



The Bonsai News of Houston

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
Houston Bonsai Society, Inc.

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August 2009

Celebration BBQ, Sat., Aug. 1

Thanks to hard work by the Houston Bonsai Society's board, the HBS now has 100 members! Thank you, board members, and congratulations.

We are celebrating with a family BBQ on Saturday, August 1, at 5:00 p.m. in Rosenberg. The HBS will serve hamburgers, hot dogs, potato salad, tossed salad, chips, beer and sweet ice tea.

Bring lawn chairs and something to share (your favorite dish or dessert). Please bring a friend or someone you think might be interested in joining HBS (we're hoping to continue on the path of increased membership).

In order to utilize HBS funding of this event in the best way, we are asking you to please RSVP to JoAnn Batey with the number of people that will be attending. This will help in accurately planning for the refreshments.

RSVP to JoAnn. Directions will be provided at the time your RSVP is received.

We're looking forward to having lots of fun. Hope to see you all there.

Monthly Meeting, Tiger Bark Ficus

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be Wednesday, August 5, at 7:30 p.m., Houston Garden Center, Hermann Park, 1500 Hermann Drive. Refreshments will be served at 7:00.

We will work on tiger bark ficuses. Trees will be available for \$20 each. If you plan to participate, be sure to bring tools and wire.

You will also have an opportunity to sign up for Roberto Martínez's bring-your-own-tree workshop August 22.

Study Group, August 15

The next meeting of the HBS Study Group will be on Saturday August 15 at Bayland Center in Bayland Park. We'll get started at 9:00 am and go to noon. The center is located at 6400 Bissonnet (Bissonnet at Hillcroft—south of 59 and west of Hillcroft). This is an opportunity to bring your trees if you need some in-put or assistance. You can also come by if you just want to assist others. All are welcome, the novice and advance bonsaist. The only requirement is to have a good time. So bring your trees, tools, wire, or just yourself and we'll see you there.
--Michael

August 21-22, Roberto Martínez

Roberto Martínez, this year's Texas Tour speaker, will give a lecture-demo Friday night, August 21, 7:30 until 9:30, in the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, 1500 Hermann Drive. Admission is \$5. The tree, which will be raffled, is a large, multiple-trunk, tiger bark ficus.

On Saturday, August 22, Roberto will conduct workshops from 9:00 to 12:00 and 1:30 to 4:30. The fee is \$20.00 per workshop. There is no fee for observers. Please note: if you are an observer, be a silent observer.
--Buddy



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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.

We can still to repot our tropicals and semi-tropicals like Fukien tea, Bahama black olive, buttonwood, ficus. When repotting, be sure to wire the tree securely in the pot to give it good stability against the winds. It might be a good idea to tie the pot to the bench also, especially if there is a lot of foliage or your pot and soil mix are lightweight.

For all except the tropicals this is the most stressful time. Most native species can take full sun on the foliage but cannot take heating of the roots. Tropicals are usually repotted during warm weather, but you should remember that even the tropicals do not like their roots hot. Sun on the pots may heat the soil and prevent new root development even though the tops may break new buds. "No new roots" eventually means "dead tree," a finished bonsai.

You will need to provide some way to keep the sun off the pot while still providing air circulation around the pot. Partial shade, 50% shade cloth or afternoon shade will be great. Mulch on the soil will help but does not keep the sides of the pot from getting hot. Even the morning sun can be too much on the pot in August. A cloth cover will work. Setting the pot in a loose fitting box does not give as much protection.

Not only does the heat get to our plants but the low humidity causes the plants stress by evaporating the water from the leaves faster than the plant can move it upward. Any wind that is present multiplies the problem. Hot soil dries out faster. Therefore you may need to water more than once a day. If so, my preference is to water heavily in the evening letting the plant recover during the cool night and then to water lightly in the morning spraying the foliage also. It also minimizes the length of time the roots are hot.

Remember to water twice. Wait a few minutes after the first watering for the dry soil particles to absorb some of the water on their surface. Then the second watering gets the whole particle wet.

The stress caused by the temperature will give any insects a chance to wreak havoc. Watch for the spider mites and scale especially this month. The morning spray will help knock some off. The organic foliar spray will keep them down also.

Horticultural oil sprays may be used year round. (The old oil sprays were heavy and would burn foliage so be sure to get the new type). Even so, you should be cautious about using them in July-August. Spinosad is a fairly new organic pesticide on the market (can be found locally under the Green Light label) that works on caterpillars, mites, and thrips without harming beneficial insects (per TAMU web site). Please note that Spinosad is said to be toxic to bees. Chemical sprays are available but most chemical reactions are accelerated by heat and may damage plants. Read the labels! Organic foliar spray--one tablespoon each of liquid kelp, fish emulsion, 5% apple cider vinegar, and molasses in one gallon water – can be used as a fertilizer also.

Also be careful about applying fertilizer in hot weather. Even organic fertilizers create some chemical reactions and the above remarks apply here, too. By the end of the month the nitrogen applied to the tree should be reduced. A little may be put on into September but the tree needs to be allowed to stop growth to get ready for dormancy. Evergreen trees benefit from a low nitrogen fertilizer through the winter.

Any rainy spell can bring some fungal problems. Powdery mildew or black leaf spot are a couple of them. That is why I use the foliar spray in the morning, so that the leaves will dry quickly. The organic web sites say you can mix baking soda with the Garret Juice for fungal control. However I have decided to do separate sprayings. The foliar spray has an acid (vinegar) which would react with the baking soda thereby reducing the effectiveness of both. Anyhow all your trees would benefit from the GJ but not all would have a fungal problem.

If you have a fungal problem, you may also use potassium bicarbonate available at most nurseries. One brand is named Remedy but that is also the name of a potent herbicide; check all labels.

Most spring blooming plants make their buds in the fall so pruning them would limit the amount of flowers you will have. Do not prune azaleas any more this year if you want flowers next spring. Buds have been set by now. If you are still developing your azalea, go ahead and prune. Some varieties will set a few buds anyway. In general, when pruning look for the cluster of twigs at the site of last spring's bloom. Cut out all but two, usually the ones growing horizontally. Be sure to cut back strong growing shoots to a couple of leaves.

Since deciduous trees have slowed their growth you can do some pruning on them. However pruning

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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.

- Aug. 1 HBS barbeque, 5 p.m. in Rosenberg. For information and directions, contact JoAnn Batey, 713-914-9180 or jbatey@comcast.net
 - Aug. 5 Monthly meeting of the HBS. Tiger bark ficus.
 - Aug. 15 Saturday Study Group, 9 a.m. Bayland Park
 - Aug. 21 Roberto Martínez, Lec-demo, raffle. 7:30, Hermann Park.
 - Aug. 22 Roberto Martínez, workshops, 9-12, 1:30-4:30. Hermann Park.
 - Sept. 19 Shohin Society of Texas meeting. Shohin bonsai pot workshop; business meeting. Austin. Contact Terry & Sheila, 512-280-5575
phbonsai@sbcglobal.net
 - Oct. 9 Set-up for fall bonsai show, 6 p.m. – 10 p.m.
 - Oct. 10-11 Fall bonsai show and sale, 8 – 5 Sat., 8-4 Sun. Houston Garden Center, Hermann Park.
 - Oct. 17 Saturday Study Group, 9 a.m., Cabrera Farm
 - Nov. 4 Monthly meeting of the HBS. Nominations for board and officers.
 - Nov. 21 Saturday Study Group, 9 a.m. Bayland Park
 - Dec. 2 Monthly meeting of the HBS. Elections of board and officers. Holiday pot luck supper and gift exchange.
- 2010**
- Feb. 5-7 Biennial California Shohin Society seminar, Ramada Inn, Santa Nella, CA. Call 209-826-4444 for hotel reservations ASAP.

Monthly Bonsai Care, *con'd.*

may stimulate new growth that may not have time to harden before winter which would result in some dieback of the new growth. On these trees it's better to wait until later. After leaves have fallen, you can see where corrections need to be made more easily. You should not let tip growth ruin the fine ramification on finished trees. Keep it pinched.

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Summer Watering

By Dave Schleser

Dave Schleser is the former president of the Dallas Bonsai Society. This article was excerpted from his "Message from the President," which originally appeared in the July 2009 issue of the DBS newsletter. It is reprinted with permission.

Here in Texas the bonsai buzzword for July - and also August - is *water*. Numerous bonsai unnecessarily succumb each summer due to insufficient watering. While many bonsai planted in large size containers that dry out more slowly due to their increased amount of soil might survive on once daily watering, it is a different matter with smaller pots or species such as willows, maples, buttonwood and bald cypress that are water hogs.

There are many ways to deal with this potential problem and I will mention a few. The most obvious is to water your trees two or even three times daily depending upon their individual needs. Constructing an automatic drip system of the type so well described in Mark Bynum's April's club presentation is another option. A help for very small pots is to partially bury several of them in a tray (with drainage!) filled with an absorbent granular material such as Hadite. When the trees are watered this material will absorb quite a bit of moisture that is slowly released into the soil within the pots via the pots' drainage holes. As the season progresses roots may grow into the Hadite, but I would not worry about that as they can always be clipped off with the onset of cooler weather.

Species that normally grow in wet or marshy conditions (buttonwood, willows, many *Ficus* spp.) benefit from being placed in shallow trays of water. Kitty litter trays work quite well. If you try this I recommend that you drill a hole in the side of the water-filled tray at a height that equates to the amount of water the tree will absorb during the day. This will prevent the roots from being constantly water logged and possibly rot. An exception is the bald cypress. Not only does it prefer to be partially submerged in a tray of water, but when kept this way its growth rate is nothing short of phenomenal.

This year I have been experimenting with watering wicks. This is an old technology that was formerly used more frequently for house plant culture and is still popular with growers of African violets. So far I have tried it on a slab forest planting of

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Korean hornbeams belonging to Garrett Larson that always seemed to dry out within hours of watering, and for several other smaller bonsai.



The results have far exceeded my most optimistic hopes. Just make certain that the container being used as the water reservoir is large enough to hold enough water to last at least until your next regular watering. You can either buy commercially available wicks, or according to member Diane Lowe, make them out of old pantyhose.



Another important watering issue concerns vacation care. I will not enumerate the number of sad stories I have heard from people who have lost valuable trees while they were gone on vacation. The reasons vary from improper watering, a caregiver who slacked off on the job, or an automatic watering system that failed. I am extremely fortunate to have a good friend who is an expert horticulturist and reliable - a rare combination. As a matter of fact, my trees generally look better when I return from my

midsummer Amazon trips than before I left! If you will be using a friend, neighbor or family member to do the watering take the time to thoroughly train them. Explain that overwatering is a non-issue because of the excellent drainage inherent in bonsai soil mixes. (Non plant people have constantly heard that more house plants die from overwatering than underwatering). If you opt for an automatic watering system get someone to come by at least every other day to make certain it is functioning properly, and that if it fails this person knows how to hand water your collection. And if you have a few trees that really mean a lot to you think about bringing them over to another club member's home to be expertly cared for while you are gone.

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Worth Every Penny!

by Paula Hickman

The following article is excerpted from the March 2000 issue of The Bonsai News of Houston. Anyone interested in attending the February 2010 convention needs to start making plans now. Space is limited and the workshops fill up quickly.

Hey HBS members, here's just a note to let you know there is a "little" tree convention that's well worth the trip, so plan on attending the next one. The Shohin Society of California held its biannual convention February 4-6, 2000 at the Ramada Inn in Santa Nella, California, and it was fantastic! Even though shohin is defined as a tree 8 inches and under, there was nothing small about the quality of the trees or the talent of the workshop instructors at this gathering. There were a total of 22 workshops in one day with instructors like Mas Ishii, Boon Manakitipivart, Harry Hirao, Jim Barrett, Mas Imazumi, Bill Valvanis and Texas' own Terry Ward.

Workshop prices ranged from \$15 to a high of \$70 (for Ishii) and included: Yamadori black pine, Juko azaleas, Korean lilac, black olive, prostrata and grafted Kishu Shimpaku junipers, Hokkaido and Chinese elms, saikei, rock plantings of cotoneaster or hinoki cypress, shohin finger pot making, accent plantings, Ilex serrata and pyracantha.

There were some very EXCITING demos including beautiful saikei, penjing and accent plantings. The exhibit of shohin trees was

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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 at the address above or at www.HoustonBonsai.com. 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.

EXCELLENT and the quality of vendor items was a delight! There was even a new vendor selling collected coastal redwoods which were gorgeous, very affordable and should do well in Texas since they are a "cousin" of the bald cypress.

The raffle had many interesting items and winners got to pick from all of them as their names were drawn, so one ticket was good for any raffle prize.

You fly into San Jose, Sacramento, Fresno or San Francisco and drive about 90 minutes to 2 hours (depending on where you land) to get to Santa Nella It's LITERALLY a TRUCK STOP on Interstate 5 on the way to Yosemite.

Since this is more northern California, the weather as was cool, brisk and invigorating and the convention was relaxed, casual and friendly. I understand there was some good natured "gripping" about the invasion from the "Texas" contingent (there were about a dozen total attendees from Texas), but we were all greeted and treated very warmly.