

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - January 2007

January, 2007 Columbus Bonsai Newsletter

Watch out for trees starting to break dormancy. With the extremely mild weather we have been having, some of the trees from zone 6 or 7 might decide they have been through winter and wake up. That would be bad news if we have a hard February or March. There's not much to do right now other than wait and monitor to be sure nothing dries out. The squirrels have been digging in my pots for imaginary acorns. I think I've lost a pot of miniature hosta accent plants, but with no snow cover the vermin are not eating my bark or branches. So far anyway. One of my cats continues to seek my approval by bringing me headless furry vermin so that is some consolation.

Coming Attractions

This meeting, January 21 we will have a break from the usual "So you got a bonasi for Christmas" format and see a Japanese master demo on wiring and pruning. Okay, it's a video, but the review is in and it's a good video.

Seeing how an expert makes these decisions can be a very educational experience. So we have rented "The Bonsai World's Basics Series - Volume 1-Wiring" and "Volume 2-Branch Selection and Pruning". These tapes show two renowned Japanese Bonsai Artists providing one on one instruction. (Don't worry, they are English voice narrated).

We also plan to provide some branch material and wire to allow those of you who want to practice right away an opportunity to do so. Depending on what the weather does, you may be able to bring in material to wire if you so choose. Kobayashi (the Wiring tape) says that Japanese maples are best wired when the trees are dormant. Weather looks good for this as I assemble the newsletter - ZAC

For February think about getting your hands dirty. We are going to have a make your own pot workshop again. These seem to be popular with members and its been a while since we did a clay workshop. The focus this year will be on smaller pots for accent plants and slabs. Zack is celebrating getting his Kiln working and will be firing the products of our labors. Clay bodies from Columbus Clay Company of Speckleclay (off white with speckles) and Rustone Clay (a deep brown) will be offered. Be thinking about a form or mold that you want to use or hand build a special shape like a moon pot or small slab. A workshop fee of \$10 is asked to cover expenses.

We have received information on the Dawes Bonsai Work Day. They will be doing some potting up for the Show and sale in June, but this year the message seems to be they will be working on maintaining the collection. They are looking for help to repot, weed, prune, and general care of the collection plants. The time is 9 to 12 with a potluck afterwards at the Zand Education Center down the hill and behind the main building and bonsai garden.

So, this is a great chance to work with some knowledgable people and old friends on Saturday, Feb. 24. For more information call Keith Stevens, 740-323-2355 or email kmstevens@dawesarb.org.

President's Message - Mark Passerello

Here's hoping that 2007 is starting out well for all of you!

I knew we would be in for an unusual winter when I saw people wearing t-shirts and flip flops shopping for Christmas trees. I was at a big box home center picking up some mulch to take care of some winter care preparations. It was the Saturday after Thanksgiving, so not an unusual time to be shopping for a Yule decoration, but the environment was anything but typical. There is something very surreal and just not quite right about strapping a Christmas tree to the top of your SUV while dressed for a Jimmy Buffet concert!

This winter has already set records for high temperatures and lack of snow fall-at least in this area. Some parts of the country have more than their share of snow, while others are crying out for some precipitation. What it all means for our little trees is probably not all that much, at the moment. It's been cold enough that they will still sleep soundly through the next month or two. But unseasonably temperatures but induce them to believe spring has arrived far earlier than it real has, which means some careful arrangements must be made to keep new growth and opening buds from getting nipped by hard frosts, but that's a few months down the line.

Bonsai trees that have gone dormant and tucked away safely under some mulch in a sheltered spot-out of the sun and wind-ought to make it through the winter just fine. The lack of snow means it is probably a good idea to make sure things don't dry out, since Mother Nature won't be helping you water. One easy way that I've found to do this is to take the collection bin out of the automatic ice maker on the freezer and scatter the cubes around the trees, right on top of the mulch. The ice will melt slowly when the temperatures are right and keep things just wet enough, and it also makes sure the ice in your freezer is fresh and clean (no off-tastes or odors).

What ever the weather, the New Year will certainly bring some interesting programs and speakers at upcoming club meetings. Mark your calendars and save the days-the third Sunday of the month is shaping up to be very interesting.

Tree of the Month

Cotoneaster - By Ken Schultz

Usually I follow the common name with a scientific – or vice versa. But this is it, both. It's Cotoneaster, not Cotton Easter, which I've frequently heard over the years. There are a wide selection of Cotoneaster varieties. Unfortunately, pre-bonsai varieties tend not be hardy to this zone, and when planted in a pot some of the locally available landscape materials object to root pruning. This must be why I've avoided Cotoneaster as the tree of the month subject for so long.

Cotoneaster are usually trained as nifty little "apple trees"; their white flowers and red fruit are size proportionate, and their natural branching is arched toward the ground make them an ideal scale model. Unfortunately, they also get fire blight just like apples. However, when fire-blight strikes a shohin or mame' bonsai is likely to die before the fire blight can be removed.

In the landscape Cotoneaster are used as ground cover or low filler shrubbery. I have seen and bought, cascade pre-bonsai. But they have succumbed to blight or perhaps weren't hardy to our zone. I've also tried my hand at converting nursery stock, with similar results. However, I keep going back. They are readily available and aren't pricey at all. The trick in selection is finding one that is single trunked so that it makes a believable tree. The next issue is that they frequently have large branches near the top of your bonsai; keep that in mind when you cut off the big branches to keep the smaller twigs as your future tree. Colin Lewis says that the regular branching pattern make them a good subject for beginners. Remember England is a zone 6 or 7; so they're easier to cultivate there.

Since they are a landscape plant, they will tolerate a good deal of sunlight. Though because you are likely to be trying to reduce the root ball to make it into a credible Shohin or Mame', you will find that you cannot let them dry out. In addition, they cannot be rushed into a reduced rootball size, as a result mine tend to be over potted. While they do not like wet feet, you may want to keep some of their original soil in your mix to help with moisture. I am certain that in the winter you will need to provide the roots with protection from freezing. If you have a coldframe, use it. I am tempted to try keeping one inside to see what that would do. Tomlinson says that Cotoneaster microphyllis is good for indoor bonsai. The literature notes that in cold climates they are deciduous, and in warm climates they are evergreen.

In keeping with the "does not like to dry out" note: repotting is suggested annually. And a further caution is that they do not like to be bare rooted. The literature also says do not remove more than 1/3 of the roots. The color of pot should be a dark blue with a glazed finish, though lighter blues or dark greens also make good choices. Since the trunk is likely to be curved, an oval pot will probably be the shape to use. Propagation is best from air layering; nick a branch and stick it in soil near the plant to you are using as the stock material. Soon adventurous roots will form and the branch can be removed from the parent plant.

During the growing period, keep your eye on the new stems; they seem to be irresistible to aphids. Inside you may have trouble with mealy bug. Use ½ strength liquid fertilizers (with a higher P) during the growing period. Because they are a shrub, pinch out all unwanted suckers, and shorten new growth to one or two sets of leaves after they lengthen to 3". Outdoors wiring should be done before bud break. After they leaf out, wiring without damage to the new growth is very tricky. The bark is a dark grayish color, but be careful, wire can easily damage it.

January Care Tips

Plan and dream of what spring will bring. Order your pots and supplies.

Book of the Month

Bonsai from Native Trees and Shrubs, By Werner Busch

It may be that I've reported on this book before, but maybe not. I have had it on my bonsai bookshelf for some time. It has a 1995 copyright date. While the title states that this book covers native trees and shrubs, don't be misled, Busch is from Germany and the trees in the back half of

the book are from Europe, not North America. Busch explains that bonsai is not cruel to the plants; rather they are plants in containers kept under optimum conditions. He explains that bonsai techniques mimic the rigors of growing in the wild. He says that bonsai satisfies the need for; responsibility, creativity, communication, the desire to work with nature, and the desire to work with others.

Busch says that the height of the tree is based on the relationship between the thickness of the trunk and the size of the gap between branches. If you remember last month's book report, Jeker states in *Bonsai Aesthetics* that a part of the composition is the negative space. I think this is another way of making this point. He goes on to state that good bonsai needs to stand sturdily and believably to appear natural. The composition is a sum of the branches, leaves and negative areas. Then he wisely points out, "but before working on the creative effects, you will have to learn cultivation and care."

Cultivation is sun, watering, soil, repotting, fertilization and pruning. Busch goes through the basics of each. He suggests that lava granules can replace sand in your soil mix. I've added these to my soil mix when I can find them small enough; but they are not easy to find. In this book, Busch covers over wintering. He says the "best" way to over-winter hardy trees is to remove them from their pots and to mulch them up to their first branch. I personally do not know anyone who has said they do this. However, I suspect it does away with the watering issue. In the section on watering Busch warns that rain may not reach the pot as it can be deflected by the tree's leaves. When starting a bonsai he suggests planting in the ground or in a large tub to achieve the trunk thickness you desire. He says that a young tree needs new soil every two years, but in a tub you need to only replace half the soil. When repotting, protect the tree from the wind and sun for two weeks and do not feed it.

I found it interesting that Busch says deciduous seedlings should not be pruned until their second year and then just once; and conifers should not be pruned until their third year. Remember that the bud closest to the point pruned will develop first. Top growth will weaken the lower branches. With deciduous trees, large branch removal should be done during the peak growth period; with pines and spruces winter or spring is OK. But larches need to be treated as deciduous. Feeding also begins when shoots begin to show. He suggests rapeseed pellets to start, then cactus fertilizer in August, ending with a low nitrogen fertilizer in the fall. Busch explains what each fertilizer element does and why balanced fertilization is needed to ensure a healthy tree. He even covers a number of trace elements. This section on fertilization is followed by a section on how the tree grows. Root development finishes midsummer. Growth ends in the fall with fruit development.

The book has a chapter called "Elements of Bonsai"; its first section is "What Makes a Good Bonsai". The part on root systems is thorough; it even shows how to get surface roots to develop. The next chapter is "Shaping Techniques", followed by "Month by Month Care in the Bonsai year". In this care chapter, Busch warns that plants fertilized in the fall will produce large leaves in the spring.

The final chapter before getting into the book's individual species guide is "Starting a Bonsai". He covers growing from seed, nursery stock and collecting from the wild. He notes nursery stock

can usually be planted immediately into a training box, but collected material, which can only be collected in early spring, may take years to accumulate.

In the tree section Busch covers sixteen deciduous trees, eight conifers, and six shrubs. I found it strange with the limited species presented that he included ash, sycamore and walnut trees and weeping willow was included as a shrub. Each species included has a physical description, a bonsai description, cultivation, wiring, pruning, propagation, pests and fungal diseases.

While this book was not what I had expected, it does provide good information, warranting its addition to any bonsai library. ~ Ken Schultz

Growing Tips

Granted, this is arguable winter and may not be the best time for this article, but then again, with the weather we have been having, it looks like we are due for the first hard freeze of the year this week.

I have heard that late fall is a good time to take hardwood cuttings for some species. Taxus, Juniper, Arborvitae, Holly, Boxwood, Cypress, Forsythia, Sandcherry, Cotoneaster, and Privet, are some of the bonsai species that come to mind.

Fill a starter tray with coarse sand or washed fines that you have sieved out of your regular growing mix. This will hold moisture around the cuttings without drying out too quickly. If you have an open bottom grow box that would be best. Take about 4" cuttings and dip them in a rooting hormone - mostly this will help prevent rot. Put the hardwood cuttings into the damp medium

Immediately after sticking the cuttings, thoroughly soak the sand/mix to make sure they are seated and settled into damp media around the cuttings. Keep the cuttings watered as long as the weather is warm. Once winter sets in you can stop watering, but if there is a warm dry spell, water as you would the rest of your trees. Start watering again in the spring and throughout the summer. The cuttings should be rooted by late spring and won't need as much water, but don't let them dry out. By next fall you can transplant them into the ground or larger growing trays.

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 21 Back to Basics – Pruning and Wiring

February 18 Pot Selection – DIY pot workshop with clay

February 24 Dawes workday - 9 to 12 with potluck

March 25 (4th 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 Boon
June 9 and 10 Dawes Show
June 16 and 17 32nd 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 – Jack Wickle on Long Term Development Mame.
September 23 Field trip and BBQ at Ken Huth's
October 21 Demo – Jose Cueto
November 18 Randy Clark on Shohin
December Holiday Dinner

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