BADGER BONSAI SOCIETY

Promoting and Enjoying the Ancient Art of Bonsai Since 1972

Badger News | A Publication of the Badger Bonsai Society | January, 2010

NEXT MEETING DATE: January 14th, 2010
6:00 pm: Cocktails
7:00 pm: Dinner
Imperial Gardens

MEETING AGENDA: Annual Member's Dinner
Celebrate each other's company with good food.
Members RSVP to Tim by Monday, January 11th

CLUB OFFICERS:

President	Tim
1st Vice President	Matthew
2nd Vice President	Devon
Secretary	Duke
Treasurer	Gary
Librarian/Newsletter	Greg
Refreshments	Elaine
Past President	Ron

President's Message

By: Tim

The neat thing about being president again is that I can repeat everything I did before, and very few people are around to remember. I hope I can live up to the standards set by those who led while I was gone. With that said, I begin by asking you all to **let me know if you are coming to the dinner on the 14th** at Imperial Gardens on Allen Blvd. on Madison's far west side. It is open to all members and their significant others. Although it might be boring for little ones, some of us have brought our children in the past. Drinks are at 6:00 and dinner is at 7:00. I have requested separate checks and use of the regular menu so that everyone can pay for whatever they order. Most places will not let us do this.

Just some quick bonsai advice: During the winter, in preparation for spring, you can start mixing your own soil. Try stripping and annealing your own copper wire. Us old-timers used to do this long before someone local started selling wire with all the prep work done for you. In the future, there will be a talk on how to mix your own soil and anneal your own wire. I am looking forward to an exciting year for the Badger Bonsai Society.

—Tim

Newsletter Announcement (partial repeat article)

By: Devon

As of January 2010 we are no longer mailing the newsletter to your home. We've moved to a fully-online system in an effort to save money and expedite the delivery. **The Newsletter will be available here:** badgerbonsai.net/category/newsletter. Please bookmark this page in your web browser of choice.

For the past several months I've been gathering email addresses and I always bring the contact list to every meeting. Please take a moment to double check that we have your correct email address or just email me at: info@badgerbonsai.net

A Call for Submissions!

Please consider writing a regular or semi-regular column for the newsletter. As Badger Bonsai Society Members, this is YOUR club and we want your input. We want your stories! What are you up to in the world of bonsai? If you are interested please see Devon or Greg at any meeting to discuss how to get your content into your newsletter.

Best Wishes for a Happy and Better New Year for All

By: Greg

A few members braved the weather to attend our December Holiday Treats Meeting. Besides raising everyone's sugar levels, the talk ended up as a general discussion format with all laying out bonsai related questions and answered by anyone whom had experience on that topic. We got off topic at times to comment on outside driving conditions and other topics of general concern. I believe a lot of very good information was produced at that meeting, and that the members present should be able to use some of this information in their own Bonsai quest. This month on January 14th we will assemble at The Imperial Gardens, 2039 Allen Blvd, Middleton WI. Cocktails at 6:00pm, and dinner at 7:00. Be prepared for not so nice weather, last year was not so bad but a few previous years were quite nasty. Drinks are always good, same as the meal, but the best is the togetherness that we will share. So please come. See you there.

Two newsletters ago I regaled to you the trials of my one and only indoor Bonsai, a nice little Dwarf Schefelera that I picked up from Ron a few years ago. The poor little guy was covered with SCALE oozing sticky goo all over the leaves, pot, and table, since then I thoroughly soaked the tree with Insecticidal Soap and scrubbed each leaf by hand rubbing off the offending bugs. There were alot and yes this procedure took some time! Since these bugs are hardy a couple of treatments are necessary. It is recommended to wait two weeks and reapply the insecticide, and even retreat two weeks later if needed. Just the other day I noticed a few more scale. These will need to be treated soon as they do breed quite proficiently.

Want something relatively inexpensive to practice your indoor growing skills on this winter, go out and rescue one of those little ugly Ginsing Ficus (the ones with the fat roots) from your local neighborhood big box store. Get them before they kill 'em. These are real inexpensive, have some branches to practice wiring on, and learn general indoor growing skills. You cannot learn all this stuff only by reading you need to get your hands dirty some times. There are a few Indoor Bonsai Books in our library, there is a spot on our website marked library and the books are listed there. One thing I am trying to do is to include a small report on each book. Have not got there yet. If a member would like to check out a book and write a small report on it this would be greatly appreciated by the management and would progress our library to a little more user friendly format.

There are a number of magazines also, some going back to 1977 available to look at, I will bring some to the February meeting. Also if you would

like to contribute to this newsletter or would like to see something specific covered please feel free to contact me and let me know your wishes.

– Greg

The following articles are adapted from bonsaihunk.us. Jerry "Bonsaihunk" Meislik, is the author and owner of the site and has quite extensive knowledge of growing indoor Bonsai. Check out his site and all the knowledge he has to offer. – Greg

Materials For Indoor Bonsai

By: Jerry Meislik

Introduction

Centuries ago the art of bonsai originated in China and spread to Japan where it underwent much modification prior to its dissemination to the western world. The Japanese use the trees found in their backyards and woods which are native temperate zone species such as pine, maple, beech etc.

In America we have accepted traditional bonsai but we have modified these methods and are using trees previously untried and unknown in classical bonsai for the newly evolving "indoor bonsai" specialty.

Why bother?

The population of the world is moving to urban environments where outdoor growing is difficult. Growing outdoors has problems such as extreme temperature variation, pollution and vandalism. Apartment dwellers, and home renters can grow trees on a window sill or under artificial light. In addition, during winter outdoor trees are in cold storage and unavailable for work and enjoyment; with the addition of an indoor bonsai collection the fun continues year round. Last, indoor bonsai offer non-traditional materials, and the freedom to experiment with styles and flamboyant pots that would be sneered at in traditional bonsai.

Nature never created an "indoor" tree so materials must be able to cope with the rigors of the indoor habitat. Trees must tolerate low light, low humidity, and lack of chilling. Surprisingly few species have been used indoors, and much work needs to be done to determine which plants will survive this hostile environment. Every indoor grower is a pioneer adding to the fund of knowledge about plant survival and suitability. It is vital that indoor bonsai growers communicate their success as well as failures.

Growing Techniques

Trees need light to survive, and even more for growth, flowering and fruiting. Growers can utilize one of several techniques. First, those lucky enough to have a greenhouse have enough light for successful bonsai culture. Two, a south or west windowsill will provide adequate light for many tree species. Three, if natural light is unavailable great success can be had by growing plants under fluorescent tubes. Plants should be as close as possible to the bulbs, as light energy drops drastically even at one or two feet from the tubes. Fluorescent tubes are cool to the touch and leaves will not be damaged by proximity to the bulb. Special plant grow lights may allow better plant growth and flowering.

The second critical factor is humidity. Most homes are incredibly dry due to the heating and cooling necessary for human comfort levels. In fact the humidity in our homes is less than the average desert. Plants, excepting cacti, will not grow and flourish in such low humidity. Any technique to humidify the area around the plants will allow better plant growth. Misting and spraying plants frequently helps but is impractical. A humidifier close to the plants may be beneficial. Last, surround the growing areas with a plastic "tent" and increase the humidity around the plants, but don't completely seal plants in plastic since fungus will take over.

Temperature is another important factor in plant growth. In general most plants thrive indoors in a range of 60 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Higher or lower temperatures will result in slower growth of

some plants or even their death. Varying temperatures from a daytime high and cooling down twenty degrees at night allows materials considered difficult to be grown indoors.

In twenty three years I have culled through plants searching for plants that will tolerate indoor conditions. Some species have been failures and others have been very successful. Following is a list of ten plant species that I have found to be suitable for indoor bonsai and suggestions to allow success with these plants.

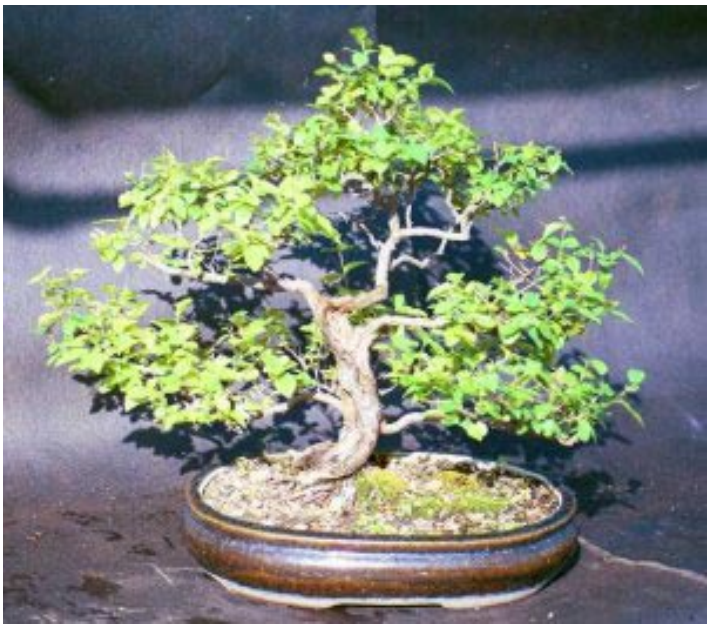
Common Name - Scientific Name

1. Chinese Banyan - Ficus microcarpa

ADVANTAGES
- Many varieties available
- Leaves dwarf well in pot culture
- Tolerates heat and dry air
- Excellent root flare and buttress development
- Tolerates pruning well
- Easily grown from cuttings, and air layers
- Aerial roots develop in humid, dark conditions

DISADVANTAGES
- Less useful for small (Shohin) bonsai

CULTURAL HINTS
- Water and fertilize regularly
- Give as much light as possible
- Keep evenly moist
- Avoid temperature below 50 F



2. Chinese sweet plum - Sageretia theezans

ADVANTAGES
- Twiggy growth
- Small leaf size
- Exfoliating bark - if over 6 years old
- Tolerant of high heat and light levels
- Easily grown from cuttings

DISADVANTAGES
- Difficult to wire old wood
- Collected specimens difficult to re-establish

CULTURAL HINTS
- One of the few plants that never seems to rest
- It is always in active growth
- Appreciates even moisture and frequent fertilization

3. Buttonwood - Conocarpus erectus

ADVANTAGES
- Gorgeous dead wood on collected specimens
- Leaves dwarf with pot culture
- Unusual flowers
- Not fussy as to soil type

DISADVANTAGES
- Requires warmth
- Must never dry out
- Hard to obtain collected specimens

CULTURAL HINTS
- Keep warm and never below 50 Fahrenheit- especially roots
- Soil must be kept moist; never allow to dry out
- Avoid the use of pesticides; toxicity is common

4. Natal Plum - Carissa grandiflora

ADVANTAGES
- Leaves reduce with cultivation
- Smaller leaf cultivars available
- Tolerant of heat and dryness
- Flowers and fruit are attractive

DISADVANTAGES
- Must have a coarse and well-draining soil
- Older wood is brittle and difficult to wire

CULTURAL HINTS
- Plants respond to severe pruning (reduction) with new growth
- Blooms on terminals of new growth; limit hard pruning if flowers/fruits are desired
- Grow the plants slightly drier rather than wetter
- Wire branches while green; woody branches will break

5. Lantana - Lantana camara

ADVANTAGES
- Flowers and fruits easily
- Hardy
- Drought resistant and heat tolerant
- Easily grown from cuttings

DISADVANTAGES
- Brittle branches
- White flies love this plant
- Trunk does not fatten readily in pot culture

CULTURAL HINTS
- Branches are brittle and break easily; if the branch breaks stop immediately and leave wire on until the fracture heals, then cut the wire off
- Yearly repotting is beneficial
- Do not overwater

6. Pomegranate - Punica granatum

ADVANTAGES
- Fruits and flowers
- Vigorous grower
- Dwarf varieties available

DISADVANTAGES
- Winter rest is necessary and some chilling is helpful
- Definite cold requirement is not necessary

CULTURAL HINTS
- Allow the plant to go dormant in the fall by keeping the plant cooler and drier
- Leaf drop will occur.
- Do not fertilize when at rest

7. Singapore holly - Malpighia coccigera

ADVANTAGES
- Small leaves
- Twiggy growth
- Flowers well but rarely fruits indoors

DISADVANTAGES
- Trunk remains small

CULTURAL HINTS
- Keep lightly moist and well fertilized
- Appreciates trace elements in soil mix

8. Olive - Olea europaea

ADVANTAGES
- Small leaves
- Twiggy growth
- Good bark color and texture
- Excellent trunk buttress
- Tolerates heat and dryness

DISADVANTAGES
- Older wood difficult to wire

CULTURAL HINTS
- Avoid constant soil wetness- prefers to go nearly dry before watering again
- Rests during winter but retains leaves
- Wire branches while green and supple

9. Parsley aralia - Aralia elegantissima

ADVANTAGES
- Delicate leaf

DISADVANTAGES
- Brittle branches make wiring difficult
- Roots won't tolerate constant wetness
- Branches irregular and coarse

CULTURAL HINTS
- Let soil dry between waterings
- Watch for insect infestation

10. Schefflera - Brassaia actinophylla and Dwarf Schefflera

ADVANTAGES
- Tolerates low light
- Tolerates low humidity
- Brassaia tolerates dryness
- Will form aerial roots under humid conditions

DISADVANTAGES
- Dwarf Schefflera must be kept moist
- Large leaf size
- Coarse branching

CULTURAL HINTS
- The plant to try if you have killed everything else!

Secrets to Success With Indoor Bonsai: Part 1

By: Jerry Meislik

Introduction

I have been growing bonsai indoors on windowsills and under artificial light for over twenty five years. During that time I have learned, and unfortunately had to re-learn, some crucial concepts. What follows is an assortment of ideas that I have gleaned over the years. Many of the conclusions seem obvious, but they were not so obvious at the time. I hope these ideas will help growers save themselves time, effort and mangled trees.

Indoors is not indoors!

Growing trees indoors is a difficult task, and part of the problem is that indoor growing conditions can be quite variable. One window in your home drops to 48 degrees Fahrenheit at night, while another windowsill may be a constant 85 degrees! One spot in the living room is extremely dark with almost no natural light and another area has southwest light streaming in from the window. Trees that grow well in one room of a house may not be happy in another room in the same house. Finding the right microclimate in a home is a huge part of winning the battle.

Simple homemade indoor fluorescent light setup

A cool basement is the ideal place to grow boxwood, crape myrtle, Cotoneaster, Chamaecyparis, Serissa, and citrus, while the warmer bedroom is the best place for Ficus, Schefflera, Wrightia religiosa, and buttonwood. Ask friends who are successful in growing trees indoors about the lighting, humidity, temperature range, soil, and water conditions that work for them. Use these suggestions as a starting point for your indoor growing set-up and modify these to suit the types of trees that you grow.

All plants are not created equal!

One key element to successfully growing bonsai indoors is selecting trees that will survive indoors. Most trees will not survive indoors for long periods of time, while a few trees are proven indoor survivors. Temperate trees, those requiring a cool dormancy period, such as maples, larch, pines and junipers will usually not live indoors. While tropical trees such as Ficus, Brassaia/Schefflera, Sageretia, and Portulacaria are quite happy in most homes and will not need chilling, or a prolonged winter resting period. They also will not have a leaf drop and sit in leafless condition for weeks while waiting for the start of their spring growth period.

Select trees that will be happy under your home conditions. If you do select sub-tropical or cooler type trees modify your home to make these trees happy.

One way to find suitable trees that may work for your indoor situation is to go to the produce section of your supermarket and buy some fruit; try guava, lemon, kumquat, tamarind, and fig. As you eat the fruits, save the seeds and plant them. Some of these will survive, and may make good plants for indoor bonsai. Next, go to your local plant nursery, and select any small-leaved tree from their terrarium selection. Trees that you can find are cotoneaster, chamaecyparis, boxwood, myrtle, elm, and ivy.

Grow these plants in your home, and over a year or two some will survive while others will die. Select the healthy and growing survivors and concentrate your efforts on these few trees. Propagate the vigorous trees and discard the weak trees. Make sure to have at least three or four specimens of each of the strong varieties.

Lastly, purchase some pre-bonsai and finished indoor bonsai from a reputable bonsai nursery. Ask specifically if these plants can be grown indoors or whether they will require a dormant period or an outdoor summer growth period. These developed trees can be admired immediately, while your young, new experimental trees will take time to mature into respectable bonsai.

Light and more light!

Growing trees in a dark corner of an apartment is doomed to failure. Over the last five years, I have become more convinced that the most critical element to long term success with indoor bonsai is adequate light. Given enough light many trees will grow indoors and become wonderful bonsai.

More complicated indoor fluorescent light setup

Windowsill growing is borderline in most homes as window light is often dim and unreliable. For most indoor growers, supplemental artificial light is the only way to go, and my recommendation for anyone with a small bonsai collection is to use POF, plain old fluorescent lights. POF are inexpensive to purchase and to run. At the local hardware store purchase four foot long fluorescent fixtures. Use simple chains to hang these over the bonsai growing area.

Do not bother to search for special plant bulbs. The normal daylight spectrum bulbs work just fine and they are much less expensive. The key is to have the leaves nearly touching the bulbs. Fluorescents are relatively weak in energy and they must be left on for a 16 to 18 hours each day. A simple electric timer will cycle the lights on and off automatically.

Other types of lighting can work including incandescent bulbs, metal halides, halogens etc. The key factor is to increase the amount of light available to the trees. Trees in dark areas are literally starving to death.

I encourage those who have tried to grow trees indoors and failed, to try again with supplemental lighting. The experience will be an "enlightening" one for you and the trees.

Semi-tropical or less than tropical trees need special care!

Most tropical trees will grow year round in the normal temperature range of a typical home, 60-90 degrees Fahrenheit. However, if you are trying to grow semi-tropical trees, you likely will experience great difficulty unless you allow these trees to slow down their growth in the fall. Trees such as juniper, cotoneaster, holly, elm, boxwood, pomegranate, serissa, and azalea can be grown indoors, but many successful growers of these plants grow them in cooler temperatures than exist in most homes.

To succeed with these plants try a cool basement, or a really cool window in an unheated, spare bedroom. Besides cooling down the growing area, another trick for success with these trees is to raise the humidity level. A humidifier can be placed near the plants or the plants can be surrounded with a plastic tent to increase the humidity. Leave the top of the tent open to keep fungal problems from developing. Cooler temperatures also help by keeping the relative humidity higher. Another technique is keeping trays full of water near the trees, but do not allow the trees to sit in this water.

The last suggestion is to allow the soil of these subtropical trees to become definitely drier during their winter rest period; inactive trees need less water. Begin watering them normally when they resume active growth.

Conclusion

Select trees from the survivors' list, and make sure to find the microclimate in your home to make them happy. Increase the light and humidity levels and let your trees rest when they want to rest. These five tips can help you successfully grow bonsai in your home. Future articles will highlight other useful tips. Please let me know of other ideas that make your growing more successful.

Are you kidding me?!?! I call this "The Alliant Energy Special"