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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, July 6, 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.

**August Meeting.** Phillip, member of HBS and owner of Cabrera Farm Nursery, will demonstrate the repotting of tropicals while HBS member Alex styles a tropical tree of his choice. The tree that Alex styles will be raffled at the end of the meeting.

**September and October Meetings.** The programs for September and October have been changed. In September, Mary Miller will critique HBS member trees. The club auction has been moved to the October meeting. Mary Miller lives in Florida and specializes in tropical plants as bonsai. Some of her personal favorites include the buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*), tamarind *Tamarindus indica*, many of the figs (*Ficus spp.*) and a tree she introduced to the bonsai world: Bahama berry *Nashia inaguensis*.

She was voted a life member of both the Bonsai Society of Miami and the Gold Coast Bonsai Society, Ft. Lauderdale.

Mary has been guest speaker at many bonsai clubs throughout the country and gave workshops at LSBF conventions in 1998 here in Houston, in 2000 in Corpus Christi and in 2004 again here in Houston.

**November Meeting.** For the November monthly meeting, Mike Hanson will speak on Japanese black pines. Mike owns the MBP Bonsai Studio in Austin. He has been active in Bonsai Clubs International, having served as president, officer, and director. Mike has also served as president of the Austin Bonsai Society and the Minnesota Bonsai Society. Black pines are one of his specialties.

## Saturday Study Group

Our study group will meet Saturday, August 20, 9:00 A.M. at the 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.

## Marc Noelanders To Be in Houston

Marc Noelanders will be in Houston September 9 and 10 as the LSBF Texas Tour Speaker.<sup>1</sup>

Marc, a native of Belgium, studied extensively with noted Japanese artists, including Masahiko Kimura. He has been recognized by many, including the late John Naka, for his knowledge of the trees he works with and for his ability to capture perfection and yet maintain the ruggedness of his subject. He has taught throughout Europe and in Russia, Canada and the United States.

**Lecture/Demo.** Marc will do a lecture/demo Friday night at the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park starting at 7:00 p.m. A sign will be posted near the front door as to which room we will be using. **WE WILL NOT BE IN THE MAIN AUDITORIUM.** On Friday night there will be a \$5.00 per person charge to attend the lecture. The tree will be raffled at the close of the lecture.

**Workshops.** The morning workshop on Saturday will be from 8:30 a.m. until noon in the West Room, **NOT IN THE MAIN AUDITORIUM.** Signs will be posted.

Workshops will be limited to 8 attendees and cost \$35 per person (one tree per person). If there is enough interest, we will have an afternoon workshop from 1 p.m. to 4:30.

Please prepay for your workshop when you sign up. We will not hold a space for anyone without payment. This will be on a first come first served basis. There will be a \$5.00 charge to observe the morning workshop and \$5.00 for the afternoon workshop, if we have one.

We will have a signup sheet at the August meeting. If you have questions, see Buddy Allen or give him a call at 281-437-3177 or e-mail him at ballen2836@sbcglobal.net

--Buddy

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<sup>1</sup> Every year, the Lone Star Bonsai Federation (LSBF) sponsors and subsidizes nationally and/or internationally known speakers to visit the Texas bonsai clubs that belong to the federation.

## 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.*

*Reprinted from the August 2003 issue of The Bonsai News of Houston.*

On to the more mundane tasks needed to be done during the hottest part of the year. For all except the tropics this is the most stressful time. Most native species can take the full sun on the foliage but cannot take heating of the roots.

Not only does the heat get to our plants but also the low humidity causes the plants stress by evaporating the water from the leaves faster than the plant can move it upward. Any wind that is present multiplies the problem. The sun shining on the pots will raise the soil temperature, causing the soil to dry out and damaging the plant roots. Therefore you may need to water more than once a day. If so, my preference is to water heavily in the evening, letting the plant recover during the cool night and then to water lightly in the morning, spraying the foliage also. Partial shade, 50% shade cloth or afternoon shade will be great. Mulch on the soil will help but does not keep the sides of the pot from getting hot. Even the morning sun can be too much on the pot in August. A cloth cover will work as will setting the pot in a good fitting box.

At the B-B-Q at the Smith's I observed that Howard and Sylvia use a white cloth around the pot together with an automated mist system. The cloth provides both shade and evaporative cooling after being wet by the mist system. As Bill Cody's detailed articles in the Austin newsletter show, there is no perfect solution outside of a climate-controlled greenhouse (one for each species of bonsai) but every little aid helps our trees get through the summer.

Remember to water twice. Wait a few minutes after the first watering for the dry soil particles to absorb some of the water on their surface. Then the second watering gets the particle fully wet.

The stress caused by the temperature will give any insects a chance to wreak havoc. Watch for the spider mites and scale especially this month. The morning spray will help knock some off. The Garret juice foliar spray will keep them down also. Gary Marchal uses the new horticultural oil sprays year around. (The old oil sprays were heavy and burned foliage so be sure to get the new type). Chemical sprays are available but most chemical reactions are accelerated by heat and may damage plants. Read the labels!

Any rainy spell can bring fungal problems, powdery mildew being one of them. That is why I use the foliar spray in the morning, so that the leaves will dry quickly. If you have a fungal problem, use potassium bicarbonate

available at most nurseries. One brand is named Remedy but that is also the name of a potent herbicide; check all labels.

Be careful about applying fertilizer in hot weather. Even organic fertilizers create some chemical reactions and the above remarks apply here, too. By the end of the month the nitrogen applied to the tree should be reduced. A little may be put on into September but the tree needs to be allowed to stop growth to get ready for dormancy. Evergreen trees benefit from a low nitrogen fertilizer through the winter.

Look in nurseries for material for bonsai. Some nurseries reduce their stock and order new material for the fall season. For our purposes many plants with beat up tops work great and are sold at a reduced price. When appraising a potential purchase, roll your hand into a loose fist and look through it at the lower part of the plant. Ignore the top, observe the base trunk and lower branching. Ask yourself, Can I make a bonsai out of what I see? If the answer is not yes, look some more. This works in the field when on a dig, also.

## Mary Miller on Tropicals

*A summary of the lecture that Mary Miller gave in Houston in June 2002. Reprinted from The Bonsai News of Houston, July and August 2002.*

Mary Miller began her lecture-demonstration Friday night with a brief discussion of buttonwoods--in response, she said, to requests to talk about the tree.

"Everybody loves buttonwoods," she said, "but not everybody can grow them. Success with buttonwoods is part art; part horticulture."

First, many people think they grow in the water. They do not. Mangroves grow in the water, but buttonwoods grow near the water. Although it is true buttonwoods tolerate salt water, they do not like salt water. Those of you who may be adding sea salt to your buttonwoods are not helping the plant.

Not everything about the buttonwood is logical. It can get fungus. It can get root rot. Keep them evenly moist, and distinguish between "watering to keep wet" and "watering to keep moist." Buttonwoods do not want to be kept wet. Be aware that a lot of buttonwoods are from South Florida and come in a nursery soil that is a wet mix.

This is the perfect time of year [mid-June] to repot buttonwoods. Some people use a soilless mix. Mary believes a coarse, fast draining mix is best. She adds a little extra organic matter.

"Never pick a buttonwood up by the trunk," she warned. You may have what you think is a container full of roots, but there may really be only one or two roots. If the soil has a lot of clay, it will fall off in a glob taking all the tree's roots with it. Never break the roots on a buttonwood.

When you repot, tap the root ball and slip it out of the

pot. Lay the root ball down on the ground or on something for support and wash the soil off. When you put it back into the pot and start putting soil around it, watch out for the chopsticks. Roots on the buttonwood are easy to break, no matter how big or old the tree.

If you do break the roots, as a last resort, you can put the tree in a bucket of water. The procedure is to first decide where you want the roots to break out. Punch a line of holes around the circumference of the buck at that point. Put the tree in the bucket and secure it with rocks or bricks. Let water drip into the bucket so the level stays the same (because overflow will escape through the holes you punched). At the line where air and water meet, new roots will develop. This procedure will only work in June, July and August.

Buttonwoods do not like the cold and will not tolerate it. They will sulk when the temperature gets below 50 degrees. They must be protected in winter.

After the brief discussion of the buttonwood, Mary turned her attention to the lecture-demo tree, *Ficus retusa* "Golden Gate," called Tiger Bark in Taiwan. The Golden Gate is a good tree for quick rooting.

**Styling.** "The first rule in styling is to start by taking off what you know you don't want," said Mary. As the evening progressed, it became clear that there was quite a bit that Mary didn't want! She also noted that in the summer, you can cut all the leaves and all the branches off a ficus without killing it.

The demo tree had a large aerial root. Mary noted that if an aerial root comes from the trunk and develops like a root, then it is fine to keep it if it fits into your design, but if the aerial root looks like PCV pipe, cut it off. If you want to keep a particular aerial root, do not touch it. If you touch it, you kill it.

In styling a ficus, a literal apex is not necessary. The ficus should have a soft top, but it should not look like a mushroom. It should have soft and gentle clouds. In fact, for many tropicals this is true. We are not too quick to make the classical triangle in designing ficuses. Ficus branches tend to go up to support that big canopy.

**Root Mealy Bug.** Mary warned about root mealy bugs. At first glance, they look like mycorrhiza, the good fungus found on the roots of some trees, especially pines, but if you notice something moving, what you have is not mycorrhiza--you have root mealy bugs. They will not kill a tree right away, but they will eventually kill it. It may take six or seven years. To get rid of the pest, drench the soil with some kind of chemical, for example Dursban. Follow the instructions on the label.

**Brushing Trunks.** With regard to cleaning the trunks of the trees, Mary noted that she brushes her tree trunks, including the trunks of the buttonwood and ficus. Brushing removes dust, calcium deposits and such. The tree will respond positively when it gets sun, water, and

stimulation on the bark.

**Pruning.** When pruning a ficus, make the cuts flush, she said. Don't gouge into the trunk.

In answer to a question, Mary said she never uses wound sealer. "Occasionally, I use Elmer's Glue to inhibit borers on a big cut. If you do use wound sealer, don't leave it on. It holds moisture, and the wood behind the sealer will rot."

**Roots.** When cutting big gnarly roots, make the cut cut-side down. That way the new roots will grow straight into the ground. If you cut so the cut is face up, the new roots will go up and then down. Go to the dollar store for cheap saws for cutting roots in the soil. The soil will ruin the saw, but you can throw it away.

**Potting.** Ficus do not like to be soaking wet. They should have a good, well-drained soil. Mary does not use Superthrive. "If you do use Superthrive," she warned, "realize because of the vitamin B-1, the tree will stay wetter longer."

Shallow containers are ok for ficus. Ficus are also good for slabs.

**Air Layering.** In air layering, when you cut through the cambium, there is a thin layer, almost microscopic. Some people remove the cambium but do no scrape to hard wood. This is a mistake. The idea is to kill the area between the top and bottom of the tree. It is a good idea to sand the area.

**Fertilizer.** Tropicals need to be fertilized every week during summer. Use what's on sale, Mary said. There's no magic formula, but it is most important to understand the numbers on package. If first number is nitrogen content. If the first number is highest, the fertilizer will be a pusher--you'll be pruning all the time. The middle number is the phosphate content. A high middle number promotes fruit and flowers, but is also good for roots. If you use a liquid fertilizer, you will flush it out the next time you water.

In winter, fertilize tropicals once a month with a low-nitrogen fertilizer. If you use high nitrogen in winter, you may get new growth which may not be able to tolerate cold or freezing weather.

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### Calendar of Events

*The HBS meets the first Wednesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. in the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, 1500 Hermann Drive, next to the rose garden.*

Aug 3	Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30. TBA. Phillip Drilling and Alex Leong
Aug. 20	Study Group, Bayland Park
Sept. 7	Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30. Club Auction
Sept. 17	Study Group, Bayland Park
Sept. 17	SSOT. Critique; Business Meeting.
Oct. 5	Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30. Open workshop
Oct. 8-9	Fall Bonsai Show
Oct. 15	Study Group, Bayland Park
Nov. 2	Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30. TBA; nominations to the HBS board.
Nov. 19	Study Group, Cabrera Farm Nursery
Dec. 7	Monthly HBS meeting, 7:30. Elections to the HBS board; Holiday party.
Dec. 17	Study Group, Bayland Park
<b>2006</b>	
July 14- 16	State Bonsai Convention, Corpus Christi

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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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