

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - February 2007

Well, as noted in last months newsletter the bad news would be a hard freeze in February. In spite of the groundhog's prediction of early spring, we are having a pretty hard freeze as I write this. At least there has been some snow and precipitation prior to the arctic temperatures, but keep an eye on your pots when it starts to thaw out. Check for cracks or blown out sides, dryness, and evidence of frozen buds. Protect the roots in damaged pots with a wrapping of saran around the sides of the pot and figure out what pot you have for a replacement in spring. That plant will probably be your first repotting of the new year. I have several pots that have been frost damaged that way. I epoxy the side back on and use it as a training pot. The epoxy lasts for several years and the next break seems to be somewhere else on the pot.

Coming Attractions

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 for about two pounds of clay.

At the last meeting the question was asked about glazing pots. There are a couple of reasons the workshop doesn't cover that. One is time. Glaze is usually applied to a pot after it has been low fired - a bisque firing. That is about as hard fired as surface. The glaze is put on and the pot is refired to its final high temperature. That means two firing cycles with attendant electric cost. It also means a second work day and picking and applying a glaze. Glazing is an art, and doesn't always turn out the way you anticipate. Materials for glaze are an added cost on top of the extra firing. So there is the quick answer. See me or one of our other potters in residence if you have other questions or really want to pursue glazing. We will probably point you to a ceramics class.

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 knowledgeable people and old friends on Saturday, Feb. 24. For more information call Keith Stevens, 740-323-2355 or email kmstevens@dawesarb.org.

March will bring us A club tree workshop. Dan Binder is finding a set of trees and March will be a styling workshop for members. We have done this before, but I don't think its has been within the last 6 years. I have a nice Juniper nana procumbens from the last one we did. I don't know what Dan will find for us, but more information will be at the meeting and in the next newsletter.

More on Clay

Surface texture becomes important when you are planning an unglazed pot. Do you want a smooth texture or something more visually interesting. A smooth surface can be an asset for a quiet composition. Something contemplative. For a bold statement texture becomes more important to match the tree or accent. Roughing up the surface of the pot with pressed on bark or scratching it with a fork or other edgy material can create line and movement. Scraping around the surface with a flat edge will give a muted texture that can enhance the finer details of bark or ground surface. Slathering on a frosting of slip will give yet another texture, like platy or flaking bark. Or, you could work two clays together to get a mottled color on the pot surface. I have a pot I made in a press mold that I like from that technique.

Do you want feet or do you want the pot to sit on the bench? Feet aid drainage and give a more finished appearance. Having the pot sit on the display surface is easier to make. Feet can be pinched out blobs of clay, cut out circles or some other application that raises the pot bottom off the surface and adds visual interest. For a bonsai pot you will usually want the feet to be visible so that the pot does not appear to be floating over the surface.

Get out the coffee table books and look at the different kinds of pots. Look at the different treatments. Pay attention to any accent and mame - small shohin pots that you like. Those are the best pot for this kind of workshop. Big pots are fun to make, but unless you really know what you are doing, bad things are apt to happen in the firing process. A 2 pound lump of clay will make a couple of mame or accent pots. A shohin pot or a small slab. These are sizes most beginning potters can handle without major complications during drying and firing. Remember there will be some shrinkage in that process, and that is where the warping and cracking happens with the bigger projects. ~ ZAC

President's Message - Mark Passerello

What a difference a month can make! In the last newsletter I was musing about the delay in real winter weather getting to us, and now here we are getting more winter than most of us care to see! But the end is in sight, as famous weather prognosticators like Punsutawney Phil and Buckeye Chuck have both indicated a short winter, and there is a sure sign that spring can not

be far away: the mail order catalogs are starting to arrive.

The first sign of the changing seasons for many gardeners, and bonsai folk are no exception, is not a change in temperatures or a longer span of day light but a mail box filling up with catalogs from various mail order vendors. For some of us adults, a glossy color catalog filled with tempting images of leaves, blossoms and fruit can be more captivating than the toy section of Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Wards were. Though the snow may be thick upon the ground, the seductive images and ingratiating ad copy of a good catalog will get your imagination working overtime, planning a garden far larger than you have room for, or have labor enough to keep weeded and watered!

Having a few catalogs to pour through can also remind us that seeking out items from specialized retailers may not be the only way to find what we need for the hobby, and using some imagination and keeping an open mind will often be rewarded. For example, a catalog I've received for several years comes from a Virginia company that caters to fruit growers, all of their

merchandise is edible or useful in a culinary way. The selection is vast, with seemingly every sort of tree, bush or shrub that can be eaten on offer in the catalog's pages. None of their stock is intended primarily for bonsai, but much of what they carry are species that can be trained, the

difference here being that since it is not marketed for a particular niche of the gardening market, the prices can be lower than a bonsai nursery would charge. They offer items in a variety of sizes, so if your looking for a quince or pomegranate in a 5 gallon nursery pot, they can help you out. The down size of course is that you would be basically buying a trunk and growing new branches and compact root system, since any stock would not have had bonsai training in mind. There are always trade offs, but the lesson might be-keep your eyes open.

The February meeting promises to me very interesting and a great hands on project. Zack Clayton will be leading a accent pot workshop. Previous clay workshops have been a rousing success, so this looks to be another winner. I know both my kids are looking forward to it very eagerly. Wear old clothes and come ready to be creative!

Tree of the Month - By Ken Schultz

Common Olive, *Olea europea*

I do like olives, ripe black or green stuffed with pimento. But seriously, they make a really attractive bonsai. Though I haven't seen one entered by any of you at our Show in the past several years, I do see Olive trees in almost every bonsai book, especially when a European author writes the book. I recently saw some beginner stock at one of the Oakland Park nurseries; it may have been marked 12 or \$14.99. I didn't buy it though, because I had just ordered a package of seeds from Thompson & Morgan. Also don't be confused, there is a tree called "black olive" that is in the same family as Texas ebony, these have thorns and are not hardy to our zone either, but they are not fruiting as is *Olea europea*. It is unclear to me which of the forty or more cultivated varieties is the "Common Olive". In Europe, small potted olive trees are a popular Christmas gift.

Olives are mentioned in the bible and have been cultivated by man for thousands of years. Olive wood fragments have been found in Egyptian tombs. They are native to the Mediterranean as well as tropical and central Asia. In the US, they are grown primarily in California and Arizona. Outdoors in the landscape they are grown for their evergreen leaves. The leaves are oblong, slightly leathery, dark shiny green on top with grayish undersides. In nature the leaves are 1-3" long. The flowers are described as uninteresting off-white. At least three books did mention that the flowers are aromatic – interesting that they did not say "fragrant." While not a tall tree (average 20-25') they live quite a long time, reportedly up to a thousand years! Depending on the variety they are hardy up to zone 9. *Bonsai in Your Home* says that the ideal temperature range

is 43-53 F; another says they will handle 35-60 F. Regardless; they aren't hardy here and will need winter protection.

My gardening encyclopedia says that Olives thrive in a wide variety of soils, but will not tolerate poor drainage. Ortho's bonsai book says that the soil should be alkaline to simulate the soil in the Mediterranean. Repotting is recommended every two or three years in early spring before growth starts. Up to a third of the foliage and roots may be taken off when repotting. It says not to fertilize for three months after repotting. Be careful, as the roots are reportedly tender. (In contrast, Colin Lewis reports that common for landscapers to transplant trees up to 100 years old.) If you hope to see fruit on your bonsai, you may have to avoid pruning, especially after flowering. One book said that branches should be cut to shape in the fall. Another author says to let the branches grow 8 pairs of leaves before pruning to 2 pairs of leaves. Crespi, an Italian bonsai author, says not to prune from April to August because of the fruit. Anyhow, you will need to use scissors to do this trimming because of the hardness of the wood.

While I will be trying to sprout my Olive trees from seed, the books advise buying an established tree. Cutting can also be started in equal parts peat and sand (when the temperatures are about 68 (?)). Large specimen bonsai are truly a sight to behold; some of you probably remember the one that the Conservatory had. Almost all that I have seen were trained in the informal upright style. Several of the pictured specimens had hollowed trunks for interest. Only one book mentioned training them into cascade or clump-forest styles. The bark is a silvery gray-green in young trees, turning fissured with age. Reportedly the bark may be easily damaged when wiring and wrapping it with raffia will help protect it damage. Because old wood becomes very hard wiring should be done when the branches are young. While pruning is suggested for the fall, wiring can be done year round, though Simon and Schuster recommend spring till autumn. The wood is reportedly so hard that using a saw to prune branches is recommended. Also, a stub will not sprout new growth; they will likely die back to the trunk. Colin Lewis warns that a wired branch may die, so sometimes it is necessary to use selective pruning to get the direction you want your tree to grow.

Once the temperatures are above 45(?) you can place your tree outdoors, in a sunny place protected from winds. However, be careful the books warn against letting them be too hot especially at night. They also say, the more sun, the more water they need. While they like good drainage, do not let them dry out completely. (Again Colin Lewis is the only author who says this is not a problem.) This is the same warning that goes for Serrisa, Bahama Berry. At least two of the books I referenced say that they also appreciate daily misting of the foliage. Feed it every two or three weeks in summer, reducing that to four or five weeks in winter. Colin says to bring them in if the temperatures are predicted to go below 41. A balanced (half strength) liquid fertilizer is suggested. Indoors, they will need a bright sunny spot.

As you probably noted, there is a bit of conflicting information on temperatures from one book to another as well as how and when to plant the seeds or take cuttings. I suspect that a lot has to do with the geographic location of the authors and their personal experience with the variety of Olive they have grown. None of my bonsai books (and I used 7) mentioned particular varieties. Varieties were mentioned however when it came to eating the fruit.

Book of the Month

Bonsai with American Trees - By Masakuni Kawasumi

I picked up yet another used bonsai book from Half Price Books. Published in 1975, its 114 pages. In the front jacket it says, "This concise practical manual contains everything you need to know to raise a miniature forest in your home or garden."...."It is the result of a long period of research and practical experiment undertaken by the author in various parts of the United States...." In the back flap it says he spent "3 years in the US growing and experimenting with American species of trees."

Everything I want to know?? And he learned it all in three years!!! Surely he is a genius. AND it's all packed into 114 pages...In retrospect; the author knows how to raise bonsai. I'm sure the tips contained in this book are worth following.

On page 77 I found two things of interest. One has to do with 5-needle pine, and the other with quince. These tidbits were associated with repotting - 5 needles were an exception because he says wait until the leaves start to emerge to repot, otherwise all trees should be repotted in the spring before bud burst. The other exception was Quince, and those he said to repot in the fall because of their susceptibility to threadworm. When repotting he says that if you notice that a particular side of the tree doesn't have roots, cut into the bark, apply root hormone and push some sphagnum moss under the bark to hold it away from the trunk, keeping it moist until roots sprout. Also he goes through a long description about getting moss transplanted. There were 4 small color photos showing different mosses.

I found the references to particular tools and wire hard to follow because he uses a numbering system to differentiate between different sizes. This is probably because his father was a bonsai toolmaker. Pruning tips were simply worded and easy to understand. For example he suggest cutting off branches that are too weak or too strong and trim off the tips of branches that are not in proportion with the tree. He says that the position of branches should spiral up the tree so that they do not shade each other. He cautions to take off wire before fall.

In his chapter on Fertilizer, he says that too much fertilizer will cause the fine roots to rot; therefore, he says no fertilizer is better than too much. He says rape seed cakes make the best fertilizer, adding 20% bone meal for its phosphorus and potassium. He gives tips on making the cakes or making a liquid from fermenting rapeseed in water. Fertilizer should be applied after the buds appear. Do not fertilize when a tree is blooming, just before and just after is the guide. The author gives 10 tips about fertilizing, selecting bonsai, pruning and wiring. Repotting a Japanese maple has 23 numbered steps.

Based on the book's title Kawasumi lists 28 trees popular for bonsai in America. The photos in this book are mostly black and white. There are color photos, up to ten on about 20 pages in the book. It's interesting how accustomed we've become to big color pictures in newer publications.
~ Ken Schultz

Growing Tips

Just some “light” information this time.

Gro-Lux - Stems elongate slowly, extra thick stems develop. Multiple side shoots develop.

Cool White, Warm White - Stems elongate slowly. Multiple side shoots.

Vita-lite, Agro-lite (wide spectrum) - Stems elongate rapidly. Suppresses development of multiple side shoots.

Incandescent - Stem elongation is excessive. Side shoot development is suppressed.

Also - if you’ve ever been tempted by the idea of using rainwater for your trees. Here is a link that can get you started: http://www.olentangywatershed.org/explore_backyard.htm The Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed have a backyard explorer program that is encouraging the use of rain barrels to cut down runoff and also help with water conservation. As far as demineralized water goes, you won’t get much better and affordable than rainwater. The barrels are screened for mosquito control and are in recycled green plastic or real oak barrels. They look pretty nice. Many of the Japanese books will talk about using rainwater for the trees and even in drought conditions, it would make a good “ageing container” for tap water if you don’t want to use it straight from the hose.

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.

The Bonsai Series

Wednesdays, May 2, 9, 16, 2007, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

This course is a comprehensive beginner’s course on the ancient form of bonsai gardening. Students receive their own tree and tools and learn the basics of bonsai in a hands-on repotting and styling session under the expert guidance of FPC Bonsai Specialist Dan Binder 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. The cost for this course is \$90 for FPC members and \$100 for non-members. Call 614.645.5923 to register.

February 18 Accent Pots – 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

President - Mark Passerello

Past President - Dan Binder

1st Vice President - Ken Schultz

2nd Vice President - Ben William

1 year Board - Denny Sackett

2 year Board - Wendy Fissel

3 year Board - Chris "Pootsie Conomy

Treasurer - Richard Gurevitz

Secretary - Ross Lebold

Librarian - Merida Weinstein

Newsletter Editor - Zack Clayton

President Emeritus - Jose Cueto