



The Bonsai News of Houston

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
Houston Bonsai Society, Inc.

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October 2004

Monthly Meeting, October 6

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be held Wednesday, October 6, at 7:30 p.m. at the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, located at 1500 Hermann Drive. Refreshments will be served at 7 p.m. Be sure to come early so you can visit with members before the meeting begins. Guests are always welcome.

We will have an open workshop. Bring any material you want to work on. Plenty of our seasoned veterans will be there to give you help and advice. If you need any last minute help with your trees for the fall show, now's the time to get it.

--Pete

No Study Group in October

We will not have a study group in October, but come to the fall show and bring the trees you would have worked on in the study group. Our visitors will enjoy seeing and hearing about what you are doing.

--Donald, Buddy

Fall Bonsai Show October 9-10

The HBS fall show will be October 9 and 10 in the Houston Garden Center of Hermann Park. Show times will be 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, and 10:00 am. to 4:30 p.m. on Sunday.

We need members to place more trees in the exhibit. Presently we have a little more than half the number trees needed. The sign-up sheets will be circulated again at our regular October club meeting.

Set-up time for the show will be Friday, October 8, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Members may bring their trees on Friday night or early Saturday morning. We would like to ask all members to please leave their trees on exhibit until at least 4:00 p.m. on Sunday.

--Donald

From the President

Just a reminder about the elections in December, we are looking for volunteers to serve on the board. We will need a president, second vice president and two members at large. If you want to have more of an impact on the club, volunteer. Contact one of the nomination committee members--Janet, John, Buddy and Virgil --for information.

We elect members at large each year, but we elect the other officers for staggered two-year terms. That way, every year, we have some new officers for fresh ideas, and some old officers who "know the ropes." The changing of board members keeps the club active. With new members you have different ideas, renewed energy, growth in the people serving, and a renewed outlook for the future of the club. An added value to being a board member is the new friendships that you develop.

I look forward to seeing everybody at the October meeting--ready to volunteer.

--Virgil, President, HBS

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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, with its early springs, long summers, late falls and erratic winters.

Some people want to repot their bonsai in the fall, especially if they have just done a workshop to create the new bonsai. This is not a good idea generally. Repotting can stimulate new growth which is bad just before going into winter. Also the new roots will be tender and thus require that you give the bonsai protection from freezing. If temperatures do not get that cold, the tree may decide to break dormancy on the first warm day that will surely come here in Texas. So if you must repot for any reason, be ready to give a bit more protection to the tree than you normally would.

On trees that you have been training, be sure to check the wiring. The fall growth can make the trunks and branches swell up and get bad wire marks in a hurry. If the trunk or limbs do not stay where you want them, then rewire, placing the new wire in a slightly different path.

To keep from over stimulating growth on your bonsai, go with fertilizers with little or no nitrogen. At the last meeting, I checked the organic gardening section at North Haven. Probably the best that they carry is the commercial version of Garrett juice put out by Gardenville. Since it is a very low concentration as well as being organic, you can use it as a soil drench and not worry about burning roots. Another one might possibly be Sul-po-mag. My problem with it would be that there may be too much magnesium for repeated use. Some bonsai nurseries have a Dyna-Gro product called Pro-tekt with a formula of 0-0-3 but it also contains a silicon supplement that is said to give stronger plant cells making them hardier and more insect resistant.

Watering can be a problem now. With the temperature is a little lower, the trees require less water. Also trees going into dormancy will not use much, but the evergreen types will still be using quite a bit. And you need to remember that the wind can still dry and stress the trees. So water by checking the soil and not just on a given schedule.

As the trees go dormant, it is important to check for, and treat if necessary, any insect or fungal problems before you put the trees into winter storage. Some of the Japanese growers disinfect their benches and the soil underneath with a strong solution of lime sulfur. Coat the bottoms of the benches and the posts as well as the tops to get all the spores.

I heard a gal from *The Old Farmers Almanac* on the radio today. She is saying that we should be looking for a colder winter than normal. I don't exactly believe all their predictions but . . . we have been having cold fronts come all the way into Texas this summer which is very unusual. The reason for this has been the strong and almost straight north to south flow of the upper air currents. If this continues into

November, we could see an early freeze. I for one will be watching for that—watching, but I still expect I will be out there covering up late one night.

Austin Bonsai Society Places 4th

In the August newsletter, when I reported to you the winners of the 2003 newsletter contest sponsored by Bonsai Clubs International (BCI), I was not aware that the *Bonsai Notebook*, published by the Austin Bonsai Society had placed fourth.

Congratulations, Austin! And yeah for Texas.

Calendar of Events

Oct. 6	Monthly meeting of HBS (1 st Wed. of mo.) 7:30 p.m., Garden Center, Hermann Park
No Study Group this month	
Oct. 9-10	HBS Fall Bonsai Show, Hermann Park
Nov. 3	Monthly meeting of HBS: Nominations 7:30 p.m., Garden Center, Hermann Park
Nov. 13	Study Group, Cabrera Farm Nursery
Dec. 1	Monthly meeting of HBS: Elections, pot luck dinner, gift exchange.
2005	
Jan. 15	Study Group, Bayland Park
Feb. 19	Study Group, Bayland Park
Mar. 19	Study Group, Cabrera Farm Nursery
Apr. 16	Study Group, Bayland Park
May 21	Study Group, Bayland Park
June 18	Study Group, Cabrera Farm Nursery
July 16	Study Group, Bayland Park
Aug. 20	Study Group, Bayland Park
Sept. 17	Study Group, Bayland Park
Oct. 15	Study Group, Bayland Park
Nov. 19	Study Group, Cabrera Farm Nursery
Dec. 17	Study Group, Bayland Park
May 13-15	State Convention, Fort Worth Walter Pall (Germany); Mary Madison (Florida)



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By appointment.

Help Needed

We need someone—or a group of someones—to provide the refreshments for our monthly meetings. We have about \$45 per month budgeted for refreshments. If you are willing to help, contact Virgil.

Invernizzi Styles a Juniper

If you missed Marco Invernizzi's lecture Saturday night, you missed a great one.¹ The demonstration tree was a field-grown Japanese juniper. Because it was field-grown, it had already had some training (wiring and pruning), but it was still just a bush, not a bonsai.

Marco said he would style the tree as a *bunjin*, which expresses the idea of an ancient tree anchored on top of the mountain. The finished tree would have elegance, not just in trunk line, but in branch line, too. The branches would be exposed and wired to have twists and curves compatible

with the movement of the trunk itself. The pads of foliage would not hide the trunk, which would be exposed all the way to the apex of the tree. Nor would the foliage hide the branches themselves.

Marco liked the bark on the demonstration tree. "Bark is important in *bunjin*," he said. If you have two *bunjin*-styled trees, one with smooth bark and one with rough, corky bark, the value of the rough-barked tree will be ten times that of the smooth-barked tree.

Jin and Shari. To give a juniper the appearance of age, it must have some *jin* and *shari*.² Without *jin* and *shari*, Marco said, a juniper will always look young.

In choosing the front of the bonsai, the placement of the *shari* is just as important as the placement of the branches and the *nebari*.³

So, how do you know where the *shari* should go? If you look at a cross section of the trunk of a young juniper, say a five-year-old juniper, you will see that the growth rings are fairly uniform, making almost perfect circles—and consequently, the outer circumference of the trunk itself is almost a circle.

¹ Marco Invernizzi, from Milan Italy, was this year's Texas Tour speaker—a speaker arranged for and subsidized by the Lone Star Bonsai Federation, our state-level bonsai organization. LSBF pays for the travel expenses and a portion of other expenses, thereby reducing the cost to the club and the club members. For those of us who attended Marco's lecture-demo Saturday night or a workshop Sunday or both, it was very clear why this young man is a headliner at the Golden State Convention in Santa Rosa, California in November.

² *Jin* and *shari* are Japanese terms for dead wood on a bonsai. *Shari* is dead wood running up and down the trunk or along a branch. *Jin* is dead wood at the apex of the tree or on the tip of a branch (including dead stumps of branches).

³ The rootage at the base of the tree.

But if you look at a cross section of the same tree 30 years later, the outer growth rings will show a great variety in size, and the outer circumference of the trunk will no longer approach a uniform circle. A cross section of the trunk will reveal bulges and indentations. These are the result of branches dying. In a juniper, when a branch dies, the trunk ceases to grow thicker at that point. The living branches, of course, continue to grow and the trunk continues to thicken where the live branches attach. Over time, irregularities occur in trunk thickness.

After 150 years, a cross section of the trunk of the same tree may be extremely irregular. At the trunk's narrowest points, the diameter may be even less than when the tree was young, because rot and wind and sand erosion may reduce the diameter at certain points.

These irregularities are characteristic of ancient junipers. Old pines and yews, for example, do not have these irregularities.

Over time, the surface of the trunk of an old juniper appears to have "hills" and "valleys" twisting up and down and around the trunk, showing the paths of the live veins and the dead veins.

In conclusion, Marco said, "Never make a *shari* on a hill, always in a valley!" The "valley" is the dead vein; the "hill" is the live vein, or the "life line." If you make *shari* along the life line, you will kill branches feeding from that line.

"I cannot today do all of the *jin* and all of the *shari* that needs to be done on this tree. The stress might kill it," Marco said. "I will just do the *shari* on the lower trunk tonight. Whoever wins the tree will have to finish the *shari* later."

Marco recommended brushing the trunk first to remove flaking bark and reveal the life lines better.

In examining the trunk, Marco noted that a good way to make *shari* is to join two *jins* provided the two *jins* are on the same life line.

The question was asked, when you create the *shari*, won't the root at the base of the *shari* die?

"Yes," Marco replied. "We **want** that. When we repot the tree, we will remove the entire dead root below the soil line to make room in the pot for the living roots—the roots supporting the live branches. It is important to kill the roots to make room for the roots supporting live branches."

Next Step. The next step in styling this tree, Marco said, is to determine what is good and what is bad, and also what we can change and what we cannot. First, however, to see the tree better, Marco cut all the little branches that were growing straight down. They cannot be used in the design. Then he cut the most vigorous tips of the remaining branches to balance the energy of the limb and encourage back budding.

Wiring. Marco then began wiring the tree. "It is absolutely necessary," he noted, "to wire conifers if they are to have an ancient appearance." He recommended

holding the branch at a 45 degree angle to the body. He also holds the wire out toward the end, for two reasons, 1) to keep the hand out of the tree and away from the foliage thereby resulting in less damage to the small branches and 2) to get better leverage on the wire itself.

Watering. In answer to a question on watering, Marco said that knowing when to water and how much to water is the most difficult thing in bonsai. "In my nursery," he said, "we water once or twice a day—a **lot** of water each time. You must balance your place, your soil, and the particular kind of tree." Study your place. Make experiments with the trees you are working with. Talk to the members of your local bonsai club. The purpose of a bonsai club is to exchange knowledge.

Whether you have to water twice a day or twice a week, you have to make that determination by checking your trees.

"That's why, my friend, you have to be there everyday for your trees."

"Here in Houston, I have noticed, the water is very hard," he went on to say. "Get a big pot, even if it has to be a plastic pot. You can catch rain water, but even just collecting tap water and letting it sit a two or three days will help." Some elements such as chlorine will evaporate and heavy particles will settle to the bottom. Then just skim water from the top.

"When do roots grow?" he asked rhetorically. "When they are looking for water. If there is a frequent change from wet to dry, the roots will grow more often. Marco then explained (and I did not quite understand whether this was in Italy or Japan) that certain nurseries planted their bonsai in what amounted to sieves. Water ran right through the root ball. Thus these nurseries watered five or six times a day, but they got tremendous growth from their plants. [*I won't be doing that. —ed.*]

Fertilizer. Answering another question, Marco strongly recommended only organic fertilizer. Chemical fertilizers have been developed for agricultural use and are designed for young plants—vegetables, fruits, garden flowers. Even when designed for such plants as peach trees or grape vines, the plants are rarely more than 20 years old.

Bonsai are different, he said. Bonsai grow very slowly. Chemical fertilizers are too strong, too aggressive. "And keep in mind, fertilizer is not an aspirin. It will not 'fix' anything." You must start with a healthy tree, and the three things necessary for a healthy tree are good soil, water, and sun.

In his nursery, Marco uses pellets. He likes Biogold, but the pellets he uses most often are essentially horse manure (presumably composed). "In spring you can sprinkle blood meal (high in nitrogen) on top of the soil. It will cake up after watering and drying, so you will have to break the crust up each time you water.

You can even put rusty nails on the soil!

Conclusion. In conclusion, Marco noted that “the most important thing in the initial styling of a bonsai is not definition of the foliage pads, but definition of the trunk line.” The foliage pads can be developed later. At this stage, the main reason for wiring the small branches is to be able to spread them apart so each little branch gets the maximum amount of light and the maximum amount of light falls on the primary and secondary branches. “The most important thing at this point is to spread the branches in all directions so all can get a lot of sunlight. The sunlight is essential to back budding.”

Marco then turned the juniper on its side so that we could look into the tree from the top down, and walked around the room to be sure everyone could see.

Indeed, looking down from the top we could easily see that no branch was on top of another branch, *i.e.*, no

branch shaded another branch. Clearly light would be streaming into the interior of this lucky tree.

Help Also Needed for Indexing

Your editor also needs help. You probably noticed that last year, I was not able to prepare an index for the 2003 newsletters. This year is shaping up to be even worse. If anybody would be willing and able to prepare indexes for 2003 and 2004, I would appreciate it. I can provide you with a floppy disc with (or email you) the existing index to start from.

Contact the editor. Thank you.

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