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# The Bonsai News of Houston

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

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Volume 37 Number 1, Internet Edition

January 2008

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### Monthly Meeting

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be held Wednesday, January 2, at 7:30 p.m. at the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, located at 1500 Hermann Drive. Refreshments will be served at 7:00.

We will have an open workshop, so bring a tree to work on, or a tree you need help with, or some other bonsai project.

### Club Dig, Saturday, January 19

Our annual HBS dig will be on Saturday, January 19 at the Addicks-Barker Reservoir area from 8:30 - 12:00. 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).

See page 3, below, for tips on collecting trees for bonsai. --Hurley Johnson, Vice-President, HBS

### Officers, Directors and Delegates for 2008

At its December meeting the HBS elected the following officers: Hurley Johnson, first vice-president; Rossana Cromwell, secretary; and Alan Raymond and Christina Esmahan, members-at-large. Officers also serve as directors. Buddy Allen was elected LSBF voting delegate; and John Denton, LSBF alternate delegate.

Our thanks to these members for giving up their time to make our organization work. Thanks, too, to outgoing officers Pete Parker and David Bately for their hard work for the club.

### Saturday Study Group?

Our study group usually meets one Saturday a

month at 9 a.m. usually at Bayland Center in Bayland Park, 6400 Bissonet (Bissonet at Hillcroft--south of 59 and east of Fondren). In the last minute rush, I forgot to check whether we will have a study group this month. An announcement will be made at the regular January meeting.

### ABS Membership at Half Price

In the December issue of this newsletter, HBS members were encouraged to join the American Bonsai Society (ABS). HBS member Ron Smith will pay one-half the \$40 annual membership for all HBS members. Houston Bonsai members can sign up at the ABS website or contact Gloria Duncan directly, pay the \$40 fee, turn in a copy of the membership card to me (Donald Green). Ron will then reimburse \$20 to each person who joins. The address for Gloria: Gloria Duncan, ABS Executive Secretary, P.O. Box 351604, Toledo, OH 43635-1604.

--Donald Green, President, HBS

### Contests for 2009 Convention: Logo Design and Theme

The HBS will host the Lone Star Bonsai Federation (LSBF) 2009 state convention at the Marriott Hotel--Westchase in Houston. To prepare for the convention, HBS will sponsor two contests. Be creative and enter your suggestions for the convention theme/slogan and/or the convention logo design. All submissions should be given or sent to Buddy Allen on or before our March 5, 2008, club meeting. Contest winners will receive a \$50 gift certificate for use at any of the convention vendors.

1. **Theme/Slogan** should be a short phrase that evokes any one or combination of bonsai, the

*Con'd page 5.*

## 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.*

There seem to be a lot of digs scheduled throughout the area. Even TTSBE has now gotten into the act and is sponsoring two digs in some great territory. So get out your shovel, loppers, chain saw, and your other favorite collecting paraphernalia. Check and sharpen them and be ready to join your group when a dig is scheduled. That's the best way to get old material that will do well in your area. If you are lucky, you just may find a tree that nature, machinery, or cows have done most of the styling for you.

Your primary job in cold weather is to be sure your trees are well watered before going into a deep freeze. They will be losing water to evaporation but will not be able to replenish it if the soil is frozen. Protection from high winds is also necessary so the tops will not dry 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 soil and that could make the tree come out of dormancy too early.

Because the ground holds a more even temperature, I advocate placing the hardy trees on a well drained ground bed in a protected shady area. Then cover the pots with a shallow layer of mulch. 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. Evergreens can use a very light feeding during the winter, maybe one-fourth the summer rate.

Personally, I keep my hardy trees on the benches until the temperature goes below 25. Then I set the deciduous and more tender 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 around the deciduous trees for air circulation 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 bad.

The tender and semi-tender trees need protection. The semi-tender (*e.g.*, crape myrtle and pomegranate) 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. It's not a big greenhouse and doesn't give optimum growing conditions, but keeps things from freezing.

Tender or tropical trees that are kept indoors will be using more water to offset the lower humidity. Soil will also be losing water faster through its surface. Also, 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. The flat green scale is hard to spot on the underside of leaves or tight against the stem. Indoor trees need regular fertilization and will require 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 organic foliar spray all winter.

Back to the outdoor trees. 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 and not at all if any green is showing.

If you have your summer display and growing benches cleared, you could use a strong solution lime sulphur to disinfect that area, too. The underside of the benches should be sprayed also. Might even eliminate spider mites next year.

Styling can be done at this time but no repotting unless you are going to keep the tree from freezing after that. Repotting initiates the development of new roots, which are usually not very hardy.

A good approach is to study one or two trees 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 long straight branches need wiring to give them motion? Does the tree really need a drastic redesign? You can also trim the twigs while you have the trees there.

## Collecting in Houston

By Pete Parker

*Reprinted from The Bonsai News of Houston, January 2005 and January 2006.*

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 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, take 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

*Con'd next page.*

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 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.

## The Texas State Bonsai Exhibit Sponsoring Two Digs In January 2008

In January of 2008 The Texas State Bonsai Exhibit is sponsoring two collecting trips.

Some of you are familiar with the location in west San Antonio. Many specimens were successfully collected last year at **Red Bird Ranch** on Protranco Rd. about 8 miles beyond 1604. This is year it is necessary to reserve a space. The weekends of January 19<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> are available. Please contact Donna Dobberfuhl with your reservation. [Two2views@yahoo.com](mailto:Two2views@yahoo.com) and or 210-326-0860.

The second collecting trip is in Eagle Pass, Texas. There are only 3 available spots left. The owner of the property is allowing 10 individuals to participate. This is a three-day trip, leaving Friday January 18<sup>th</sup> and returning Sunday evening January 20<sup>th</sup>. The land is described as brush land that is home to many South Texas plant species popular for bonsai--Texas ebony, huisache, kidney wood and desert yaupon. The land has not been previously scouted for bonsai material; so we may spend a day or so looking for appropriate plants. This trip will be a great adventure and is likely to involve a lot of walking over hilly terrain. We have a choice of good over night accommodations in Eagle Pass and an invitation for breakfast tacos on the ranch in the morning. Contact Mike Hansen at [mbpbonsai@hughes.net](mailto:mbpbonsai@hughes.net).

Don't forget the cameras. The rest of us want to see what has been collected. **Good Hunting!!!!**



**PERSIMMON HILL BONSAI  
STUDIO & NURSERY**

**Terry & Sheila Ward      Austin, Texas**  
512-280-5575 - [phbonsai@sbcglobal.net](mailto:phbonsai@sbcglobal.net) - By Appointment

**Logo Contest** (*Con'd.*)

theme "Bonsai on the Bayou in 2004", Corpus Christi's "Wind, Waves, Bonsai LSBF 2006" or "The Best of Bonsai in 2009." Feel free to submit as many theme suggestions as you like.

- The selected **Logo Design** will be the graphic or symbol that represents the convention on its letterhead, flyers, posters, pin, etc. The graphic should be submitted on a 4" x 6" card and should contain any combination of bonsai, LSBF, HBS, 2009, etc.

--Buddy Allen, Convention Chair, LSBF Delegate

**Membership Fees Are Due**

Membership fees are due, \$25 for an individual, \$35 for a family. A membership form is attached at the end of this newsletter.

**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. 2 Monthly meeting of the HBS.
- Jan. 18-20 TTSBE dig, Eagle Pass. See article, page 4, above.
- Jan. 19 HBS club dig. 8:30 Addicks-Barker Reservoir.
- Jan. 19 TTSBE dig, Red Bird Ranch west of San Antonio See article, page 4, above.
- Jan 26 TTSBE dig, Red Bird Ranch west of San Antonio
- Feb. 23 Shohin Society of Texas (SSOT) Workshop. Continued preparation of trees for state convention. 10:30, Persimmon Hill, Austin, Terry, Sheila Ward, [texshohin@sbcglobal.net](mailto:texshohin@sbcglobal.net) or 512-280-5575..
- Apr. 12 SSOT. Critique—Shohin bonsai and rough material critique by a 3-person panel. Austin
- June 7 SSOT, Austin. Display selection & workshop.
- June 19-22 Convention hosted jointly by San Antonio, Austin and the American Bonsai Society at the Tropicana Hotel on the river walk. For info <http://absbonsai.org/seminars/ABS2008/main2008.html>.
- Sept. 27 SSOT, Austin. Business meeting & workshop, slabs from slate.
- 2009**
- State LSBF bonsai convention in Houston.
- July 7-13 6<sup>th</sup> World Bonsai Convention, San Juan, PR, Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino [www.worldbonsaiconvention2009.com](http://www.worldbonsaiconvention2009.com)

**The Texas State Bonsai Exhibit Highlights Ending 2007**

- The board conducted seven fundraisers during the year.
- Hired a fundraising consultant, *Seeds For Change*.
- New and expanded and easy-to-update website: [www.ttsbe.org](http://www.ttsbe.org).
- Land was found, 12.2 acres in Mustang Ridge.
- September an anonymous donor gave \$25,000 to facilitate the purchase of the exhibit property.
- Mike Hansen and Elaine White closed on the site for the exhibit in Mustang Ridge, Texas.
- A investor (a private individual and friend of Bonsai) stepped forward and offered to carry our mortgage
- at 8 ½ % for 15 years.
- A very large ceramic pot (65"x42"x3.5") was ordered from China for the cedar elm forest planting donated to the exhibit by the family of Paul Pepitone of Houston. Pictured below, with Lori Hansen, is the elm forest in its new pot.



- Two significant volunteers, Els Ulug nominating committee chair and Debra Van Cleef organized the database of individuals associated with bonsai.
- Six (6) new board nominees elected in November to start in January 2008: Marie Byer, San Antonio; Greg Setter, Austin; Mike Watson, Austin; Bill Moore, Austin; Nancy Moore, Austin and Els Ulug, Austin.

Respectfully submitted,  
Donna L. Dobberfuhr, sec. TTSBE

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For special requests or questions related to *The Bonsai News of Houston*, contact the Editor, Dolores Plaisted, e-mail [bonsainewshouston@yahoo.com](mailto:bonsainewshouston@yahoo.com) or the **Houston**

**Bonsai Society, Inc., P. O. Box 540727, Houston, Texas 77254-0727, [www.HoustonBonsai.com](http://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.

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

**MAIL TO: HOUSTON BONSAI SOCIETY**

**P.O. BOX 540727  
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77254-0727**

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