

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - March 2007

March, 2007 Columbus Bonsai Newsletter

The meeting this month is the 4th Sunday of March, 3/25

Have you gotten your supplies ready for spring? It will be here before any of us realize it's that time of year. I suspect we are in the final gasps of winter and will start to have warming days this month. So if you followed the advice from last month you know which plants have to be repotted due to freezing. Hopefully, that number is zero. I've been lucky so far, but this weather can still be cruel, so keep an eye on your plants. I have a large repotting job staring at me this year, a ponderosa that has been growing in an 18" flue tile that I want to put into a square temple pot that I got from Ken Huth. It will sit on the flue after I get the soil and roots out.

We had 21 people who paid for the pot workshop last month. The pots have dried out and are waiting to be fired. I have been hooked up with a source of 4/3 with ground copper wire - wire that heavy doesn't show up in the home improvement stores - Thanks Denny.

Coming Attractions

The Fourth Sunday in March (3/25) 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 it has been within the last 6 years. I have a nice Juniper nana v. procumbens from the last one we did. Curently I know we are getting in cotoneaster and Juniper nana v. procumbens. I don't know if we were able to locate any tropicals. CBS is supplying soil screen and wire. You need to bring along your tools and if you have a nice shohin sized pot that you want to use please bring it along. The club will have pots available for purchase and we are expecting our pot order to be in for the meeting so you want to come prepared to purchase pots if you need any for spring repotting.

April's meeting will be back on the normal 3rd Sunday schedule and Jose will be demonstrating carving on a large specimen. It has been a couple of years since we had a carving demo and this should be a good one. If the weather is good we may be outside in the Bonsai courtyard. If not we will be in the Palm House.

President's Message - Mark Passerello

As March begins, Spring must be close at hand. Its time to be thinking about a big Summer event, the Club's annual Show. I would like to personally invite every member to plan on participating in the show, which is the most publicly visible thing that our club does and probably the most important outreach event we take on to bring bonsai in front of the public.

If you have never had a tree on display in the club show, this is the year to try it. Age of the tree or length of time you have been involved in the bonsai hobby are not important. Having trees of different ages and levels of "completion" is very desirable in a show like ours, which is not a juried exhibition or event that only works by invitation only. As a club, our show is an over-view

of what all our members are doing, so all skill levels and ranges of experience are encouraged to participate.

When thinking about which of your trees might be appropriate to put on display, consider what you have seen before. If you are growing a type of plant that is not often used in bonsai, or your tree is a common bonsai subject that happens to be in a style or size not usually seen with that sort of plant, that might bring some welcome novelty to the display. Like wise a unique container, hand made by you or a local potter, or an historical vintage piece might set your item apart from all the others. So what if you have a common ordinary plant in a standard pot? If you like it, and think it's a good looking bonsai, sign it up for the show. At each of the coming club meetings, we will spend a bit of time talking about show preparation. Please feel free to ask questions you may have during these sessions, or catch any of the board members in person or by email.

And speaking of the show, here's a thought to share with those more experienced members who have been participating regularly year after year: rearrange the line up and get some new players up to the plate, to borrow a sporting metaphor. If you have had a tree in the last few shows, give it a pass this year and try out some of your other stock.

Tree of the Month - By Ken Schultz

Jade and Elephant Bush

No, they aren't the same plant. I thought they were a large leaf and small leaf variety of the same species. But unless the scientists have gotten it wrong they are not. Jade is *Crassula arborescens*, (previously *Crassula cotyledon*). Elephant Bush is *Portulacaria afra*.

Both are native to South Africa, though some species of Jade are found as far as China. Both also have succulent leaves that are thick and fleshy. Elephant Bush leaves are smaller. Jade will flower given enough light and heat. It produces a cluster of small star like white flowers which gradually turn to pink-red. Perhaps you've never seen them bloom, but they do, usually in late summer to fall. One of my references said he hadn't seen them blooming in Florida where they grow outdoors, perhaps because it was too wet. [My jade usually flowers in midwinter in a west window and very little extra light - perhaps because of the dry conditions and short day. ZAC]

Portulacaria afra grows to 10'-14 feet tall in the wild. It is not only used as a hedge material, but the leaves are sometimes eaten. The book said by nursing mothers to increase milk production. (I was surprised too.) *Portulacaria* will shed their leaves during times of drought; this was not mentioned as a Jade trait. I've noticed that the trunks or stems of *Portulacaria* develop an exfoliating paper like surface and others are wrinkled, much like the skin of an old elephant - hmm, maybe that's where the name comes from? Jade trunks develop rings where the leaf pairs grew. The surface is smooth looking in appearance. Jade are also smaller in the wild, reaching a height of only 6'.

Both plants are succulents and are difficult to wire. The wire will cut into the soft flesh quickly. This makes clip and grow the training technique. It is possible to pull branches into a direction

using tie downs padded with aquarium tubing or some sort of padding. Some varieties drop naturally as they grow, while some grow fairly upright. Remember that watering increases turgor and if you want to wire, withhold water for a few days.

These plants are tropical and winter temperatures should be above 50 degrees. If you let your Jade get too cold it may develop black spots on its leaves. Keep them near a bright window or under bright- intense lighting. Without good light, Jade will get leggy and weak; *Portulacaria* may drop its leaves. Both plants seem to like being pot bound. Therefore repotting is recommended only every three years or more. Urban legend has it that Jade will not bloom until it is pot bound. Being succulents, these plants need a well draining soil. You may want to use a cactus mix or add extra aggregate. If the soil keeps the roots too wet they will rot. *Portulacaria* needs to dry out between watering. When you repot, do not remove more than 10% of the root mass as the roots are slow growing compared to the tops, with Jade root pruning should be avoided unless necessary. Watering should be avoided for as much as a week or two after repotting Jade. It says that Jade can be repotted any time except during periods of vigorous growth. During winter, feeding *Portulacaria* is not needed. Jade feeding may slow from every two weeks to once a month. Slow release 20-20-20 is recommended. Mealy bug, aphids and rot were mentioned as possible problems.

Portulacaria pruning is suggested after 2" of growth. On Jade they only mention removing crossing branches. Another reference said pinch after only 1" of new growth. I usually pinch the new tips when it reaches two leaves that are on the sides of the stem that I want the new branches to grow in. In the summer new growth may need to be pinched twice a week. The results are spectacular. However, due to leaf size and the coarseness of the branch tips, they generally make bonsai taller than 24".

There are a number of Jade varieties mentioned for bonsai use. Besides *Crassula arborescens*, these include *Crassula ovata* and *Crassula sarcocaulis*. *C. ovata* has red edged leaves that are slightly smaller than *C. arborescens*; *C. sarcocaulis* has pointed leaves. Jade plants can be grown in informal upright, slanting, and clump and raft styles. *Portulacaria* styles were listed as the same plus broom and semi-cascade. One plant that I grew in the office for years developed a low almost horizontal branch that I eventually cut off. This plant became a raft style grove.

For those who don't believe this type of plant material can ever make good bonsai, I encourage you to pick up a copy of Craig Coussins's new book, "Bonsai Master Class." There is a fantastic clump style bonsai on the cover; it is *Potulacaria afra*. The book devotes three pages to *Portulacaria* raised by Florida bonsai artist, Jim Smith.

Book of the Month

Books about Saikei or Bonsai Landscapes, By Ken Schultz

This is not the usual book report that I normally write for our Newsletter. In place of a single book to report on, I found myself with four books open on the subject of saikei or bonsai landscapes. I have been wanting to plant a saikei and when I see one, I study it carefully. As a result of my interest, I bought *Saikei: Living Landscapes in Miniature* from a book vendor at the

Scott's Antique Market on February 17, 2007. It's a first edition and I probably paid too much for it. It's also the first bonsai book I've bought at Scott's Antique Market on bonsai.

Saikei: Living Landscapes in Miniature written by Toshio Kawamoto was published in 1965 and is 151 pages long. It has 21 color photos of saikei; however there are 200 black and white photos and over 100 drawings. In the book jacket it claims to be the first book in English to describe saikei bonsai techniques. It certainly has the earliest publish date of the saikei books I own.

Saikei involves more than planting a group of trees; it is the creation of a miniature landscape like a diorama with living plants. The plants individually are not specimen bonsai. Saikei also feature rocks. As with the plants, individually the rocks are not suiseki. The rocks are arranged to create the "hardscape" portion of the saikei, much like walls, walkways, water features and arbors in your yard are the "hardscape" of your home landscaping efforts. In saikei, the rocks are arranged to create islands, stream banks, mountainsides or even mountaintops.

Initially as I delved into my newest but oldest book on saikei; I thought, if saikei means bonsai landscape, I ought to dig out the other books in my bonsai library on bonsai landscapes. These books are Creating Bonsai Landscapes by Su Chin Ee, Bonsai Landscapes by Peter Adams and Miniature Living Landscapes: the Art of Saikei by Herb L. Gustafson. (Check our website columbusbonsai.org) As I collected these books into one place to work on this article, I thought it was interesting that each of the four authors was from a different country. I thought there should be discernable style differences in the landscapes shown in each of their books. Also the books were written over a number of years. Kawamoto - Japan (Tokyo)- 1965; Gustafson - USA (Seattle) 1994; Peter Adams - Great Britain (London)- 1999 and Sue Chin Ee - China (Singapore) 2003. Here's what I observed.

The photos in Gustafson and Adams books were mostly single species plantings. Sue Chin Ee and Kawamoto show landscapes composed of a mixture of species. Both also showed a multiple pot landscape where three pots were arranged near each other to create a single large scene.

Kawamoto used the largest pots; generally they were rectangular (40"x14") or oval shaped (27"x19" some larger, some smaller). The number of rocks used per landscape ranged from one that looked like a mountaintop to 25 arranged to look like two islands.

Su Chin Ee used the widest variety of plant species in each planting. She also used figurines and buildings. Only one of her rocks was real, the rest she created from chicken wire and cement fondue. One of her "rocks" was fashioned into a waterfall complete with an electric pump. One of my favorites in her book is a raft maple planting. Unfortunately no pot sizes were listed for any of the landscapes shown.

Gustafson's book was the most "how-to" of the four books. He devotes a number of photos and text to explaining the effects of arranging the rocks to achieve different landscape effects: mountains, gorges, streams, seashores and islands. His plant material should be easy for you to acquire without too much expense. In one series of photos he starts by showing a pine in a rectangular pot. Next the tree is shown in a larger oval pot, and then he adds one rock, then several rocks that created a landscape of a tree on the top of a rocky plateau.

Peter Adams's book is one that I've referred to a number of times. He shows using the mesh bottom of a plastic nursery tray to anchor the trees in one of his group plantings. This allowed him to add soil without losing the tree placement. Each landscape photo listed pot size, and the ages of the trees used. Several step-by-step projects were provided in the second part of the book. Except for one landscape that used a created rock planting, the overall visual effect of the landscapes were less mountaininess than those shown in Kawamoto's book. I think that this shows that the mountains of Japan are more rugged than those found in England. Another difference was the number of trees used to create the landscapes. The greatest number of trees in one of Adams's landscapes was eleven. The numbers in Kawamoto's ranged from 2 to 30 trees. In Kawamoto's how-to section he uses one to five trees to illustrate his techniques.

I bought Kawamoto's book because it is the first book I've found that shows the upper - lower story concept that is like a real forest. I saw a demonstration using the same concept at the North Carolina Arboretum. Tall Shimpaku were the trees and azaleas were used to represent the mountain laurels found on local mountainsides in the Appalachian Mountains. In one of his large 40"x15" rectangular landscapes Kawamoto uses the placement of six large dead trees to create the framework of this very realistic scene. The living trees were 25 Ezo spruce 10-25" tall, 3 azaleas and 5 stones were also used. My favorite was an 18" round planting arranged with 12 stones to create a mountain brook running through the middle. The trees were 3 spruce, 16 cryptomeria and 10 azaleas.

So lets start gathering those stones and thinking about the landscapes that we'd like to create.

*** A new Half Priced Book store opened in Westerville at S. State and Schrock - They have several copies of two bonsai books - both at \$7.98. They currently have Herb Gustafson - Miniature Bonsai (cover has 3 or 4 palm sized accent plants on it) and Delmer's - Beautiful Bonsai (cover has a Calmondium pictured) ***

Horticulture and Style

Spring is Coming - Prepare to Transplant by Ken Schultz

Each year I ask myself, and newer members ask older members, "Does this tree need transplanting? There are many formulas in the books on bonsai on how to judge when its time. An example of one that I've read is one year for fast growing newer material, 2-3 years for older deciduous and up to five years for older pines. But how do you really know, after all this formula is based on the growth rate of a healthy plant.

Some people just procrastinate. "What's the harm they ask?" The answer is roots begin to die on a pot bound plant. In some cases pot bound plant may drain poorly and the roots will begin to rot. Healthy roots need air to pass through the soil with each watering. Also salts from water build up, eventually making the soil to alkaline for most plants due to the softening minerals used.

One sign that this may be occurring is when a plant wilts, but the soil is still wet, or some trees will sacrifice a branch for no apparent reason, while the rest of the plant continues to look healthy. *Chamaecyperus*, junipers and pines seem to do this for me.

Soil components also break down with age. So even though you are replacing nutrients with fertilizer, the ability of the soil to drain is changing. Particles may become smaller, passing water and air more slowly.

Also, healthy plants are growing continuously, including the roots, even if you can't see them. The pot becomes full of roots, and the tree may even begin to rise up as it "grows out of the pot." Many of my tropicals and some of my outdoor trees find a way to grow roots through the screen in the bottom of the pot. Be careful when removing these if it's been awhile since repotting, as these may be the only feeder roots the tree may have. Transplanting involves balancing the branches of the tree with the number of healthy roots that a plant has.

Transplanting should occur right before a species of tree normally has a growth spurt. For most outdoor trees this is someplace between mid March and early June. Watch for bud swell. For tropicals, it may be later. Before you start, you will need a collection of empty pots, a vision of what you want a tree to eventually look like, and the patience to shape the root ball over several transplantings to maintain the health of your tree while you work toward achieving the right tree to pot composition. Remember that bonsai is art as well as horticulture.

If you are seeing a larger tree than the one you are looking at when you are transplanting, over pot, or plant it in the ground. If you are seeing a bigger looking tree, by reducing the root ball or pot size, careful root and branch pruning will be needed. Changing the angle or style, even front for back may occur when you repot a tree. Look carefully before beginning, as it may be a year, or two or five, before you have another chance to make these changes. Sometimes the position of the roots and the branches will dictate a different style than the one you envision.

Now is the time to plan ahead. Look at your pot supply. Should you be ordering one for that maple that is pushing up out of its pot? Is that tropical draining poorly because you haven't repotted it in the last four years? And if you are going to repot, how is your supply of soil and wire? You need to have these on hand, before you get your favorite tree out of its pot, unless you are going to plant it in a flower bed for a year or two to make it thicken and grow more quickly. Remember let the tree dry out (not bone dry!) before you begin repotting, some plants become more brittle when their branches are full of water. However, do not let the fine feeder roots dry out while your tree is out of its pot. Have a spray bottle handy, and mist the roots whenever they begin looking dry. This is why cloudy rainy days are good days to transplant.

There are four signs that you need to repot. 1) Water seems to take a very long time to soak into the pot. 2) The tree seems to be high in the pot than when you planted it. 3) Roots are coming out the drain holes. 4) Branches are dying or the leaves are wilting even though you have just watered. This last indicator may call of emergency transplanting even though the timing is not quite right. If you carefully lift the root ball from the pot and it smells, or the roots are black, or mushy and you can't see any growing tips on the roots. Your tree is in deep trouble.

Roughly calculate how much soil you are going to need to handle the trees that you need to repot. For those with just a few trees, maybe a bag or two when we make soil in a few months will be enough, but for larger collections, several 50# bags of Turface, several cubic feet of bark, and a number of bags of chicken grit need to be laid in. Remember, you can screen these components even if the ground is frozen.

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 - Tell your friends!

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

This course is a comprehensive beginner's course on bonsai. 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 is \$90 for FPC members and \$100 for non-members. Call 614.645.5923 to register. Tell your friends!

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 Manikuvipati - Demo TBA

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

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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