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# The Bonsai News of Houston

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

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## January Meeting—Open Workshop

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be held Wednesday, January 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.

Our program for January will be an open workshop. This is a great time of year to wire those deciduous trees while you can see the branch structure and get in to the fine branches easily. So, bring one of those elms or maples or whatever and your wire and do some wiring.

See you in January. --Pete

## Club Dig, Saturday, January 21

We will be collecting in the Addicks-Barker Reservoir area from 9:00 - 12:00 on January 21 (rain date will be February 4). To reach the meeting point from I-10 West, take the Eldridge exit and go north on Eldridge. Once you cross over the levee and into the reservoir, turn left into the first opening you see (next to a large pond). This is where we found the parsley hawthorns last year. My cell phone is 832-656-0208 in case you have trouble finding us or are uncertain about the weather.

See this page, below, for tips on collecting trees for bonsai. --Pete

## Saturday Study Group, January 21

Our study group will meet Saturday, January 21, 9:00 a.m. at the Bayland Center in Bayland Park, 6400 Bissonnet (Bissonnet at Hillcroft--south of I-59 and east of Fondren).

## New Officers; Chairmen

At its December meeting, the HBS membership elected the following officers: Pete, first vice president; Rosanna, secretary; Michael and Catherine, members-at-large; Buddy, LSBF delegate; and John, LSBF alternate. We also have a new web master, Gary.

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

## Collecting in Houston

By Pete Parker

*Reprinted from The Bonsai News of Houston, January 2005.*

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

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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.*

Saying winter is here now is a bit of overkill. I had a temperature on the coldest day of 9 degrees. Since then it's been back up to 70. That's the kind of swings that are bad for bonsai. Try to select locations to temporize the lows and highs by utilizing ground heat and artificial shade.

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 in the pot 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. This will give the roots several degrees of protection. You should know which trees have a greater need for water. If you put these trees together it will be easier to check your need 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 temperature goes below 25 degrees. Then I set the deciduous and tenderer 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. Its 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 than 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. Does the tree need to be repotted this spring? Is the present pot good or should you find a more appropriate pot for it?

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 Valentine's Day. A weak lime sulphur dormant spray will also get fungal spores and should be done before February 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.

If you have several trees and find that you run short of time during the repotting season, you may gain a little advantage by mixing your soil this month.

I am looking forward to the week after Christmas. That is when I will start bringing my shohin elms and maples into the greenhouse to break dormancy, and I get to play a couple of months earlier than I would without the greenhouse. That repotting, restyling, and the first flush of growth will be over before the big stuff thinks about growing.

## Membership Fees Are Due

Your membership fees are due. Renew now to be sure you do not miss a single newsletter or any information about up-coming events. An individual membership is \$25.00; a family membership, \$30.00. A membership form appears at the end of this newsletter.

**PERSIMMON HILL BONSAI**  
**AKADAMA / KANUMA / PUMICE**  
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**Premium Plant Fertilizers**  
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**Terry & Sheila Ward**  
**Austin, Texas 78739**

**phbonsai@sbcglobal.net**  
**By appointment please**

**Collecting**, *cont'd from page 1.*

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 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 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

*Cont'd next page.*

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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### 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.*

Jan. 4	Monthly meeting of HBS, open workshop
Jan. 14	Mike Hansen: Styling
Jan. 21	Club dig, Addicks-Barker Reservoir
Jan. 21	Saturday study group, Bayland Park
Feb. 18	SSOT. Trident maple Workshop--fused trunk style and/or stone clasp. Terry, Austin, 512-280-5575, <a href="mailto:texshohin@sbcglobal.net">texshohin@sbcglobal.net</a>
Feb. 25	Mike Hansen: Styling continued, special topics
Mar. 11	Mike Hansen: Springtime care
Apr. 22	SSOT. Workshop, raft style by John Miller.
June 17	Mike Hansen: Candle pruning and series wrap-up
June 17	SSOT. Workshop, Steven, tropical shohin refinement and air layering. Shohin display for the CCBC/LSBF convention. Annual sale & swap meet.
July 14- 16	State Bonsai Convention, Corpus Christi
Sept. 16	Panel critique. Annual business meeting. Workshop, Alisan, Japanese style scroll.

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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.

Space for advertising in *The Bonsai News of Houston* can be requested by contacting the editor. Advertising rates for a business-card-sized ad (approx. 3 1/2" x 2") are \$6 per month, \$30 for 6 months and \$50 per year (12 issues). A full-page ad is \$25 per month. Rates are subject to change without notice. 3 1/2" x 2" classified ads are run free of charge for one month once per 12-month period, for noncommercial members.

# HOUSTON BONSAI SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(Please fill out and mail in or bring to a meeting)

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Type:** (Select one) \_\_\_\_\_ Individual (\$25.00) \_\_\_\_\_ Family (\$30.00)

**Membership Classification:** (Select one)

\_\_\_\_ Local member      \_\_\_\_ Out of town member      \_\_\_\_ Vendor      \_\_\_\_ Bonsai club

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **STREET:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY:** \_\_\_\_\_ **STATE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **ZIP CODE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**HOME PHONE:** ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ **WORK PHONE:** ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ **E-MAIL** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ *Do not publish my address to general membership*      \_\_\_\_ *Call here ONLY if absolutely necessary*

**Payment Amount Enclosed:**      \$ \_\_\_\_\_ **Paying with:**      \_\_\_\_ Check      \_\_\_\_ Cash

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