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# The Bonsai News of Houston

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE  
**Houston Bonsai Society, Inc.**

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## June Meeting—Greg Setter Demonstration

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be held Wednesday, June 4 at 7:30 p.m. at the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, which is located at 1500 Hermann Drive. Refreshments will be served at 7 p.m. Be sure to come early so you can visit with other members before the meeting begins.

The June program will be a presentation by Greg Setter on elm styling. Two trees will be available for Greg to style and use for his presentation. Greg may or may not have time to work on both trees, but at the end of the meeting one tree will be auctioned and one tree will be raffled.

Greg was born and reared in Iowa and made his way to Dallas in 1979 and to Austin in 1998. He became interested in bonsai in 1985 and studied under Ted Guyger from 1987 to 1989. He was a student of Ernie Kuo from 1990 to 2000 and has been studying with Nick Lenz since 2001. A member of both the Austin and Dallas Bonsai Societies, Greg is primarily interested in collecting and training native Texas trees.

Please make plans to attend this meeting and offer Greg a warm Houston welcome. And...come prepared to participate in the auction and raffle!

See you at the meeting!

--Ken

## Study Group: June 14

Our study group will meet Saturday, June 14, at 9 a.m. at Bayland Center in Bayland Park, 6400 Bissonnet (Bissonnet at Hillcroft--south of 59 and east of Fondren). Everyone is welcome--beginners and seasoned veterans. We all have a good time.

## Picnic Saturday, June 21

The club picnic will be on Saturday, June 21 at Cabrera Farm Nursery located at 3914 Cabrera Drive, Sugar Land, Texas 77479. From Houston take Hwy. 59 south towards Sugar land. Exit at Hwy. 6 and go under the freeway. Go several miles to Lake Olympia Parkway and turn right. The street name changes to Oilfield Road. Proceed approximately 2.5 miles. When Oilfield Road makes a sharp turn to the right, continue straight. You will then be on Cabrera Drive. Follow Cabrera into the nursery. For a map, see [www.orchidsandbonsai.com](http://www.orchidsandbonsai.com). It will be fun and a good place to get plants or work on them.

## Amendments to HBS Bylaws

At the April meeting, the HBS board of directors proposed three changes to the bylaws relating to the publication of the board

minutes, nominations of officers from the floor, and selection of the audit committee. The three amendments are reproduced in full on page 30, below. The membership will vote on the amendments at the June meeting. [con'd p. 30, below.]

## Opportunity Is Knocking

As you may have noticed, I have not been able to write up as many meetings as I used. Last month we had a great presentation by Butch Wilken on pruning, and the month before that two great presentations, one by Pete Parker on collecting trees and one by Donald Green on making fertilizer cakes. I was not able to get any of this good information written up. In June we will have Greg Setter with us who is sure to provide a lot of good material.

The job does not require any experience in bonsai at all and provides a benefit, not only to the club, but also to the person who does the write-up. I have found that taking notes, studying them and writing up the information has been a good exercise for me to reinforce learning.

If you would be willing to write up the monthly meetings, or if you and a friend or two would be willing to take turns doing so, let me know. I will appreciate the help, and the club (and you) will profit.

--Dolores

## Letter from the President

We still need donations to the LSBF seminar in July. Bring the donation to Paula Hickman at the June meeting.

If you have an interest in any area of training that we can provide during our meetings, please give the list to Ken Credeur or me. It will take some time to get training material and a teacher, but we will try to take care of your training or information needs. Please give us your input, we have a lot of members with a lot of different experience levels.

At the last meeting, there was a miscommunication about bringing raffle and auction trees. We ended up with only one tree to raffle off. We are hoping to have our communication together this meeting and have two trees. We still had fun and enjoyment at the meeting.

Thanks to all of you for your time and hard work. Buddy, you need to buy more than one ticket to win.

Have a great day.

--Virgil

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## 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, longer summers and erratic winters.*

Usually in June you are slowing down for the summer. But this year there is a convention next month to get ready for. Last minute to get registration in and ready for workshops. Also gotta make sure your trees are provided for for three days and two nights.

Maintenance - the act of maintaining. Maintain - to hold or to keep in any particular state. When applied to bonsai maintenance consists of two aspects. HORTICULTURAL maintenance is keeping the tree in good vigorous health. This encompasses providing proper location, sunlight, water, soil, and fertilizers. Horticultural maintenance must be done before you can be successful in doing ARTISTIC maintenance. Artistic maintenance is continuing the plan you used when you styled the tree. It will develop ramification, grow bark, get smaller leaves, and all the other good characteristics of a great bonsai. Each one of these items above is a chapter in a book, all I can hope to do is help you know when to do some of them.

Going into summer means your trees in pots will be given the hot foot out in the sun. Think of walking barefoot down an open sidewalk. Anything solid will soak up the direct rays and get very hot. Its bad enough when the air temp goes over a hundred without the sun adding to it. You should do something to block the direct rays of the sun and put a bit of air, however thin, between the material and the pot and/or soil. Afternoon shade helps the foliage but the morning sun can heat up the pot too much. A solid cover on the soil is not very desirable as it makes it hard to water. Long fiber moss on the surface will protect the soil and let water through. Cloth would work but does not look very good. Protecting the pot is a harder job. Aluminum foil, shiny side out, has been used. Some have built wooden boxes the same size as the pot to set the bonsai in. You may figure out something in between.

As the summer progresses, the growth of the deciduous trees will slow also. But you still need to keep an eye out for errant shoots. Keeping a clipper with you when watering lets you take care of most of them. Just like in the spring, a shoot too long will thicken the twig too much. The daily (seems like) pruning chore is transferred to the tropics.

Tip pinching on flowering species like the crape myrtle will result in fewer flowers but if you let it go, they get out of shape. I prefer to try to balance the flower/design question by pinching early. This provides more growing tip to divide the energy and the resulting flower is shorter. It's less showy but more in scale.

Also if you have fruiting bonsai, you should reduce the number of fruit on the tree. The number one goal of the tree is to provide seeds for reproduction and it will starve itself in order to do so. Again, most fruits are too large to look good on a bonsai.

The best way to fertilize bonsai is by using fertilizer cakes. The cakes provide a slow constant feeding each time you water. Cakes made with a cottonseed base will provide an acid pH when they break down which we need in any city water system I know of. Making your own is easy and much cheaper than buying them. I use chemical fertilizers such as Miracid or Peters a couple of times a month also. My main problem with chemicals is not knowing how many bad salts may accumulate in the soil and also in knowing that each time I water I am washing the chemicals out on the ground.

If you want someone's viewpoint on the effects of salt buildup in soil go to the Internet and dig up some articles by Warren Hill. He is a fervent lecturer on the cause of leaf burn in maples being caused by too much sodium in the soil. He says that, when this is transported to the leaf and concentrated there by the high evaporation, it causes leaf burn. He makes a good argument but. . . .

As usual, keep an eye open for insect and fungal problems. If you are using the original garrett juice, you should not have any problems. If any fungal problems show up, mildew is a possibility, use potassium bicarbonate (does the same as baking soda but contains no sodium). I used the 1% solution of hydrogen peroxide which worked ok but it did burn some tender new growth on an elm cutting. I will only use that in cooler weather.

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### **Letters to the Editor**

The article by Paul Weishaar is the single most valuable thing I have read in any of the bonsai press on soil. I quickly downloaded the whole series, and I am slowly committing the whole thing to memory.

I have always thought that John Miller's "Monthly Bonsai Care" articles are the finest resource available for seasonal tasks, and now to have the soil article is the

greatest. BOTH IN *BONSAI NEWS*!! Congratulations and thank you. --Phil

\* \* \*

In response to the article by Paul Weishaar, I will say two important things about the soil media I have tested. He refers to Solite under 2. This product is from Japan and it's called ISOLITE. It is super but \$\$\$\$.

Under 2, he mentions Turface. This product tends to hold a lot of water and attract the salts from the water more than other products. I hope to have additional comments on this article when I return from Brussels. It looks like a lot of time and effort went into its content.

--Ron

## Soil and Soil Amendments

By Paul Weishaar

President, Indianapolis Bonsai Club (IBC)

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Thanks to HBS-member Pedro Rodriguez for calling this article to my attention and obtaining permission to reprint. The article documents a two-part program that Mr. Weishaar presents to the IBC every three years. It is updated for each presentation. You may read the entire article on the Internet at <http://www.indybonsai.org/calendar02.html> <http://www.indybonsai.org/files/Bonsai%20soil%20presentation%20revised.PDF>. Please send me your comments, particularly those with a Conroe-Houston-Galveston slant.

### 3. Organic Materials

The use of organic materials provides additional moisture retention capability and also provides the necessary micro-environment for the health of the Bonsai. Sterilized organics can be "unsterilized" by adding small amounts of unsterilized material which introduces the microorganisms into the mix. In addition organics decompose providing additional nutrients. You must remember that the smaller the particle size, the quicker it will decompose. This could require repotting every year.

**Peat Moss.** Sphagnum peat moss is a common product available at garden centers as a supplement to garden soils to "keep soil loose" and provide moisture retention. Peat moss can be used in Bonsai soil and is great for water retention. But be aware, it is a very fine material which tends to compact and if it dries out is very hard to wet again, in fact, has a tendency to shed water. Peat moss in its pure form is acidic and works well with acid loving plants. Be aware that many manufacturers add limestone particles to their peat to neutralize the pH. So if you are looking for an acidic component, check the ingredients.

**Compost.** Any time you use compost [unless it has been pasteurized] or native soil you run the risk of introducing pathogens, insects and other pests as well as the beneficial organisms. Compost, if not aged, can also cause

root damage due to the heat created by its high speed decomposing. On the positive side aged compost does provide vast quantities of organic nutrients and trace elements.

**Pine Bark.** Fine chip composted pine bark mulch when sieved makes a very suitable organic soil component that is on the acidic side of the scale. Composted is the key word as there is data available which indicates fresh bark can hinder absorption of nutrients by the roots. Particles 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch should be used for large trees and those that prefer dryer soil. 1/8 inch [fine] may be used for small trees and those that prefer moist soil. Pine bark has the ability to absorb water and later release it in vapor form. Exactly what you want! Bark also will promote beneficial fungi. Composted pine bark of the size needed is not usually available at garden centers. Here in central Indiana a fine composted pine bark it is available at Greendell Farm, Inc., just west of Mooresville, Indiana. Take your buckets or trash bags and plan to spend \$3.00 to \$4.00.

**Oak Leaf Mold.** Oak leaf mold is composted material that is a minimum one year old and preferably two years old. This aging process gives the beneficial soil fungi time to develop. The mold also stores moisture and is high in nutrients while providing trace elements. Excellent product for inclusion in deciduous Bonsai soil mix but will decompose over a period of a year. Use of this material means repotting each year. Available in bags at most garden centers. The drawback is it is quite expensive.

### 4. Soil-less Package Mixes

Commercial growers use these package mixes with great success as they are able to control the environment in their greenhouses. We lose that control when placing Bonsai outside so these mixes are usually unacceptable as they hold too much moisture.

Metro Mix, Peters Professional Potting Soil, Wonder Mix, Pro Mix, these are examples of the soilless growing mediums and are available at garden centers. They contain products like Vermiculite, Peat Moss, Perlite, composted pine bark, processed bark ash and washed sand. Check the ingredients to determine if the mix has what you want. As noted before, many object to the white colors of Vermiculite and Perlite which most package mixes have. Another drawback to soil-less mixes, is the tendency to use very fine particles of materials. This requires the use of a sieve and you can sieve out as much as 50% of some of the mixes. This stuff is expensive to begin with and then have to throw 1/2 of it away!

The only exception seems to be Wonder Mix. It is quite popular in the southern states. Wonder Mix is a sterilized organic soil-less mix which has no Perlite or Vermiculite and is often mixed with synthetics to create an organic/inorganic mix.

### 5. Premixed Bonsai Soils

Many Bonsai Nurseries have premixed Bonsai soils for sale. Many have more than one mix available and are

excellent choices for those who have a small Bonsai collection. The negative is the high price you must pay for small quantities.

#### MATERIAL SIZE

Is soil material size important? You bet it is. Does a layer of coarse granular material in the bottom of the pot improve drainage? It does not. Wait just a minute. . . . That is contrary to what every Bonsai book says! In order to understand the answer to this question we must first understand some basic principles of soils and the factors affecting water movement through it.

Soil structure or the arrangement of soil particles is a very important aspect of soil management. Sharp edged granular soil, free of dust or fines is the most desirable soil structure in which to grow Bonsai.

When water is applied to a soil it would immediately fall through due to the pull of gravity if it were not for the forces of adhesion and cohesion.

**Adhesion** is the binding force of molecules of unlike substances when brought into contact (soil and water particles)

**Cohesion** is the binding force of the same substance (water to water)

With these principles in mind we can better understand some examples of water moving through varied soils and mixes in containers. Studies made at the University of California and the University of Washington confirm the following:

Fine soils will hold more water than coarse soils, and therefore, water moves more slowly through them. Soil particle size, structure, material, adhesion, and cohesion, which we have discussed, all have an effect on the rate of water movement through the soil. If an interface, or layer of substances of different particle sizes, is placed at any point below the surface of the soil, it will impede the movement of water through it. The soil above it will become completely saturated before water will move through the interface. Therefore, larger particles placed in the bottom of a pot will actually hinder, rather than improve, drainage.

Although this is a proven principle, it is hard to understand. A good illustration of this principle is a dripping faucet. If you watch the drop of water on the end of the faucet, you will see that it grows larger and larger until it finally falls off. Adhesion is the water holding on to the faucet, cohesion is the water drop getting larger. The drop of water getting larger is the equivalent to water moving through soil of small particle size until it meets a layer of larger particles and stops, as the drop grows larger the soil above becomes saturated. If you were to test the soil moisture at this point by sticking your finger in the surface you would think it very wet, while in fact it may be dry at the root level. Once the adhesion is broken the water moves quickly through the larger particles and actually sucks the water from the above layer. The most efficient method for soil drainage is to provide a uniform mix.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

You must take into consideration the environmental conditions where you will be placing your bonsai when determining your soil materials. A Bonsai placed in full sun all day needs a soil mix that will retain moisture. If not, you will be watering it numerous times during the day. On the opposite scenario a Bonsai kept in full shade with a covering of moss needs a much more porous soil mix to keep the roots from rotting. Only you can determine the environmental conditions.

#### MIXING ORGANICS AND INORGANICS

Remember the two soil components, organics and inorganics? Well, it is time to mix each.

**Inorganic mix** is usually comprised of 50% drainage material and 50% moisture retention material. You can go through the list and use whatever products appeal to you.

**Organic mix** can be any percentage of the products noted depending upon their availability.

Now we have two buckets, one with inorganics and one with organics. The next step is to determine the proper proportions for the type tree you are repotting. The best list I have found is in Herb Gustafson's book, *The Bonsai Workshop*. The list follows but you should read his book to understand why:

GROUP I: 3/4 organic

1/4 inorganic

Azalea, Rhododendron, Bald Cypress, Tropicals, Redwood

GROUP 2: 2/3 organic

1/3 inorganic

Alder, Birch, Hornbeam, Beech, Elm, Zelkova, Maple, Dogwood

GROUP 3: 1/2 organic

1/2 inorganic

Pyracantha, Boxwood, Cotoneaster, Quince, Holly, Fig, Cororia, Fruit Trees and Wisteria

GROUP 4: 1/3 organic

2/3 inorganic

Larch, Ginko, Fir, Spruce, Hemlock, Cypress, Cryptomeria.

GROUP 5: 1/4 organic

3/4 inorganic

Oak, Pine, Juniper, Alpine and Desert Plants, Jade, Eucalyptus

Many Bonsai enthusiasts simplify the list into 3 groups in lieu of the five. This simplifies the list and Bonsai should not only survive but thrive quite well.

GROUP 1: Soil mix as proportioned

GROUP 2, 3 and 4: Soil mixes are combined into one group and proportioned as shown in GROUP 3.

GROUP 5: Soil mix as proportioned

#### MY PERSONAL SOIL CHOICE

The inevitable question always comes up, "What do you use." I mix the organics and inorganics as per the simplified 3 Group mix. While I am always on the lookout for new products I have used the following mixes for a

number of years with great success. I must note this success cannot be attributed to the soil mix alone but also the use of appropriate additives as discussed in "Part 2, Amendments." [To be run in the July and August editions of our newsletter. --Ed.]

**Organic Mix.** For young trees which will be repotted each year the organic component consists of about 80% composted pine bark and 20% oak leaf mold. The oak leaf mold provide more nutrients but as noted, will decompose within a year.

For trees which are not repotted each year the organic mix is 100% composted pine bark.

**Inorganic Mix.** For trees which will be in full sun all day I use 50% Turface and 50% Haydite. Both are moisture retentive which is necessary in the sunny environment. You can use either material by itself but I have a personal preference for the visual image presented with the multi-colored soil mix, the Turface being a light color and the Haydite dark.

For trees displayed in a partially or fully shaded area or those which have a high percentage of ground cover, i.e. moss, I substitute Meramec WB40 gravel for the Turface. The gravel provides for quicker drainage which is necessary under these conditions.

*(To be continued in July and August)*

**Amendment to Bylaws** *(cont.)*

Following are the three substantive changes proposed for the bylaws. Underlining indicates additions to the current bylaws, strike-outs indicate deletions.

**Section 5.1 General Powers.** The affairs of HBS shall be managed by its Board of Directors. This shall include determining the offices of HBS, defining the duties of each officer, setting policies of HBS, authorizing the disbursement of funds, and carrying out the business programs of HBS. The Board of Directors is to notify the membership of their actions by making copies of the minutes of the Board Meetings available to the membership, at monthly meetings and summarizing the minutes in the newsletter.

**Section 5.5 The Nominating Committee.** The Nominating Committee will present a slate of nominees to the membership at the November meeting. The Nominating Committee will accept nominations from the floor during the November meeting only. ~~Nomination can also be made from the floor.~~ The election will be held at the regular meeting in December. Each newly elected officer will begin serving his/her term of office in January following his/her election in December.

**Section 7.4 Standing Committees.** . . . C. The Audit Committee shall be one person determined ~~by the drawing of lots~~ by members of the Board of Directors present at the last board meeting held each year. The committee shall have the responsibility of auditing the books of HBS yearly and reporting their findings to the Board of Directors.

**Calendar of Events**

June 4	Monthly meeting of the HBS 7:30, Hermann Park
June 14	Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park
June 21	Shohin Society of Texas, Exhibit Trees; Sale & Swap. TexShohin@.com or 512-280-5575
June 21	HBS Picnic, Cabrera Farm Nursery, Sugar Land
July 11-13	LSBF Symposium, Austin. Ted Matson and Ed Trout. Tex. Talent: Hansen, Holmes, Hubbard, Klajnowski, Padilla, Setter, Ware, Wilken. 817-283-5985, <a href="http://www.wimberley-tx.com/~bonsaijg/2003.html">www.wimberley-tx.com/~bonsaijg/2003.html</a>
Aug. 16	Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park
Sept 20	Shohin Society of Texas, Carving & Follow Up
Oct. 11-12	HBS Fall Show
<b>2004</b>	
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

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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.

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