



The Bonsai News of Houston

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
Houston Bonsai Society, Inc.

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February 2006

February Meeting—Suiseki

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.

The February program will be presented by Earl who will speak to us about the art of suiseki or viewing stones.

The third black pine workshop will be on February 25. We will be continuing to style our trees at that workshop.

--Pete

Club Dig.

The weather cooperated and once again, we had a fun and productive dig in the Addicks-Barker Reservoir area. I don't know how many members actually showed up as I got there around 10:30 and by that time everybody had scattered into the woods.

I helped one couple collect a good hawthorn with a base of about 5 inches, and helped Pete collect one (also a hawthorn) with a base of about 6 to 7 inches or larger. I also helped Alex collect a Hawthorn with a base of about 8 to 10 inches which we are going to name the "AK Tree" for Alex and Ken. Alex also got a good elm. DON'T dig with Alex as he digs the largest trees he can find!

The area was not muddy nor did it have water standing and running through it like it did last year. Also it was not as cold, so I think all had a good time. When I left around 1:00, some members were still in the woods!

I did not collect any trees because I will be moving into a townhouse in a few months with a smaller yard. I decided to wait until I move to see how much room I have. So I just went to roam the woods and help others collect. Next year, though, I hope to dig up the woods.

--Ken

Happy 35th, HBS

This month, the Houston Bonsai Society is 35 years old. The club was founded in February 1971 by Arch Hawkins and Bill Hedden. Thanks to the dedication and hard work of many bonsai enthusiasts over the years, it is still going strong.

Happy Birthday!

Saturday Study Group, February 18

Our study group will meet Saturday, February 18, at 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.

--Anthony, Buddy

Membership Fees Due March 15

Your membership fees are due March 15. If we do not receive your payment by March 15, you will not receive the April newsletter. 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.

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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.

This warm winter that we've had so far it makes it difficult to know what to do. If your trees show signs of growth, especially the swelling of the new buds, you will need to accelerate your repotting. However, after repotting at this time you will need to protect the new roots and growth from severe weather. New growth will be damaged by a freeze. If they are only swelling a little and no green is showing, you may be able to slow them by just moving the deciduous trees out of the sunlight especially and protected from the warm south wind.

It would also be a good time to spray insecticide and fungicide to help control wooly bugs, worms, spider mites, mildew, and other fungi.

The weather in Texas is always unpredictable during the winter months. Watch for the wind as it dries out the soil. If it rains heavily, check your pots to see that they don't have standing water in them as this will cause roots to rot. Tilt the pot by placing a piece of wood or rock under one end; this will help drain the water out. It can also get cold; bonsai in their shallow pots cannot survive a prolonged freeze, so have a plan in case of a freeze, too.

It is best not to prune during this month and don't fertilize at this time!

Keep an eye on the wires on your plants so they don't cut in and leave scars that are difficult to remove. Remember, even though growth slows in winter, the wire still can cut into the tree. Deciduous trees will expand rapidly when new growth starts. If the wires are cutting in, take them off and don't rewire now.

Spring, in bonsai as in nature, is a long drawn out affair and each species has its own timetable in dealing with it. To be really successful in bonsai, then, you must know what each species you have will need and how it responds to YOUR OWN backyard climate. If you have kept your trees from freezing, they will want to start growing much earlier than those kept outside all winter. Typically, in my collection which stays outside, the elms will be first, foliage showing about the end of February or the first of March depending on the winter, along with the earliest maples. Then later in March, the rest of the maples and most of the others. The deciduous oaks will come out around April 1. Out here in the country, I am 2 or 3 weeks later than I was in town, 30 miles away. The timetable has to be your own, set by watching the trees themselves.

All bonsai functions should be done when your tree tells you that the timing is right.

Repotting can be done at any time during the dormancy but new roots are susceptible to freezing so you have to have

some place to protect them after repotting. The best time to repot the deciduous, temperate-zone trees is when the buds are just beginning to swell but before green is showing. Generally this will be before the last of the freezing weather. Trees that leaf out early, maples and elms, can withstand a few degrees of frost but, if you repotted, you should protect the newly growing roots. Sometimes this just means setting them on the ground using ground heat for 4-5 degrees of protection. Some species such as the oaks and willows are naturally programmed to wait much later so that there is very little chance to get nipped.

Refinement is the process that makes a well-styled tree look great developing fine ramification and obtaining smaller leaves. An important part of the refinement starts as soon as new growth appears (4-5 leaves or less). Keep it pinched so you keep the internodes short and develop a compact set of twigs with small leaves on the branches. On alternate-leaved species (e.g., elms), pinch when the shoot gets 4 or 5 leaves. Fingernails or shears can be used. If the twig gets too long, it will be tough and you will have to use shears. On opposite-leaved trees (maples), pinch the central shoot as soon as it can be distinguished in between the first two leaves. To do this really right, you need to use tweezers (with a dull point).

The newer wisdom on azaleas is that you also repot them at this time. The roots will be reestablished by blooming time. This is much easier on the tree than waiting until after bloom when the temperature will be hot. Before blooming starts, you will be removing a lot of excess buds anyway which will reduce the stress on the tree at that time. Remove enough buds to allow the remaining flowers to have room to fully open. This should be done in late February or early March on the early blooming species (Karume) but may go later in March for the Satsuki types.

Spring flowering plants will have their buds set on last year's growth, so pruning them will remove some flowers. Those that bloom later in the year will generally bloom on this year's growth. Pruning them may reduce the amount of flowers. In some cases such as crape myrtle, tip pruning of the branch will result in no flowers at all. In these cases you must decide which is most important, ramification or flowers. A compromise would be to prune the branch shorter than you normally would and then let it bloom on new growth which will be at the proper length, at least for the first flowering of the season.

When the growth starts, the tree will need fertilizer. However, use one that has a small amount of nitrogen (the first number). The tree is naturally programmed to grow rapidly at this time, so you don't need to encourage it further. Feed lightly to maintain a healthy green foliage. Ideally use an organic fertilizer which provides nutrients more slowly when the weather is cool. Trace minerals should be added to help with both the foliage color and the color of blooms.

If you have not used an horticultural oil, the time is fast running out. The oil would be used to kill scale and overwintering mites and other boogers. When new growth starts, oil might damage the tender foliage. When new growth starts, the problems to look for are the above-mentioned mites but especially aphids and mealy bugs. These can be controlled as well as giving the plants the required fertilizer by using an organic spray--1 tablespoon each of liquid kelp, liquid fish emulsion, apple cider vinegar (5%), and molasses in one gallon of water. Or use a commercial mix like Garrett Juice. All these are available in any organic nursery. If leaf spot, mildew or any other fungal problems appear, use a baking soda spray or a commercial fungicide.

An important job which many neglect, saying they are not going to show any trees, is (using an apt automobile term) to detail their trees. This makes them look their best and that helps give you incentive to follow other good practices. Start by checking the branches. Prune any out-of-place or too long twigs. Remove any unnecessary wire on limbs that have set in place. Treat any jin and shari that needs it. Then move down to the pot. Be sure it is clean and all lime deposits are removed. Steel wool works great to clean pots. A coating with a very light wax polish such as leaf shine will make the pot look good and help keep the mineral deposits from forming. Then check the soil. It should cover the outer roots. The surface of the soil must be clean of any fallen leaves or other debris. Now it looks so good you might as well take it to a show.

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.

Feb. 18	SSOT. Trident maple Workshop--fused trunk style and/or stone clasp. Terry Ward, Austin, 512-280-5575, texshohin@sbcglobal.net
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 Hendricks, 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 Clarke, Japanese style scroll.

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

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NAME: _____ **STREET:** _____

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