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# The Bonsai News of Houston

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

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## Monthly HBS Meeting

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be Wednesday, June 1, at 7:30 p.m. at the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, which is located at 1500 Hermann Drive. Come early so you can visit with other members and have refreshments before the meeting begins.

The program for June will be the second part of our workshop on shohin yaupon led by Ray Gonzales. If you received one of the trees at the April meeting, please bring it so we can see how things are going and you can garner a little additional advice from Ray.

--Pete

## Guidry: June Workshops Cancelled

The Guy Guidry workshops scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, June 4 and 5 have been cancelled. Those who had signed up can contact me for a refund.

--Pete

## Saturday Study Group

Our study group will meet Saturday, June 18, 9:00 A.M. at the Cabrera Farm Nursery. Phillip and Pat are the owners and operators of the nursery that specializes in orchids, bonsai, roses, landscape plants, pottery, soils, etc. You may bring your own tree(s) to work on, or you may select something from the greenhouses at the nursery. Everyone is welcome. You will enjoy the quiet, tranquil, and beautiful atmosphere at Cabrera Farm Nursery.

To reach Cabrera Farm, 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) or call 281-313-2000.

## LSBF Bonsai Convention

The Lone Star Bonsai Federation (LSBF) annual convention was held in Fort Worth May 12 through 15. The Houston Bonsai Society had a good showing of members in attendance. We learned much, enjoyed our time together and got to socialize with friends from other clubs throughout Texas.

Each year, the LSBF convention is hosted, on a rotation basis, by bonsai clubs in Texas belonging to the federation. The convention provides opportunities for workshops with international and local artists, demonstrations, exhibits, raffles, shared meals and

*Cont'd page 31.*

## 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.*

You may still have time to leaf prune if you need to, but be careful, it could turn hot in a hurry. Remember do it only on healthy vigorous trees. Put the tree in a semi-shaded location out of the wind until new foliage appears. Again never leaf prune the atropurpeum varieties of Japanese maples, they don't want to rebud.

When night temperatures stay above 60 degrees, you can think about repotting some of the tropicals. I would wait another month, though, for the buttonwood.

It is important to continue the twig pruning of your trees on a regular basis. While doing this chore, look at the tree to see if there is a need to do some refinement pruning. Refinement pruning is a deeper pruning to replace a branch that has grown too long or too big with a smaller one. This is usually done with the secondary or tertiary branches not the primary branch coming from the trunk. I prefer to do this refinement pruning on deciduous trees in the winter when I can see the branch structure. But on bonsai like the yaupon hollies, I like to do it at this time when the tree is actively growing so that any winter dieback is apparent. Trees that weep a lot from cuts such as maples or pines should not be done at this time.

Even if the days are relatively cool, the sun can still get pot pretty hot. Not only does this dry out the soil very fast but the tree roots don't like a hot soil. A temperature I have heard given is 120 degrees that will kill roots on most plants. I cannot give you a precise to-do list since your backyard is different from mine but you should be sure that the sun does not hit the pots directly. If you use a cover of any kind, be sure that the side of the pot is protected also. A loose weave cover is preferable to solid paper or foil.

Get to know your trees like your children. Which ones use more water and which ones stay moist between waterings. If some are difficult to keep happy, you can try moving those to a cooler location (but be sure they get their sunlight). Another trick is to group these together so that you can hit them with a shot of water twice a day and not have to spent the time going through all your trees.

The extended cool and damp weather is good for fungal diseases like black leaf spot. Treat with potassium bicarbonate or sodium bicarbonate (baking soda). If the foliage is hardened a bit you can treat with 1% hydrogen peroxide (1 part peroxide to 2 parts water) weekly. Warm damp weather will bring its own fungal problems like mildew. Same treatment.

Also watch for signs of insect problems. The spider mite will always be near. Others to look for are scale of

various forms, aphids, and mealy bugs. I use the organic foliar feed (1 tablespoon each fish emulsion, liquid kelp, molasses and cider vinegar per gallon water) to control all these. You can use some of the other organic controls or a chemical according to label directions. Read the label directions carefully and don't apply oil-based chemicals to buttonwoods.

All pathogen controls must be sprayed with a sprayer that has a nozzle which produces a fine spray in order to cover the entire leaf surface. You got to get all them bugs or they come right back. And you got to spray on a regular basis. Any hiding in cracks will repeat the infestation.

Even with the temp below 90, the sun is getting quite intense. Most plants in pots will not enjoy a full day of this. Partial shade should be provided. A shade cloth awning is the best as it will protect in the middle of the day. Late afternoon sun will also hurt by heating the roots to the point where they will suffer.

Consider that here are two aspects to bonsai, the artistry in creating the bonsai and the gardening in keeping it healthy. The artistry you learn at the club, from demonstrations, or from books. The gardening aspect is no less important but is sometimes put on a back burner or ignored. You know that not watering will result in a "finished" bonsai so that gets taken care of in some form or other. However many do not try to learn how plants grow, what their needs are, or how they are all made unique by nature in some way. To be really successful in bonsai you need to study this aspect of our hobby also. One of the first places to start is by learning about the planting medium. What is makes a good planting mix? How does the size of particles affect the plant? How do the various species require their own particular type of mix? Try finding some of these answer in the gardening section of your local library and watch your trees show their appreciation by being easier to care for.

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**LSBF Convention, con'd.**

fellowship, and vendor areas for perusal and purchase of tools, pots, raw material, literature and nearly anything else a bonsai enthusiast can find to blow the budget on.

The guest artists this year were Walter Pall and Mary Madison. Mr. Pall resides just south of Munich, Germany and has a fabulous gallery of trees for online viewing at [www.walter-pall.de](http://www.walter-pall.de) - his website is in both English and German. He is also a frequent article contributor to bonsai magazines, including *International Bonsai*. At the convention, he conducted workshops on trident maple, pinion pine, and a bring-your-own-tree workshop, each of which were attended by HBS members.

In addition to being a talented bonsai artist, Mr. Pall is an excellent dancer. On Saturday evening, after learning the Texas two-step, Mr. Pall created an interpretive variation which he called the four-step, and no lady in the saloon could keep up with him.

On a more genteel note, Mary Madison resides in her native Homestead, Florida where she specializes in tropical variety bonsai, particularly buttonwoods. She is well known to HBS members who have taken many of her workshops and observed her demonstration/lectures over the years. Ms. Madison studied with both John Naka and Ben Oki. At the convention, she held workshops in Pocomoke crepe myrtle and Casuarina (Australian Pine).

She joined Walter Pall on the final day of the convention in critiquing the bonsai displayed at the exhibit. Perhaps the most engaging critique they gave was for the Texas persimmon displayed by HBS member John Denton. The critique was flattering, but if John felt proud, you couldn't tell it from his face. Nevertheless, the rest of the Houston club felt proud for him. We'll look for John to display the tree at the next club meeting so that everyone can appreciate him.



*John's Texas Persimmon on exhibit at the LSBF convention in Fort Worth. Photograph by.*

The convention workshops also included three wonderful featured artists who belong to the local Fort Worth and Dallas clubs. Estella Flather, a founder of the Fort Worth Bonsai Society and owner of Artistic Plants Bonsai nursery in Burleson held a workshop on bald cypress forest. Ray Hernandez of both the Dallas and Fort Worth clubs and owner of Bent Tree Bonsai in Dallas did a wonderful shohin workshop for Chinese elm. And the fabulous John Miller, co-founder of the LSBF and member of both clubs presented a very good root-over-rock trident maple workshop.

For those who could not make this year's convention, we missed having you there. But there is always next year!  
-Pam

**Chuck Ware on Texas Natives**

HBS welcomed Chuck Ware as guest speaker and artist at the May general meeting. Chuck is the proprietor of Jade Gardens, a bonsai nursery in Wimberley, Texas. He is also the founder of The Central Texas Bonsai Exhibit, a public display of bonsai focusing on trees native to Central and South Texas.

Chuck began his presentation with a traveling display of Texas natives. "I've brought these trees, not to discuss particular trees, but to illustrate a concept," he explained. Among the bonsai he brought were Mexican plum, Mustang grape, sweet gum, cedar elm, Texas persimmon, hackberry and Texas ebony.

Chuck noted that for most native trees, it is best to guide them just a bit, but then allow them to do what they naturally want to do. He emphasized that traditional styling for Japanese bonsai will often make little sense for a native Texas tree.

The main obstacle to Texas natives as bonsai is that we don't have the history of shaping and care. "If I have a problem or question about a Japanese maple," Chuck said, "I can find *volumes* written—not just on the Japanese maple, but on the Japanese maple *as bonsai*."

Chuck then called attention to the Mexican plum, with its magnificent, dark flaking bark. "This is a wonderful native for bonsai," he said, "but notice how weak the top is." We can speculate as to what the problem might be—perhaps incorrect soil has led to a problem in the roots, or perhaps the fertilization program is not appropriate for this tree, but we have not one book to look to for advice.

"However," Chuck said, "I happen to have several Mexican plums—and *every one* of them has a weak top. " This suggests that perhaps the Mexican plum is laterally dominant and that therefore we have to train it somewhat like the azalea, with special attention to the apex and strict control on the lateral branches.

"I'm not saying that is the answer," Chuck stressed. The point is, we Texas growers simply don't have the

collective knowledge—written or otherwise—to give a definitive solution to the problem.

“You all remember the story of the blind men ‘looking’ at an elephant. One feels the trunk and says it’s a snake; one feels the legs and says it’s a tree, one feels the tail and says it’s a rope, and so on.” We are like those blind men, Chuck said. In order to see the big picture and make real, substantial progress with Texas natives, we must pool our knowledge and experiences so that we can see the elephant, not just a rope or a snake.

That leads to a second obstacle that challenges us with regard to Texas natives, a cultural obstacle: we don’t revere the experience of those working in the area or the age of the tree. We tend to “want it now.” With bonsai, age is the key, both as to the tree, and as to the artist. Bonsai is not instant – it takes time. Nowhere is that truer than with native bonsai.

With reference to leaf reduction on natives, Chuck advised, “Nip it!” Every time a leaf grows beyond the reduced size you want to maintain, nip it off. He said that eventually your tree will realize it can’t attain a full-sized leaf and will decide to fool you and put out smaller leaves.

Of the sweet gum, Chuck said, “I treat it like a trident maple. It’s a tough tree—loves water. It’s hard to over water. It’s a vigorous grower. You have to keep after it constantly, but *it will never look like that perfect trident maple*, it won’t have those perfect pads.”

We have a unique hackberry, the sweet hackberry. It’s a wild and wooly tree with shoots everywhere. When you play with this tree, “don’t spend a penny on wire!”

Following his talk, Chuck styled a Texas persimmon. “When you collect Texas persimmon,” Chuck noted, “you will notice that as you go south, and find sandier soil, the roots are closer to the surface and therefore more flared. Trees growing in rocky soil have to send roots straight down to find soil and water and therefore have few surface roots and little or no flare at the base.

In answer to a question, Chuck said that as you go south, the Texas persimmon also tends to be evergreen, while to the north it tends to be deciduous.

When you dig a Texas persimmon, it may have to sit dormant 12 to 18 months with no leaves at all. Be patient. If the bark is green, leave it alone.

The tree was raffled off and won by Rossana, who promised nervously to keep it alive.

For reference on the characteristics and horticultural care of Texas natives, Chuck Ware recommends *Trees of the Southwest* by Robert A. Vines. He also recommends the camaraderie of the club for improving the care and health of our trees. Members should not hold back on discussions about trees with problems. Club members should not be shy about discussing or identifying each other’s tree problems.

Chuck’s presentation was enlightening and entertaining. For more information about both The Central

Texas Bonsai Exhibit and Jade Gardens, visit Chuck’s website at [www.wimberley-tx.com/~bonsaijg](http://www.wimberley-tx.com/~bonsaijg).

--Pam

### Point Well Taken

Chuck Ware’s point that we should pool our knowledge and experience with native trees as bonsai is a point well taken. We here in the Houston area have two excellent forums for pooling our knowledge. One of course is your newsletter; and so, I want to take this opportunity to remind you that articles—or even just little blurbs—sharing your experiences are always welcome. Those sorts of things distinguish us from other bonsai publications and provide a unique benefit to our members.

The second forum is our relatively new Internet Bonsai Club. With the click of a mouse, you can share information and find out if others in our area have had similar experiences—be they successes or failures. If you would like to be a member of the electronic group, send an email to [hbs-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:hbs-subscribe@yahoo.com). Your membership will be activated within a few hours, and you can begin participating in conversations. You can also visit the start page at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hbs/> and request a list membership from that web site. For more information, or to request a membership, send an email to Gary at [gdteter@houston.rr.com](mailto:gdteter@houston.rr.com).

--Dolores

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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 address above.

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**Calendar of Events**

*HBS meets the first Wednesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Houston Garden Center, Hermann Park, next to the rose garden.*

May 27-29 Brussels Rendezvous in Memphis

May 28-31 World Bonsai Congress in Washington, D. C.

June 1 Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30 p.m.,  
Wrap up of shohin yaupon with Ray Gonzales

June 4 Guy Guidry workshops CANCELLED.

June 5 Guy Guidry workshop CANCELLED.

June 18 Study Group, Cabrera Farm Nursery

June 25 SSOT. Tropical Show & Tell; Workshop  
For information, Terry or Sheila Ward  
512-280-5575 or [phbonsai@sbcglobal.net](mailto:phbonsai@sbcglobal.net)

July 6 Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30 p.m., Hermann Park  
Ugly tree swap; open workshop

July 16 Study Group, Bayland Park

Aug 3 Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30 p.m., Hermann Park  
TBA. Phillip and Alex

Aug. 20 Study Group, Bayland Park

Aug. 27-28 Guy Guidry

Sept. 7 Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30 p.m., Hermann Park  
Club Auction

Sept. 17 Study Group, Bayland Park

Sept. 17 SSOT. Critique; Business Meeting.

Oct. 5 Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30 p.m., Hermann Park  
Open workshop

Oct. 8-9 Fall Bonsai Show

Oct. 15 Study Group, Bayland Park

Nov. 2 Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30 p.m., Hermann Park  
TBA; nominations to the HBS board.

Nov. 19 Study Group, Cabrera Farm Nursery

Dec. 7 Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30, Hermann Park  
Elections to the HBS board; holiday party.

Dec. 17 Study Group, Bayland Park

**2006**  
Jan 14-15 Guy Guidry