show -Olentangy Liberty High School, 3584 Home Road
April 15	Carving, Pruning and Wiring – Jose Cueto
May 2, 9 and 16	FPC Beginners Bonsai Class
May 20	Speaker
June 9 and 10	Dawes Show
June 16,17	32 nd Annual Bonsai Show
June 21, 22, 23, 24	ABS Show – Virginia Beach
July 15	Flowering Bonsai – Fuchsia, Chrysanthemum, Rosemary, Hibiscus, Hawthorne and others
August 19	Tropicals – Member In Meeting Show
September 16	Picnic at Dawes – Possibly a Speaker Demo or workshop
September 23	Field trip and BBQ at Ken Huth's
October 21	Demo – Jose Cueto
November 18	Speaker
December	Holiday Dinner

And a final word -

From Tom Pillichody -

I heard of a crazy old coot

President - Mark Passerella

Past President - Dan Binder

1st Vice President - Ken Schultz

Who sold bonsai to rubes out in Butte.
The stones were askew,
(He shoulda used glue)
But the cuttings had started to root.

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