



The Bonsai News of Houston

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
Houston Bonsai Society, Inc.

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January Meeting—Wiring Fair

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be held Wednesday, January 5, at 7:30 p.m. at the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, which is located at 1500 Hermann Drive. Be sure to come early so you can visit with other members before the meeting begins.

Our program for January will be a wiring “fair”.

Several things will be going at once, so you can pick those that are of most interest to you. The planned activities are:

1. Exhibit of wired trees – Just a place where we will have several trees that have been wired fairly completely. Please bring in any examples you have of trees that you’ve wired thoroughly recently so others can get an idea of what the end product should look like.
2. Wiring practice area – If you want to do a little wiring during the meeting bring in a tree, your tools and your wire and have at it. We will have one or more experienced folks to give advice and assistance, and at least two of our newer members (Ian and Pam) will be working on trees and looking for advice.
3. Basics of wiring
4. Use of raffia when bending larger material
5. Bending larger material by cutting a wedge out
6. Bending larger material by removing the heartwood

–Pete

Saturday Study Group, January 15

Our study group will meet Saturday, January 15 at 9 a.m. at Bayland Center in Bayland Park, 6400 Bissonnet (Bissonnet at Hillcroft--south of I-59 and east of Fondren). Everyone is welcome--beginners and seasoned veterans alike. We all have a good time.

--Don, Buddy

Club Dig, January 15

We will be collecting in the Addicks-Barker Reservoir area from 9:00 – 12:00 on January 15 (rain date will be January 29).

See page 3, below, for tips on collecting trees for bonsai.

--Pete

New Officers; Chairmen

At its December meeting, the HBS membership elected the following officers: President, Donald; 2nd Vice President, Anthony; Treasurer, Janet; Members at large, C. J. and Gary. HBS also has new Publicity Chairmen, Pam and Tim.

Thanks to these members for agreeing to serve—or continue to serve—the HBS. Thanks also to out-going officers and chairmen Virgil, Bill, Phil and Eldon. The willingness of member such as these to give up their time and energy makes our club possible.

From the Out-Going President

It has been a great pleasure to serve as president for the past two years. I have been allowed to learn to serve and grow over the last years. I want to thank the members and board for allowing me that opportunity.. I would also like to thank the board for supporting me and putting up with me. I have learned that there is a lot of work involved as well as pleasure in being on the board. I have made new friends, have met new people, learned new things and opened my mind to new ideas, not just in bonsai, but in the world. Best wishes to all in the coming years. I hope everybody will take the chance to grow with the club as I have done. May your blessing be continuous, your mind be open, your friends grow in number and peace be your companion.

--Virgil, Immediate Past President

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.

Cold weather is here again. Be sure your trees are well watered before going through a deep freeze. They will be losing water to evaporation but will not be able to replenish it if the soil is frozen. Protection from high winds is necessary so they will not dry the tops out. Sunlight is not necessary on deciduous trees when they have lost their leaves. In fact, it can be bad for the tree because it will heat up the trunk and could make the tree come out of dormancy too early.

I advocate placing the trees on a well drained ground bed in a protected shady area. Then cover the pots with a shallow layer of mulch. You should know which trees have a greater need for water. If you put these trees together it will be easier to check for watering while they are in the bed.

I would treat the evergreens in a similar manner but put them where they can get some sun.

Personally, I keep my outside hardy trees on the benches until the temp goes below 25. Then I set the deciduous and more tender evergreens on the ground below and between the benches until a temperature in the teens is expected. At that point I will use old carpet and quilts to cover the benches. For the rest of the winter I leave them there and lift the sides for air circulation of the deciduous trees and uncover fully the evergreens when the temperature rises. Sounds like a lot of work, but I developed a routine that fits me and it isn't a bad as watering in the summer.

Of course the tender and semi-tender trees need protection. The semi-tender get left out for some frost but no freezing. When freezing is expected they get put in a cool area. If they show growth again, they go to the greenhouse. It's not a big greenhouse and doesn't give optimum growing conditions but keeps things from freezing.

Indoor trees will be using more water to offset the lower humidity. Soil will also be losing water faster through its surface. Be sure to watch the indoor trees for insect problems. Most plant insects love a controlled atmosphere like the indoors. Spider mites seem to get the most attention here because they do great in a low humidity and the lack of foliage spraying. Scale can be an easily overlooked source of trouble. There are usually more severe problems with plants that have been kept outdoors in summer then brought in without any treatment. Indoor trees need to be fertilized regularly and will require periodic trimming as they continue to grow through the winter.

Greenhouses are much the same as indoors. However, most greenhouses are kept more humid. The higher humidity is to the liking of aphids and fungal diseases. It may also result in your keeping the soil too moist with

associated root problems. Use your standard insect controls that you used last summer. I use my Garrett Juice mixture.

Styling can be done at this time but no repotting unless you are going to keep the tree from freezing after that. Repotting initiates new root development which is usually not very hardy.

A better approach would be to study one or two thoroughly each day making notes on what needs to be done. January is an excellent time to start any remodeling projects that may be necessary. While the trees are dormant you have better view of the branch structure. Do any need to be moved or removed? Do any coarse branches need to be cut back to a smaller, side branch for refinement? Do any long straight branches need wiring to give them motion? Does the tree really need a drastic redesign? You can also trim the twigs back while you have them there.

Any long warm spells during the month could activate some of the insect problems but as a rule there are no special needs to look for in January. Spraying with a dormant oil spray will kill adults, nymphs, and eggs of any trying to over-winter on your trees. Some dormant sprays can be used on new growth, but better results overall will be obtained if you do it before Valentines Day. A weak lime sulphur dormant spray will also get fungal spores and should be done before Feb 1.

If you have your summer display and growing benches cleared, you could use a stronger solution lime sulphur to disinfect that area too. The underside of the benches should be sprayed also. Might even eliminate spider mites next year.

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Collecting in Houston

By Pete

In many of the bonsai books and magazines, they describe collecting bonsai material in terms of long hikes through picturesque mountain scenery on cool, bright, sunny days to find that perfect yamadori pine tree in a rock "bowl" with its root ball ready to be lifted from the earth and carried gently back to your vehicle. While that's certainly a lovely mental image, it's not Houston.

Collecting here takes two forms, gathering of mature landscape material from homes, businesses, etc. and collecting from "the wild" which usually means a vacant lot or field on the outskirts of town. Both generally involve a certain amount of mud and mosquitoes, but also a healthy helping of camaraderie.

There are three rules you should always follow when collecting:

- **Always get permission from the landowner before going.** In the case of a house or business, you can easily find the owner and ask permission. And, for this type of collecting, you usually propose it when you become aware they are tearing out the landscaping for some reason or the other anyway. For undeveloped land you can often find who owns a

particular piece of land by asking around.

Government agencies are often quite willing to give you permission to dig trees. For example, we will be collecting in the Addicks-Barker Reservoir area of West Houston. Our permission to do that comes from the Army Corps of Engineers who manage that land. Similarly, in National Forests (not National Parks or Monuments) you can get a permit to collect small numbers of trees simply by visiting with the local forest ranger.

- **Take the time to be safe.** In Houston that means wearing the appropriate clothing (boots, long pants, work gloves and long sleeved shirts) and taking precautions against our known nuisances (mosquito repellent and watching out for snakes in the warm months). It is also a good idea to wear safety glasses or goggles when digging and pruning trees simply because there are a lot of pointed broken branches moving around, sometimes unexpectedly. I decided to make safety glasses a personal policy a couple of years ago after digging a fairly large tree with another HBS member. During that exercise, both of us had near misses and wound up with scratches within a few inches of an eye.
- **Backfill the holes you create when digging a tree.**

Take the time to backfill holes so that people and animals that come behind do not step in the hole and get hurt and so the landowner will allow you to return some other time.

December and January tend to be slow months for bonsai in Houston, so those are my preferred months for collecting. It also helps that it's nice and cool while you're outside working your tail off and it allows me to avoid sifting soil components, which is my least favorite bonsai activity. However, you're generally good collecting anytime from when the plants begin to go dormant (October/November) until it gets really hot the next spring (June).

I use the following checklist when loading up to go collecting:

Collecting Checklist

1. Mattock
2. Spade or shovel
3. Bucket
 - a. Compound loppers
 - b. Folding pruning saw
 - c. Twine
 - d. Contractor quality plastic garbage bags
 - e. Misting bottle – full
 - f. Leather gloves
 - g. Pocket knife
 - h. Root rake
 - i. Safety glasses
 - j. Water/Gatorade
 - k. First aid kit
 - l. Bug spray
4. Method to transport tree back to vehicle

If close to vehicle add:

1. Axe
2. Bow saw
3. Texas tree identification books

For rocky areas add:

1. Pry bar (Yeah, like we really have rocky areas in Houston).

When you get to the designated collection area, talk a walk around and look for good material instead of digging up the first tree that looks OK to you. Look for a respectable trunk with taper down low and movement. Scrape away the top layer of soil and locate the first layer of roots. Many trees in Houston develop good surface roots, so you should have 4-6 at roughly the same level spreading out in all directions. Look for varieties that are known to respond well to cultivation as bonsai.

Once you've picked out your target tree, it's time to get it out of the ground. Prune it back to something manageable with your loppers and saw(s) before attempting to dig. This will allow you to get in closer to the tree without getting poked by the branches. After Pruning, it's time to dig. For trunks up to 2-3 inches in

Calendar of Events

Jan. 5	Monthly meeting of the HBS, 7:30 Hermann Park
Jan. 15	Study Group, Bayland Park
Feb. 19	Study Group, Bayland Park
Mar. 19	Study Group, Cabrera Farm Nursery
Apr. 2-3	Spring Bonsai Show
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. 8-9	Fall Bonsai Show
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)
2008	Bonsai Clubs International convention, San Antonio

diameter I just undercut the root ball with a spade. I start 15 inches or so from the trunk and angle the spade down and under the trunk. Go around the trunk repeating this. When you find roots that are too big to cut with the spade, cut them with your loppers. After making a full pass, test to see if the trunk is loose (unlikely, but you can always hope). It usually takes a couple of passes and may require you to wiggle the trunk back and forth to find that uncut root that is holding you back before it comes loose.

For larger trees, start by digging a trench around the base of the tree. I will usually make two passes around a large tree before attempting to undercut the root ball with the spade or the mattock. As you near the end, use the spade to gently rock the root ball back and forth to locate those hidden roots so you can cut them.

Once the tree is free, lift it out of the hole (be careful of your back). Spend some time now reducing the root

(Continued next page.)

ball to a size that can you easily and safely transport back to your vehicle. When you are satisfied with the size of the root ball, put it in one of the garbage bags, mist it to keep the roots moist, and then tie with the twine if the root ball is showing a tendency to fall apart. Now, backfill your hole and haul your find back to the vehicle. Repeat until pleasantly tired.

At this point, I've settled on simply carrying the trees over my shoulder back to my pickup as my method of transport. The club has seen a variety of devices for transport, but the most effective in my mind is a plastic 55 gallon drum which was cut in half and had a couple of pulling ropes attached to it. It slides easily across essentially all terrain, and will hold most any tree you would care to dig along with your tools so you only need to make one trip.

When you arrive home, take a chopstick and/or a hose and bare root your find. Prune the roots to fit the training pot you are using and seal the cuts on the roots. Plant it in a soil mix appropriate for the species and use twine or wire to stabilize the tree if it is unstable in the pot. Water thoroughly and put the tree in a shady area for a couple of weeks. Water only if needed during this time.

After the first few weeks, go ahead and move the tree to an appropriate location for the species and begin treating as you would one of your established trees.

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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 address above.

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