



The Bonsai News of Houston

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
Houston Bonsai Society, Inc.

Volume 32 Number 3 Internet Edition

March 2003

March Meeting

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society will be Wednesday, March 5 at 7:30 p.m. at the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park. Refreshments will be served beginning at 7 p.m. Be sure to come early so you can visit with other members before the meeting begins.

The March program will be an open workshop. It's that time of the year—bud break is fast approaching. My elms and maples are already opening up, and it's time to make those critical refinements to my black pine.

I'd like to encourage everyone to bring that special tree(s) you find challenging to discuss styling and to ask horticultural questions. Club members will be there to explore all the possibilities of your special tree(s).

Be sure to attend the March meeting, and bring your tools and enthusiasm, as we are sure to have a great time.

See you at the meeting! --Ken

Study Group: March 15

Our study group will meet Saturday, March 15, at 9 a.m. at Bayland Center in Bayland Park, Bissonet at Hillcroft (south of 59 and east of Fondren). Everyone is welcome--beginners and seasoned veterans. We all have a good time.

--Buddy, Donald

LSBF Symposium

June 11-13, 2003, the LSBF will host *Summer Breeze Symposium*--which means all the Texas bonsai clubs will participate as the real hosts. I have been asked to be door monitor chairman. I am asking for volunteers to monitor the doors at all workshops each day. I need approximately 15 volunteer hours Friday and 30 Saturday. Everyone who is going to the symposium, please volunteer some time. The more volunteers we get, the less time any one person will have to be a monitor.

Now the *good* part--I also need volunteers to assist the artists. What a great way to listen to the artists at work.

Contact me directly. --Dennis Corley,
Southeast Texas Bonsai Club

Calendar of Events

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Mar. 1 | WaterSmart Landscaping Workshop, UHCL
281-333-5067 or http://www.watersmart.cc . |
| Mar. 5 | Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30, Hermann Park |
| Mar. 15 | Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park |
| Mar. 15-16 | Kathy Shaner in Austin, <i>Deciduous Bonsai</i> |
| Apr. 5-6 | HBS Spring Show |
| Apr. 12 | Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park |
| Apr. 12 | Shohin Society of Texas, Critique & Refinement |
| May 17 | Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park |
| June 14 | Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park |
| June 21 | Shohin Society of Texas, Exhibit Trees; Sale & Swap |
| July 11-13 | LSBF Symposium, Austin. Ted Matson and Ed Trout. Tex. Talent: Hansen, Holmes, Hubbard, Klajnowski, Padilla, Setter, Ware, Wilken. 817-283-5985, www.wimberley-tx.com/~bonsaijg/2003.html |
| Aug. 16 | Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park |
| Sept. 13 | Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park |
| Sept 20 | Shohin Society of Texas, Carving & Follow Up |
| Oct. 11-12 | HBS Fall Show |
| Nov. 15 | Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park |
| 2004 | |
| Feb. 6-8 | Shohin Seminar, Ramada Inn (1-209-826-4444), Santa Nella, CA |
| May 21-23 | LSBF State Convention, Houston.
Kathy Shaner, Guy Guidry, Mary Miller |

Monthly Bonsai Care

by John Miller

John Miller, who writes a monthly column for the Bonsai Society of Dallas and the Fort Worth Bonsai Society, has agreed to share his column with us. We need to make adjustments for our warmer, damper climate.

The end of winter is evidenced by the club digs collecting new material which means that new growth is imminent. New growth tells you to put away the repotting tools and get out the shears and tweezers because your period of rest is over.

The work to be done now is trimming the new shoots. Pruning, that is removing branches, should not be done during times of strong sap flow which starts just before you see the buds begin to swell.

In order to develop the ramification and fine twigs you want you must be trimming the new growth as it develops. Waiting until the shoots are three or four inches or longer results in coarse twigs with long internodes. These will have to be cut off and new ones developed if you are to have a good bonsai. Tweezers are the preferred tool for this job. If you do the cutting at the right time, the twig will still be soft and can be plucked with the tweezers. After a few tries you will be able to work faster with tweezers than with shears. I prefer tweezers with a dull point; sharp points catch the foliage and rounded points are too big.

Tune your trimming to the species you are working on. Essentially there are two kinds of growing habits, those with alternate growing leaves on the twigs, e.g. elms, oak, and hawthorn, and those with opposite growing leaves, e.g. maple.

The alternate growing leaves start out with small leaves and each succeeding leaf will be larger and the internodes longer. Also each leaf will have a latent bud in each leaf axial. Therefore if you let the shoot grow to 4 or 5 new leaves and cut it back to 2 or 3, you will be keeping smaller leaves and also getting twice as many growing tips on each branch and each will be a finer twig. Keep this up and you will soon have nice development on the branches of your bonsai. In determining whether to cut to 2 or 3, note the direction that you wish the end of the branch to take and cut to the leaf which has the bud on that side of the branch.

Tweezers are almost a necessity in working on maples. The opposite growing leaves clasp the new growing tip and will be extending from the old but on a lengthening stem. If the new tip is taken off as soon as the leaves separate, the result is that the leaves will be smaller and the stem will stop lengthening. Then two new tips will pop from the new leaf axials and you will have to repeat the tip plucking. Tweezers work much better for this job. I will sometimes help the new pair of leaves to separate from the new tip but be careful not to bruise them.

Junipers should be trimmed with the fingers. As the new growth develops grasp the twigs with one hand

spreading the foliage in a fan shape. Then with the other hand grasp the tips between the fleshy part of your thumb and finger and pull it off. Using fingernails or scissors will result in brown tips on the junipers. If the juniper still has needle foliage, you can avoid being stuck by moving your hand toward the tip while grasping the twig. This, in effect, causes the needle to lie down along the twig while you are holding it.

If your area is subject to late freezes, check the forecasts and be sure to take precautions. Newly developing roots in either freshly repotted trees or in established pots can be tender to freezes. Trees with new sap flow will also be more tender. And of course the new foliage will not take the cold or the strong winds that dry it and cause leaf burn.

As the weather warms up, the insects will surely make their appearance. The biggest problem in cool weather is usually aphids which seem to appear overnight. Use the foliar spray (1 tablespoon each of fish emulsion, liquid kelp, molasses, and apple cider vinegar per gallon of water, or use the commercial 'Garret Juice') weekly to control aphid, mites, etc. It also takes care of scale for me.

Spring also usually means wet weather--so watch for fungal problems such as black spot. I usually only get it on hollies and elms. A 1% solution of hydrogen peroxide or potassium bicarbonate (substitute baking soda which is sodium bicarbonate) can be used for fungal problems.

Use fertilizers sparingly at this time. Most contain too large a supply of nitrogen which causes too much lanky growth. So far I haven't had any problems using the foliar spray probably because organics need warmer weather to break down into plant soluble nutrients and therefore are not as stimulating in this weather.

When you start trimming your trees, note which ones are possible candidates for the club show coming up next month. Put these in a prominent place and give them lots of extra care. Clean the soil and make sure that moss is not growing on the trunk. Cleaning the pot with steel wool and Wiping it with leaf shine will help prevent lime deposit from forming and make the next cleaning a lot easier.

PERSIMMON HILL BONSAI STUDIO and NURSERY

Your Quality Source

**Bonsai Material, Tools, Soil, Wire,
Supplies, Pots, Bonsai Services,
Instruction, Club Programs & Seminars**

Terry & Sheila Ward

512-280-5575

Austin, Texas 78739

E-Mail: PHBonsai@aol.com

Crabapples (Part 2 of 2)

By Dolores

Because so many of us are the new keepers of crabapples, I though something on crabapples might be useful. Of course, this article is the result of research of the literature, not experience. I would appreciate comments, suggestions and criticism from any of you who have had experience with crabapples.

Other Aspects of Culture. Most authors recommend repotting crabapples annually, although some give an option of repotting every one to two years. Frequency may depend upon the species and how vigorously it grows. As far as the type of pot, the consensus seems to be to pot crabapples in deeper-than-normal pots to conserve moisture and insulate roots. Caine suggests repotting early in spring after flowering or early in autumn. Lewis, however, say to repot every year in the fall.

As for fertilizer, Walston describes crabapples as "greedy little plants" that need regular feeding. Not surprisingly, every author has his or her own fertilizer program (some may be geared to particular species or cultivars), but generally they recommend a balanced fertilizer in the spring, low-nitrogen from early summer until fall and nitrogen-free fertilizer in the fall. Craine gives a good summary of the literature:

"Resnick says weekly in spring-early fall, using dilute manure tea or general purpose fertilizer. Tomlinson recommends discontinuing feeding from the beginning of flower until the fruits are set, to discourage leafy growth that will occur at the expense of fruits and flowers. Most texts encourage heavy feeding to provide nutrients for fruit and flower production. Simon and Schuster's and Murata disagree with this practice, preferring to feed sparingly to reduce the rapid growth of the tree. Feeding is recommended at 20-30 day intervals for M. halliana and every 15-20 days for M. pumila. A good sprinkling of bone meal in the fall promotes fruiting."

As for sunlight, most sources recommend full sun to semi-sun. Several suggest protection from full summer sun. San Antonio says that intense sunlight may scald the leaves and cause the tree to transpire too much water.

Pests and Disease. Although landscape authors describe the crabapple as very disease-resistant (that description may apply only to *Malus* grown in areas cooler than our own), bonsai books indicate they may be very disease prone (but susceptibility to disease may be somewhat species-related). According to San Antonio, crabapples are prone to many pests and disease, including borers, scale, aphids, apple scab, apple rust, fire blight and powdery mildew. Caine agrees and gives a very good description of these problems plus web worms and tent caterpillars. Lewis adds apple canker (which may be the same as one of the above-mentioned problems).

The first line of defense is to cut out infected areas right away. In addition, San Antonio suggests a monthly

application of a systemic insecticide and a systemic fungicide. Caine mentions only that it is safe to use *Bacillus thuringiensis* for web worms and tent caterpillars and recommends horticultural oil for controlling some species of scale and limiting the damage from mites. Stowell used a dormant oil spray containing an insecticide, miticide and fungicide. No writer mentioned any chemical that should not be used on crabapples, but always check labels.

Of course, those wonderful old gnarly collected crabapples we see in photographs often had early training at the jaws of borers and such.

Training. Crabapples are grown primarily for their flowers and fruit; therefore, the traditional bonsai branch placement is less important than with non-flowering trees. The trees should be pruned and trained with the goal of presenting flowers and fruit. Lewis notes that, nevertheless, over time you can develop a nice branch structure by removing inappropriate branches and "waiting for the 'right' ones to develop of their own accord."¹

Of the authors I reviewed, Walston has the most extensive information on training. Among other things, he notes that, even though crabapples are fast growing, it is difficult to get taper. Crabapples want to grow like telephone poles. If you are starting with whips, he suggests cutting the whips to about six inches after letting them grow wild for two to three years. The tree will send out many shoots below the cut. Let ALL of them grow wild until winter when you should prune all but one of them back to within several inches of the trunk.. The one you leave becomes the new leader. The "multitude of lower branches" will swell the lower trunk. Over five years, a crabapple whip in the ground will develop a base of 4 to 6 inches.

Once you are satisfied with trunk and branch structure (crabapples do not usually have a lot of ramification), begin a program of pinching. The authors vary slightly on how to carry out this process (differences may be related to local climate, species, or stage of development of the tree). San Antonio recommends pruning shoots and branches to two or three buds in the spring. Caine says to prune sub-branches by mid August to encourage flower bud formation instead of leaf and stem growth. She also says that tips can be pruned as needed, reducing new shoots to two buds. Murata simply says to pinch the tips of the shoots after some growth. Lewis says to prune branches in the fall. To prune for flower production, give the bonsai a general trim to shape immediately following flowering, and then allow all the shoots to grow unchecked until mid to late summer. Cut back all the shoots to two or three buds. The buds at the base of the shoots will be fatter than those at the tips because they contain flowers as well as embryonic leaves.

A couple of sources noted that crabapples are not suitable for shohin. (Cont'd next page.)

¹ Lewis, 113. See also Walston for a detailed discussion of training stock material and Stowell, 80-85 for a discussion of styling collected *Malus*.

(cont'd from previous page.)

Flowering and fruiting. As noted above, crabapples are grown primarily for their flowers and fruit. Most species tend to have very dense carpets of flowers. None of the sources I consulted said to thin flowers or flower buds, but I would assume that should be done.

All the sources without exception stressed that fruiting takes an enormous amount of energy and strength from the tree and all recommended taking some steps to reduce the stress. Murata said to enjoy the fruit a while and then remove it all. Others suggested thinning the fruit.

It is also possible to induce a crabapple to flower early by putting it in an unheated, frost-free room late in winter, but this should not be done every year because the extended growing season will put too much stress on the tree.

Etc. For lists of cultivars that are especially good for bonsai, see Caine and Walston. For cultivars recommended for Southern gardens, see *Southern Living*.

Sources

1. Caine, Sabrina, comp. and Thomas L. Zane, ed. "Apple/Crabapple--*Malus sp.*" Bonsai Clubs International: On the Internet at bonsai-bci.com.
2. Jahn, Victoria, ed. *Simon & Schuster's Guide to Bonsai*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1990.
3. Lewis, Colin. *Bonsai Survival Manual*. Pownal, VT: Storey Books, 1996.
4. Murata Kyuzo. *Bonsai: Miniature Potted Trees*. Tokyo: Shufunotomo Co., Ltd., 1964.
5. San Antonio Bonsai Society. *Tree Care*. Pittsburgh: Sterling Graphics, Inc., 1996.
6. *Southern Living Magazine. Southern Living Gardening Trees & Shrubs Ground Covers*. Birmingham AL: Oxmore House, Inc., 1980.
7. Stowell, Jerald P. *The Beginner's Guide to American Bonsai*. New York: Kodansha International LTD, 1978.
8. Walston, Brent. "Crabapples for Bonsai." Evergreen Gardenworks: On the Internet at evergreengardenworks.com.
9. Yang, Linda. *The City Gardener's Handbook: From Balcony to Backyard*. New York: Random House, 1990.

Submit an Article

The HBS newsletter welcomes contributions from our members. Short or long. One paragraph or a three-parter. Share your discoveries with your fellow members--the good and the bad. After all, nobody knows the problems and pluses of growing bonsai in the Conroe-Houston-Galveston area better than you do.

The deadline for submissions is the Wednesday two weeks before the monthly meeting. Thank you .

Haiku

Four more haiku purported to be actual computer error message in Japan:

Three things are certain:
Death, taxes and lost data.
Guess which has occurred.

#

You step in the stream,
But the water has moved on.
This page is not here.

#

Out of memory.
We wish to hold the whole sky,
But we never will.

#

Having been erased,
The document you're seeking
Must now be retyped.

#

The Bonsai News of Houston is a monthly publication of the Houston Bonsai Society, Inc. Copyright © 2002. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without the consent of the editor or a member of the board of directors. Exceptions exist, however, for other not-for-profit and non-profit bonsai organizations or associated bonsai and bonsai nursery newsletters. HBS participates fully with reciprocation of contents and materials between other LSBF member organizations and others. Authors who submit articles for this newsletter thereby give permission to such organization to reprint.

For special requests or questions related to *The Bonsai News of Houston*, contact the Editor or the **Houston Bonsai Society, Inc., P. O. Box 540727, Houston, Texas 77254-0727, www.HoustonBonsai.com**.

The deadline for submission of articles is 8:00 p.m. the Wednesday 2 weeks before the monthly meeting. *The Bonsai News of Houston* is available by e-mail. To receive a copy by e-mail instead of regular mail, contact the editor at the address above.

Space for advertising in *The Bonsai News of Houston* can be requested by contacting the editor. Advertising rates for a business-card-sized ad (approx. 3 1/2" x 2") are \$6 per month, \$30 for 6 months and \$50 per year (12 issues). A full-page ad is \$25 per month. Rates are subject to change without notice. 3 1/2" x 2" classified ads are run free of charge for one month once per 12-month period, for noncommercial members.