



The Bonsai News of Houston

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
Houston Bonsai Society, Inc.

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July Meeting

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be held Wednesday, July 5, 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.

For the July meeting we will have an open workshop. Bring your tools and a tree or two to work on. This is a particularly good time of year to work on tropicals.

Pedro Morales. He will give a lecture-demo on Friday evening, August 4, at 7:00 p.m., in the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park. Admission will be \$5.00. Saturday, he will give two 3-hour, bring-your-own-tree workshops, 9a.m. to 12 noon and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., also in the Houston Garden Center. Cost: \$30.00. --Pete

Saturday Study Group

Our study group will meet Saturday, July 15, 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

HBS Bylaws Amendment

At the monthly meeting on June 7, 2006, the Houston Bonsai Society adopted an amendment to its bylaws. Under the amendment, the HBS will reimburse travel expenses for the alternate representative to the Lone Star Bonsai Federation (LSBF) meetings in Austin. Prior to the amendment, only the voting delegate was reimbursed. Article II.A.4 of the HBS bylaws now reads:

Mileage to Lone Star Bonsai Federation (LSBF) Meetings—The HBS will reimburse the Delegate and Alternate for gasoline to travel to the LSBF meetings. The Delegate and Alternate must provide the gas receipts in order to receive reimbursement.

Critiques by a Master

Have your tree critiqued by a Master! Do you want your trees to be ready to show in the 2007 exhibit? The

Texas State Bonsai Exhibit (TTSBE) is offering a special critique at the state convention in Corpus Christi in July. The offer is limited to the first 12 to register. Bring a tree from home or from the exhibit.

Register with your club TTSBE representative, Buddy. The cost is \$10.00 per tree. Time of critique: Friday, July 14 between 8:30 and 9:30 p.m. at the state convention in Corpus Christi. Exact location to be announced.

Win a Free Night at Hotel for the Convention

The Texas State Bonsai Exhibit is having a drawing for one free night at the hotel during the convention. Tickets are \$5.00 each. If you would like to purchase a ticket or tickets, please see Buddy. He will have tickets available at the July meeting.

Flower and Plant Expo a Success

The Houston Flower and Plant Expo at the George R. Brown Convention Center, May 5-7, was a great success. The turn out was excellent. The HBS booth was outstanding, with excellent trees on exhibit. In fact, the HBS received a Special Recognition Award for the exhibit. The exhibit was judged to be thorough and the members who manned it, to be approachable, informative, and friendly.

Thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make this event a success for the HBS.

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Monthly 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.

Thought you would like the Corpus Christi advice on tropicals and other items (by David)---Keep on re-potting semi-tropicals like ficus, and figs. You can start on your Texas Ebony and tropicals. Keep an eye out on the temperature and if is going to fall below 70 degrees (yeah right, below 70 in South Texas in June) you need to protect your newly re-potted tropicals (Fukien tea, Bahama Black Olive, Buttonwood). When repotting, be sure to wire the tree securely in the pot to give it good stability against the winds. Putting rocks on top of the soil for a few days can also help brace the tree.

It is NOT recommended to repot any deciduous trees that you need to root prune. If you must repot due to problems with tree, change the pot or repot it in larger container only. DO NOT prune the roots. These deciduous trees have very tender roots at this time of year.

Watch the soils every day so they do not dry out. Inspect your bonsai from top to bottom, also inspect the drain holes. Insects are on the move since the last rain. Inspect for ANY and all insects and treat accordingly. If you discover an infestation, treat according to the label of the pesticide.

Watch your training wires, so they will not cut into the branches.

Along with a regular fertilization during June, I would suggest to add one or two drops of Super Thrive per gallon of water to help maintain health and prevent heat stress. ---That's not any different from the Dallas bonsai care at this time of the year. My criteria for repotting tropicals is for the night temperature to stay above 60. I would emphasize to check the wires on your trees and also see that the drains are not blocked in any way. Especially check them after a rain to be sure that your pots have drained properly. If necessary, put a small board under one end of the pot to aid in draining.

Many spring flowering plants will be setting buds for next year's flowers. Azaleas will set their buds toward the end of July. If you prune tips after that you remove the new buds.

Now that night temperatures are staying above 60 degrees you should think about repotting some of the tropicals. Most tropicals do well with an annual repotting. Keep the tropicals trimmed, as they will be growing like crazy. However, if you want flowers on those that produce on the end of the twigs, bougainvillea-pomegranate-crape myrtle, you will have to forgo the bonsai shape to let them flower. These species should be pruned more drastically before the growing season starts so they can still be in a pretty good shape.

Pots out in the sun can get pot pretty hot. Not only does this dry out the soil very fast but the tree roots cannot live in 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 that allows airflow is preferable to solid paper or foil. An article by Dr. Bill Cody suggests that his experiments show that an afternoon watering at 2 p.m. will go a long way to keep the soil temperature in a desirable range, while a box close around the pot does little to protect it. My opinion that the reason for this is that the sun still heats the soil and there is no airflow to cool it. A solid cover over the pot and box would create an oven type enclosure.

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. Preventative medicine is best. By the time you see signs, the damage is already done, especially spider mites. I use the organic foliar feed (1 tablespoon each fish emulsion, liquid kelp, molasses and cider vinegar per gallon water) to control all these. Add a tablespoon of baking soda if you have mildew or other fungal problems. You can use some of the other organic controls or a chemical according to label directions. Read the label directions carefully and do not apply oil-based chemicals to buttonwoods. A hose end sprayer does not work very well. Its droplets are too large and you have little control over where it goes. Use a pump sprayer with a fine spray and cover both top and bottom of leaves.

You can fertilize with most organic type fertilizers without worrying about burning the roots in hot weather. Don't use hi-powered types though, such as guano or one heavy on the chicken manure unless you use them very lightly. If you use chemical types, follow the label. If they do not specify any temperature restrictions, try using a weaker solution than normal. Without a lot of organic material in your soil, you should use a weaker solution but more often to provide a more even feeding. Most of us do not fertilize our bonsai enough anyway.

And finally, keep up the ramification pruning. As long as you keep the roots happy the plant will probably continue to grow. Tropicals will now be growing at their fastest.

Organic Fertilizer Recipe

One of our HBS members asked if John Miller would share his organic fertilizer formula and methods. In response, John provided the following.

There are many recipes for fertilizer balls out there that keep popping up from time to time. All are roughly the same. I don't really have a "recipe" but usually throw one together based roughly on Doris Froning's Ooglah Balls.

Con'd next page.

Ooglah Balls

7 cups cottonseed meal
 3 cups bone meal
 ½ cup blood meal
 1½ oz. Elmer's glue

Mix dry ingredients and add glue and enough water to hold together.

I cut the bone meal to 2 cups and add 1 cup of Texas greens and which give a lot of trace minerals.

This can be rolled into balls, but that is a lot of work. I spread the mix out on a piece of foil on a flat board. 18" foil works good as it gives you about a 12" width of fertilizer 1/2 to 3/4 inch thick. Length of spread is whatever I have to spread it on. Let it set up, but, before it gets dry, cut it into 1" squares for larger bonsai and 1/2" squares for the smaller bonsai. For mame, I like it thinner and maybe 3/8-inch square. When the top is dry, turn over and remove the foil to help dry completely. Any crumbs generated can be used on the yard or outdoor potted plants.

I suggest storing any unused cakes in a canister with a fairly tight fitting lid to keep from attracting undesirable elements.

Put the 1" cakes 6-8" apart around the pot. Use the smaller cakes proportionally closer on the smaller bonsai. I would still use Garrett Juice as a soil drench once a month as a supplementary feeding.

As you can see there're no real tight rules. You need a source of nitrogen (the cottonseed and blood meal). The bone meal is for phosphorous. If you can get treated bone meal, it will break down and release its nutrients faster.

Some recommend letting the mix ferment for a week or so before forming the cakes. That would make the nutrients more readily available but would become quite smelly in the process.
 —John Miller, Dallas-Fort Worth

Yvonne Padilla on Forest Plantings

At the June meeting of the HBS, Yvonne Padilla created a forest setting from curly leaf ficus trees, also called ficus too little.

"First put a little soil in the pot," Yvonne began. "Since a forest--and saikei, too--is usually in a thin tray or on a slab, the soil can be more dense. I use a mixture of Landscapers Pride and filter medium from a pool supply store. The filter medium is a coarse, large-grained sand, like a large-grained blasting sand."

Yvonne had root pruned the trees about six months ago, so they would have no root problems. The trees have, therefore, developed fine feeder roots and should not go into shock from the root pruning which will be necessary to get them into position in the forest.

"I like to have the tall trees to my left and the short ones to my right," Yvonne noted. "As the trees graduate down in size, the canopies graduate down--and they also graduate back."

Although Yvonne had done some foliage pruning on the trees before she came, she did more as she positioned the trees.

As Yvonne placed the first trees in the pot, she noted, "If the trees are pushed together tightly, you can eliminate the inside branches, and you can also eliminate inside roots. Eliminating the roots will help you get the trees closer together."

Vary the spacing between trees, she advised. Don't have all the trees three inches apart. Look at the trees, their sizes, shapes, and curvatures. A drawing of the relative positions of the trees may help--both with a forest and with a saikei. No trees should cross and you must see all the trunks.

A variety of trees are suitable for a forest--curly leaf ficus like the ones Yvonne was using for the demonstration, narrow leaf ficus, elms, and so on. In answer to a question, Yvonne said that usually a forest has all the same species, but you can mix species if you like. If you do mix species, however, be sure all species have the same horticultural needs--including watering, light and temperature. Don't mix tropicals with trees that need a certain number of frost hours to thrive. Don't mix trees that need a lot of water with those that can't tolerate much water.

"I don't use wire to secure the trees in the pot," said Yvonne. It's too hard to move them around or adjust them. I just use muck to hold them in place. I mix the clay soil we have in Corpus with cut sphagnum moss. I let it set about 3 months to get the best consistence." See *The Bonsai News of Houston* 3-2006, p. 14, for her muck recipe.

At this point Yvonne had seven trees in the forest.

"All kinds of designs are possible. You can have all the trees to one side. You can have one off by itself. You can have a near forest; then you have the small trees to the front. Or you can have a distant forest, with the small trees to the back."

Then Yvonne decided to add two more trees to the forest, making nine.

Turn and adjust the trees so that no branches are crossing. Trim the inside branches because they will be shaded out and weaken. They will never amount to anything.

In answer to a question about the placement of the main tree, Yvonne said that if you have a distant view, the main tree is in the back. If it is a near view, the main tree is to the front.

"You don't need top quality trees for a forest or saikei. That's the whole idea. Trees that are not ready to stand alone can grow and develop in a forest. As one particular tree matures and is ready to stand alone, remove it to a bonsai pot."

Yvonne likes to put accent plants in before she adds all the soil. In this forest, she used super dwarf mondo grass which she had gotten from Houston Garden Center. It is a slow, slow grower, and it won't run all over the container.

It is good to have the soils at different levels. Hills and valleys add interest.

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In answer to a question regarding whether the forest would be an outside or inside planting, Yvonne said that all hers were outside.

In adding the soil, Yvonne used a chopstick to carefully work the soil round the roots of the trees. There should be no air pockets. If there are air pockets, the roots have nothing to grow in. The soil should be nice and firm, but not packed solid—just firm. Don't chop-chop-chop, she said. Instead, stick the chopstick in and wiggle it back and forth gently to work the soil in.

Next Yvonne used a spatula to make a little "gully" around the edge of the pot.

"I like to put some kind of dressing on top," Yvonne said. "This is just 'fines' left over from sifting soil ingredients. Then spray it with a little water."

If your forest is on a slab, make a little "fence" with muck to hold the soil. Cover the muck with soil mix to hide it. The "fence" will have to be repaired or rebuilt from time to time.

Yvonne likes to soak her forests in SuperThrive. It keeps the trees from going into shock and gives them a jump start. Yvonne also adds a little of Amway's LOC (liquid organic cleaner) to the SuperThrive mix. The LOC helps keep the soil from washing when you start regular watering from the top.

The forest was raffled off, and Phillip Drilling was the winner. Congratulations, Phillip. And thank you, Yvonne, for another great presentation.

--Dolores

In Memoriam Paul Pipitone

Bonsai enthusiast, Paul Pipitone, died this past spring. Paul was active in the Houston Bonsai Society beginning in at least 1988. In 1989 he served on the board of the HBS as member-at-large. He also served on the HBS Education Committee. In 1995, Paul, who was a corporate lawyer, and John Padilla of Corpus Christi, also an attorney, donated their time to incorporate the Houston Bonsai Society under Texas law. In April 2002, two of Paul's black pines were chosen for exhibit at a conference in Dallas headed by Masahiko Kimura.

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.

July 5	Monthly meeting of the HBS, 7:30 Open workshop
July 14- 16	State Bonsai Convention, Corpus Christi
July 14	Critique by a Master, 8:30-9:30 p.m.
July 15	Saturday Study Group, Bayland Park
Aug. 2	Monthly meeting of the HBS, 7:30 Ficus on a slab, Pt. 2, Pete.
Aug. 4	Pedro Morales from Puerto Rico. Lecture demo at 7:00 p.m., Hermann Park. Cost: \$5.00.
Aug. 5	Pedro Morales. Two 3-hour workshops: 9 a.m.-12 noon and 1p.m.-4 p.m., Hermann Park. Cost: \$30.00. Bring your own tree.
Aug. 19	Saturday Study Group, Bayland Park
Sept. 6	Monthly meeting of the HBS, 7:30 Club Auction
Sept. 16	Saturday Study Group, Bayland Park
Sept. 16	S.S.O.T. Panel critique. Annual business meeting. Workshop, Alisan, Japanese style scroll.
Oct. 4	Monthly meeting of the HBS, 7:30 Pete, Growing Bonsai from Seed & Cuttings
Oct. 7-8	Fall Bonsai Show
Oct. 21	Saturday Study Group, Bayland Park
Oct. 28-29	Kathy Shaner in Austin, Persimmon Hill. Terry or Sheila, 512-280-5575 or phbonsai@sbcglobal.net
Nov. 11	Saturday Study Group, Cabrera Farm Nursery
Dec. 16	Saturday Study Group, Bayland Park

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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.