

Columbus Bonsai Society Newsletter - April 2007

Last month was held on one of the nicest days we had had up to then since winter. As a result attendance was light. I can only assume that people were more interested in taking care of their own trees rather than styling up a new one at the meeting. We had nice juniper, cotoneaster, serrisa, fig, and hibiscus. The pot order came in and they are really nice. I bought a fine two hand size pot and will be back with cash this month to pick up more. We only sold about 10% of them so there are plenty left at good prices.

Coming Attractions

April's meeting will be back on the normal 3rd Sunday schedule and Jose will be demonstrating carving on a large specimen. Either a collected yew or a tree from the conservatory. 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

Yesterday as I walked into the main Library downtown, I saw a sight that was odd to the point of being surreal. There was a crew of several people doing the usual spring jobs: mowing, spreading mulch, using a string trimmer. The odd part of the whole scene was that the heavily dressed grounds crew was dashing about seemingly doing everything at high speed so they could get out

of the thick, fluffy snow that was falling thickly all around them! Winter's last hurrah was certainly memorable this year, but it seems to have released its grip on us and Spring is come to stay.

Last month I had written about show participation, and really encouraging those members who have never had a tree in the show to seriously consider it this year. By coincidence, the subject of show participation came up at the recent board meeting. At last year's show, more than 100 trees were on display, and as any one who has seen it in person knows, the display space we have to work with is limited. The general consensus of the board was that having a somewhat smaller show as far as numbers would mean a less crowded and less jumbled look to the show. Check out pictures of shows held in Japan and you might be amazed at the amount of wide open "empty" space that sets off each tree!

This year the show organizing committee is shooting to have fewer trees on display, just to make a more attractive and appealing display. This does not mean that our annual show is going to be hard to get into, like some juried art exhibitions. It really means that the club gets represented by good looking examples of the bonsai art.

Here are some tips to make sure your tree is show ready and finds a place:

Pre-register! Either by email or snail mail, registration makes sure the show committee knows what is coming, so space can be available and proper labeling ready as well. It may mean that if

lots of entries for the same sort of tree in the same size and style come in, the number can be thinned out.

No plastic pots, clay pots preferred and (good looking)mica accepted. Pots and trees should be clean and "groomed"-no insects or disease, dead leave removed and wiring neat and minimal.

Is it really your tree? Consider how much of your artistic input and horticultural skill has gone into the tree.

The annual show will be featured in these pages in the next few months and mentioned at each meeting. A good show takes work, but is also a very enjoyable social time to hang out with fellow tree enthusiasts. Plan of being a part of it!

Tree of the Month - Juniperus sp.

Junipers are evergreen conifers in the genus Juniperus of the cypress family Cupressaceae. The Genus is huge with 50 to 70 species listed depending on which source you believe. They are found a native plants from tropical Africa to the Arctic and back down into the mountains of Central America.

The growth habit is just as diverse, ranging from creeping shore junipers through shrubby types to large trees up to 120 feet that serve for lumber. What they all have in common are fragrant wood, dark blueish purple berries and evergreen stiff needle leaves at some stage of their life. Some species loose the needles in mature foliage, but all tend to revert to prickly needles when they are stressed or with rapid growth.

With this much habitat diversity, there is no one care guide that will cover all species used for bonsai.

In general junipers like a slightly alkaline soil, they are often found preferentially growing around limestone or sandy soil with limestone traces. They prefer plenty of sun, tolerating hot areas and dry soil conditions. Use a well draining sol mix with minimal organic content for bonsai. While some varieties will tolerate semi-shade, full shade will lead to weak leggy plants.

Fertilize with a balanced fertilizer in spring, summer, and early fall. Light application of agricultural lime will help boost color and vigor.

Propogation

In nature by seed, but the seeds have a low germination rate and require post ripening "aging".... heating, freezing and chemical treatment do not often affect the germination rate. The best method is hardwood cuttings and layering.

Diseases

Junipers are susceptible to Gymnosporangium rust disease, and can be a serious problem for those people growing apple trees, the alternate host of the disease. This is cosmetic on junipers but will hurt apples.

The most serious diseases of junipers is Phomopsis blight, which causes the ends of branches to die back. This disease can be controlled by spraying the young foliage several times during spring and summer with a fungicide such as Benomyl.

Phytophthora root rot is a problem if the soil in the pot is allowed to clog with fibrous roots or to much organic material breaking down. Freely draining soil will prevent this problem.

Spider mites may become serious during hot weather and can be controlled when first seen with a miticide. Bagworms can be picked off the foliage or sprayed when small with an insecticide such as Sevin. ~Zack Clayton

Book of the Month

Deferred to “Guide to Pot Selection”, with several reference books listed.

Horticulture and Style

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

I originally wrote this article several years ago when I first started to assist in teaching the Franklin Park Beginner's Bonsai Class. On April 4th, I thought it might be helpful to review it and offer a version now when its time to repot, and the Club has just ordered over a 100 pots to select from. After reading this article - I encourage you to look at your collection, make notes on which trees you will be repotting this year. Then bring your list with you to our next meeting. If its just one tree, and you're looking for a special pot to show it in this year, bring the tree. I put those three Hollies in three different pots before I thought the size and shape looked right. Though as you'll read, white or cobalt blue were my best color choices.

Does the pot make the tree, or does the tree make the 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 better 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 on pots. What did I find? It was a mixed bag. Most books limited 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 you ask? The basic rule is 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 glazed or unglazed. Sometimes these rules can be ignored. One criteria is selecting the appropriately shaped 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. Pots with chips or cracks are only for growing, not showing. There should be a number of eyes, or 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 small wire holes to help you anchor your tree into the pot. After a cold winter, glazed pots that are low-fired pots will crack, and spaul, and the glaze will come off in flakes. Bubbles in the glaze may also lead to problems.

Pots with inward curving shapes or an edge on the inside of the upper rim should only be used with your indoor trees. When a root ball freezes, it expands and 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 a show tree.

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

What Color Should I Choose? What do the "experts" say? 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 if you want.

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. Your pines and junipers could need more water than your trees in light colored glazed pots on the same day.

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 is said to remind 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 “bonsai 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 $\frac{2}{3}$ 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 (Wisteria and Serrisa come to mind). 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 aid in drying and freezing.

Container Shape based on Tree Style:

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. Shallow pots should be used for upright trees or group plantings. If you have antique pots you should save them for “very old” trees. Younger trees are OK in new pots.

Square or rectangular pots - represent high mountains. They should be used with trees that are angular 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 are frequently used for conifers, which have jin and shari. "Formal" groves and clumps may also be planted in rectangular pots.

Cascade Pots (Kengai): These pots may be round, square or 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. Use them with curved trunk trees or "softer styles". Oval glazed pots are for deciduous trees, mame' or shohin sizes. Chinese elm, pomegranate, serrisa and miniature rose are species suggested for oval glazed pots. 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. Round - glazed is also suggested for flowering trees.

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

Lotus shaped pots - Gustafson suggests crème colored glazed with arctic willow, birch, rosemary or heather. Lotus pots and hexagonal and square pots should be planted with the tree centered, as you would use a round pot. Generally, lotus shaped pots can be used with all the upright styles, but not clumps, groves or exposed root. Square and round pots were not recommended with these three tree styles either.

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 learn 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; copyright 2002 - Bonsai, Bonsai Pots, pages 104-105

Crespi, Luigi; copyright 1989 - Bonsai: the Complete Illustrated Guide to Growing and Caring for Miniature Plants and Trees, Containers, pages 46-47

Gustafson, Herb; copyright 1999 - Low Maintenance Bonsai, Pots, pages 9-18

Lang, Amy; copyright 1988 - The Living Art of Bonsai, Choosing the Pot, pages 258-263

Lewis, Colin; copyright 1993 - A Step by Step Guide to Growing and Displaying Bonsai, Pots, pages 38-39

Norman, Ken; copyright 1996 - Step by Step Create Your Own Bonsai 50 Step by Step Projects, Pots and Containers, pages 16-17

Zane, Thomas; copyright 1993 - Instructor' s Manual for Introduction to Bonsai - A Course Syllabus, pages 7.1 - 7.6

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!

April 15 Carving Techniques - Jose Cueto

May 2, 9 and 16 FPC Beginners Bonsai Class

May 20 Boon Manikivipati - 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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