



# The Bonsai News of Houston

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

Volume 37 Number 5, Internet Edition

May 2008

## Monthly Meeting, May 7

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be held Wednesday, May 7, 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.

In May we will have a yaupon workshop. The bigger ones have 4-inch trunks and will be \$15. We will also have some smaller ones with 1- to 2-inch trunks for \$10.00. These would be good for shohin.

We can still repot these. Bring your own pots if you wish help repotting at the meeting. I will ask Phil to bring some bags of soil.

In June we will once again look at the black pines we have started and work on the buds.

--Hurley Johnson

## Convention Update: "Busy Person's" Registration Now Available

In addition to the normal convention registration, the American Bonsai Society and the Lone Star Bonsai Federation are offering a Saturday-and- Sunday-only registration for those unable to attend on Friday. The price is \$150 (\$170 after May 19). This new offer is a fantastic deal, and all will benefit. To see details, go to the ABS web site, [www.absbonsai.org](http://www.absbonsai.org). To go straight to the Busy Person's registration form, <http://absbonsai.org/seminars/ABS2008/sat%20sun%20only%20texas%20registration.pdf>

--Trent Voigt, Editor, Snips 'N Clips  
San Antonio Bonsai Society

## Saturday Study Group, May 17

Our study group meet will meet Saturday, May 17, at 9 a.m. at Bayland Center in Bayland Park, 6400 Bissonet (Bissonet at Hillcroft--south of 59 and east of Fondren). Everyone is welcome--beginners and seasoned veterans alike.

## Bonsai Show, May 17-18

### Houston Chinese Bonsai Society

Everyone is welcome to the bonsai show sponsored by the Houston Chinese Bonsai Society. Admission is free.

Time: Saturday May 17<sup>th</sup> 10:00-5:00

Sunday May 18<sup>th</sup> 10:00-5:00

Location: Chinese Culture Center at 10303 Westoffice Drive, Houston, TX 77042. It is just inside Beltway 8, parallel to Westpark, between Westmart and Briarpark.

## Win a Registration to the Convention!

HBS will award four free registrations for the bonsai convention in San Antonio June 19-22. To be eligible, members must register before the May 19 early registration deadline and give Donald Green a copy of the confirmation on or before the HBS meeting June 4. The names of the winners will be drawn at the June meeting. This offer applies only to full registrants, **not** to "Busy Person" registrants.

## Note to Contributors: PDF Format

I cannot insert a pdf document into the electronic newsletter. Neither can I cut and paste anything but a few words. I'm glad to retype material if I need to, but there is no way for me to insert photographs or other graphic material, such as the ABS-LSBF registration form.

I'll always put your information in, but don't be disappointed if I cannot insert graphic material.

## 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.*

In the Dallas area, May is usually the time you do the leaf pruning job if you have to do it. If you have kept the new growth pinched properly, you are getting the ramification usually attributed to leaf pruning. The only good reason for leaf pruning is to replace foliage that has been damaged by wind or insects. On some individual plants that have large foliage, the new foliage will usually be smaller. Leaf pruning is done only on very healthy trees. Leaf pruning should be done after the spring foliage has matured and supplied the tree with enough nutrients to produce a good crop of new foliage. It must be done well before the summer heat causes the plant growth to slow or stop. In the Dallas area, I consider the very latest time to be Memorial Day. The tree should be fertilized 7 - 10 days before the operation. Cut the stems of those leaves that have them (maples) or cutting across the leaf about 1/16 inch from the twig if leaves are attached direction on the twig (elms). The tree will not need as much water until the new foliage has developed.

If your azaleas have not bloomed yet, consider removing a few buds where they would result in crowded blooms. When the azaleas finish bloom, remove all seed pods and do any reshaping that is necessary. You have 2-2 ½ months (that is, until mid-July) to work on them. They will start setting buds for next years blooms at that time.

When the nighttime temperature stays above 60 degrees, it is time to start repotting the tropical material. Because tropicals have so many different requirements, I will not try to cover their individual needs here. But in general, I like to put them in shade and mist them until the new growth starts.

Warm humid days are favorable for fungal growth. Watch for mildew, black leaf spot on elms and yaupons, among other. As an organic control you can use baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) or better potassium bicarbonate that you can get at a nursery. Hydrogen peroxide in a 1% solution (mix 1 part of the normal 3% commercial product with 2 parts water) can be used on mature foliage. It may burn tender foliage but its only by-product is water when it breaks down.

If you have insect problems, you will need to apply your control, whatever you use, several times. For example, spider mites may go thru the cycle from egg to adult to egg in as little as 5 days. Therefore you should spray 4 times 5 days apart since there may be a few eggs or bugs you miss. Other insects will have a different cycle but that schedule should take care of almost everything.

Aphids, spider mites, and scale continue to be the most prevalent insects. The foliar feeding of fish emulsion, liquid kelp, molasses, and apple cider vinegar (1 tablespoon of each per gallon of water) is all the control I use for them. Scale is the most difficult because it is usually covered with a waxy coating (the scale). You may need to use a horticultural oil mixed as directed on the label. Be sure that the direction you read is for summer use as some have two dosages given, one for dormancy (usually the first and strongest) and one for summer. Do not use oil on buttonwood or any other plant not included on the label. You might try a neem oil spray which is supposed to be an organic systemic.

Please note: the commercial variation of my spray that is sold as Garret Juice does not do the same as the above mixture. It is erroneously labeled as the original formula Garret Juice.

If you see damage to the foliage or if the plant is not doing well, look for other problems. If you do not recognize the culprit, ask your favorite nurseryman for help.

Start checking your pots to see if the sun is heating them up. Our summer sun shining on dark pots can make the soil temperature soar and kill the roots. Try putting your hand on the pot. Roots are living organisms and cannot take high temperatures any more than you can. Heating also dries out the soil making you water more often. Any number of ways of keeping the pots cool will work, the requirement being to prevent the sun from shining on them and letting some air circulate around them. I do not care for the aluminum foil methods because I don't care to have the light reflected into my eyes and it is usually applied to tightly around the pot. A simple cloth with a slit to go around the trunk works fine. A good use for old rags.

Remember all the work that you did in the spring? Keep the new growth trimmed so that you haven't wasted your time. While trimming or watering check the wiring periodically and remove it before it damages the branch. If the branch springs back some, rewire it.

If you are not on a regular organic foliar/drench feed schedule, be sure to use fertilizer cakes with supplemental feeding with a good liquid fertilizer, one that includes the minor elements. Most bonsai I see are malnourished. The liquid water soluble fertilizer gets washed out with the next watering and the tree starves until the next infrequent feeding. There are a number of fertilizers in pellet or cake form on the market or you can make your own.

Potting season will soon be on us. The tropicals this time. You can start repotting them when the nights stay warm. One nice thing about tropicals, they give you a long repotting season by starting with those that take cooler weather and going into summer with some of the ficus and buttonwoods.

It's time to consider becoming more proficient at your hobby. The LSBF-ABS convention in San Antonio

will give you 4 classes plus associating with bonsai people.

You can learn all the rules, but, without practice, you will not be able to perform. You need practice to learn to recognize the line of the raw material you are starting with. You get this practice and experience by taking part in your club's various study groups, beginner classes, and workshops. If you are not a beginner, try teaching some beginners. The teacher always learns as much as his students by trying to verbalize what he is attempting to teach. Visit conventions, especially the local state convention, and discuss trees with others who share your like for a particular style or species.



### PERSIMMON HILL BONSAI STUDIO & NURSERY

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

### Ed Trout's Buttonwood Stolen

Recently somebody stole one of Ed Trout's buttonwood. Please read the email that Ed sent to his club about what happened:

*"I have some very bad news. Last night, some low-life stole my (our) logo buttonwood from my back yard. It was no more than 8 feet from my back door. I am sad and sick, and feel like someone has kidnapped a family member. Please help me get the word out. Ed"*

If you know Ed, you will agree with us that Ed gives his time, expertise and love of bonsai freely to all. He is one of the pioneers of bonsai in Florida, and I think we have all learned a lot from him and respect him immensely.

It is now our time to show him that we care and how grateful we are to him. Please pass this on to everyone that you can, even if they are not in bonsai. If you know the email to your local newspaper, send it to them as well (they may do a story on it). The more people that know and see the picture attached, the more chance we have to find Ed's tree and get the tree returned to its proper place. A picture of the tree will be on our website: [www.bonsai-bsf.com](http://www.bonsai-bsf.com).

If you have any questions or information, please don't hesitate to contact us.

--Narelle Robbins, Corresponding Secretary  
Bonsai Societies of Florida

### Some Pearls and Pitfalls About Fertilizers in Bonsai

by Jorge Mendizabal, MD,

Member, Corpus Christi Bonsai Club

*Reprinted from the Corpus Christi Bonsai Club newsletter with permission of the author.*

The use of fertilizers is often a topic of much discussion amongst bonsai enthusiasts. Just like soil recipes, everybody seems to have a different system or schedule. And just like soil ingredients, there is no single correct way to fertilize for bonsai. Some people swear by "organic" fertilizers and others believe "chemical" fertilizers work best. The bottom line is both fulfill the same purpose which is to provide the tree with the same basic nutrients: nitrogen, phosphate, potassium, minerals and trace elements. At the end, if you have found a system that works for you and your collection, it is probably the right one.

During our March monthly workshop, I was approached by some fellow CCBC members who were inquiring about some mysterious "balls" or "rocks" lying at soil level next to one of my ficus trees. They were surprised to learn these balls are actually fertilizer cakes and they quickly became interested in learning the recipe.

This takes us to my way of fertilizing for bonsai which may not be the one and only correct method but, heck . . . it works for me!

I like to combine so-called "organic" and "chemical" fertilizers. The use of quotes here is intended to emphasize both methods provide the same elements regardless of the origin of the product. I have been making fertilizer cakes for about three years now after reading about them in a magazine article by an artist by name Michael Persiano. He preaches a method he calls "super-feeding." He believes bonsai trees are growing in a very restrictive medium. They are fully dependent on us to provide them with water and nutrients. Optimizing the delivery of those nutrients provides the tree with the necessary material to achieve its maximum potential. For the artist, this translates into abundant growth and thus plenty of opportunities for styling and continuous improvement of the tree.

This system works for Mr. Persiano but he lives in the Carolinas, in a different USDA zone and climate. Here in South Texas we are blessed with a longer growing season and we are able to fertilize our trees almost year around. During our late fall and short winters, growth usually slows down and deciduous trees become leafless. During those weeks, it makes sense for us to slow down our fertilizing schedule or to use it at half strength. Trees are dormant and they are conserving energy in their roots in preparation for the coming of spring. There is also a sort of "dormancy" that occurs during the middle of our brutal summers. The intense heat may sometimes add an element of stress to some of our trees slowing down their active growth to some extent. Having said that, we South

Texans have the luxury of being able to fertilize our trees out to the "wazoo" almost year around.

Liquid fertilizers such as MiracleGro, Peter's 20-20 or Schulz's work fine and they are safe to apply once a week at full-strength following the manufacturer's instructions. During active growing season, twice a week applications may be just fine if you have the time to do it (I know I don't), especially since considerable amounts of these liquid fertilizers tend to be washed away with daily watering. In addition to the use of liquid fertilizer ("chemical"), I use fertilizer cakes ("organic"). They are applied on top of the soil starting from early spring to late fall. The number of cakes for each pot will depend on the size of your tree and the size of your cake. Most trees will get between 2 and 6 cakes. These cakes dissolve slowly with watering over 2-3 months and they need to be re-applied at that time. The recipe includes a small amount of iron and magnesium but it is always prudent to become familiar with trace element deficiencies and to supplement them year around as necessary.

I usually prepare the fertilizer cakes in January or February, ideally under a sunny weather forecast. The preparation of the cakes is not particularly appetizing and may not be suitable for prime time in The Food Network. I recommend performing it in a well ventilated area of your home (backyard, porch, etc.) since the "aroma" from some of the ingredients may be quite strong (don't be surprised if it attracts neighborhood cats or bees).

So, without further adieu, here is Persiano's cake recipe (slightly modified by Mendizabal):

#### Ingredients (found in any of the local nurseries)

- 3 parts cottonseed meal
- 2 parts horticultural lime
- 1 part blood meal
- 1 part bone meal
- Liquid fertilizer (MiracleGro, Schulz's, etc.) prepared at full strength to mix the dry ingredients
- 5 liquid ounces of fish emulsion for every 5 lbs of dry ingredients
- 2 ounces of Superthrive for every 5 lbs of dry ingredients
- 1 tsp of Ironite (or powdered chelated iron)
- 1 tsp of Epson's salt (magnesium)
- 1 tsp of Sevin powder (it keeps the flies and maggots away)

#### Preparation

Mix all dry and liquid ingredients into a moist paste. I wear latex gloves when preparing them. The paste is easier to manipulate when it is very moist so mix the liquid fertilizer as necessary. I scoop small portions of this paste using a plastic spoon of the kind you find in any box of MiracleGro or powdered fertilizer. I place the scooped paste onto a sheet of plexiglas. Aluminum foil works just as well. I let them dry for 2-3 days under the sun until they acquire a light whitish color. Keep them

away from pets. They may be attracted to the smell but may not do well if they ingest them. The dried fertilizer cakes are best stored in a Tupperware container. Mold may be a problem sometimes during storage. That's OK, the moldy cakes are still safe and good to use on your bonsai.

Why not simply use Osmocote?

Osmocote is a slow release, usually balanced, fertilizer which comes in the form of small pellets. These pellets are designed to release the fertilizer by means of osmosis in a moist and warm environment. We often mix a small amount of Osmocote into our fresh soil during repotting season in Spring. Osmocote may work fine during the spring season. Unfortunately, the intense heat of the South Texas summer may cause the pellets to suddenly dump all of their nitrogen into the soil at once. This may be the recipe for disaster as the roots could potentially suffer irreparable nitrogen burn. So, my suggestion is to leave the routine use of Osmocote to the nursery industry.

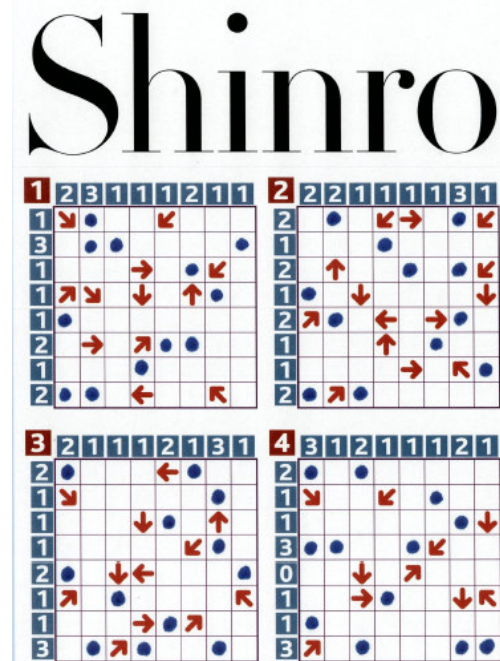
So there you go, those are my 2 cents worth about fertilizers in bonsai.

## Shinro Solution

Here's the solution to last month's puzzle. I hope you did better than I did!

*Thanks to HBS member L D Dornell for sending us this puzzle and obtaining permission for us to use it.*

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