



BADGER BONSAI SOCIETY

Promoting and Enjoying the Ancient Art of Bonsai Since 1972

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

NEXT MEETING DATE: **March 11th, 2010**

6:30–8:00 p.m.

Olbrich Botanical Gardens

3330 Atwood Ave. Madison, WI

MEETING AGENDA: **THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF WIRE**

Tim is going to discuss using wire to shape your bonsai.

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 Art vs. Science; Inherent Contradictions

By: Tim

For most of us, bonsai is a fine art form and become an obsession. This concept of art creates many problems. It can be confusing for the beginner when several of us give our opinion as to how to style raw plant stock. The opinions may differ greatly. This is why we cannot refer to it as the science of bonsai. After all, the art, and not the science, first drew us to this hobby. Horticulture and science becomes less important than the art. Even bonsai growers and self-proclaimed experts often ignore the necessary science needed to enable these overly-stressed plants to survive. Contradictions abound.

I have read contradictions within the same magazine issue.

An example of a contradiction within our own club that I have heard over the years are the many soil recipes. Some people insist their recipe is the best. The scientific method uses control groups along with many test groups. The success of a particular procedure should be tested and have the same results. In science, peers question all aspects of results and meth-



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ods. Such questions might include, “Why does this method work?”, or “Will another method work just as well?” A plant died, was it because of this method or something else? Within our club, successful soil recipes have differed from clayey garden soil to pure chicken grit.

One time, a member transplanted a tree belonging to someone else at their request. A heavy soil surrounded some of the roots near the base. The tree died later and blame was placed on the bit of soil around the base. The scientist would ask, “Could the death be caused by something else?”

Horticulturists recommend keeping foliage dry during watering. However, I know of a member who succeeded using a twice daily overhead watering system. He did not believe the recom-

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mendations of the horticulturist. The scientist then would ask, “Why did his system work?” The answer might be that his display was near a parking lot and white gravel lay on the ground around the display area. This created a microclimate of much sun, much air flow, and low hu-



midity. This greatly reduced the chances of fungal diseases which a collection might suffer from in a different setting.

We once had another member swear by his method of wintering over. Unfortunately, he had to restart his collection every year for at least three years. Some people winter their trees in garages. Some have had success with this and others have not. Why?

A number of years ago, we had a master from Chicago come to our club who swore by his expensive Japanese fertilizer. Later, I noticed a box of MirAcid contained the same ratio of important macro nutrients, but cost only 1/10 the price. The same person espoused the benefits of a particular wound sealer. Organic Gardening Magazine and Madison's Forestry Department do not use wound sealant after removing tree branches. This same individual showed us a tree that he used the sealer on. He claimed the wounds healed extremely fast because of the sealer. However, the always doubting scientist would have asked if the tree would have healed at the same rate without the sealer. In his defense, if it helps even a little bit, I might do the same thing.

This begs the question, “Who or what do we believe?” I say if it has been working for you, then do not stop. I recommend to the beginner to use techniques suggested by successful growers and then question and experiment with other options once finding success. I do understand why we cannot experiment using 100 valuable trees in a control group and 100 valuable trees in the test group. Questioning is good, just be polite in asking the question and be polite in answering it.

Contradictorily yours,
-Tim



March is for Wiring

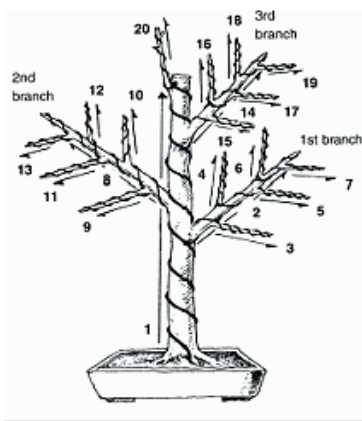
By: Greg

Winter is close to being over, ya right, the ground rat from Stoughton did not see his shadow. They are calling for 6 to 10" of snow tonight and tomorrow.



At our February Meeting, one of our members, Mark P, gave a demonstration on Sketching designs for our bonsai, kind of as a plan for future development. A major point here was to just do it no matter what kind of artist you think you are. Sketching is just a guide, a plan, for potential future development.

At our March meeting we will be talking about wiring, this is a month when we need to get everything together for when we start working on our bonsai, once we start to work on them then is not the time to start gathering items. Get enough soil together, pots cleaned and sterilized, tools sharpened and sterilized, and enough wire – wire is like pots you can never have enough. Our president Tim will give us a demonstration on wiring, one technique which takes hands on practice and practice to get proficient on. Just reading about it will not do.



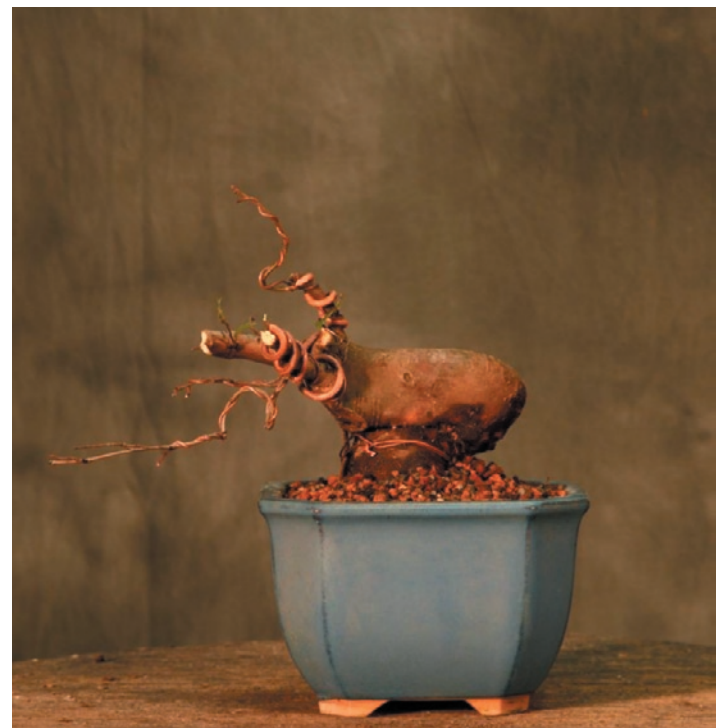
Looking forward to April, Ron will give us a demonstration on repotting something which we should be doing by then. There is even talk of a forest workshop on one of the latter weekends at the Gardens. On my own I purchased some small seedlings from a bonsai nursery and told them to deliver the

seedlings in March, am looking forward to getting them, as I am planning on doing a forest myself, and putting some in the ground for growing out. In one of the newer Bonsai Focus magazines which we get for our library, to be looked at and checked out by our members, I saw an article which intrigued me. I have read about this procedure before and I believe we have discussed this procedure before. If I can get a few rooted cuttings of the same tree,

the article uses five. You bind the five stems tightly together and then wire them as one. Using the apex of one seedling wire as a lower branch, using a second seedlings apex as a second branch, and so on until you have a “tree” with four branches. The article said that over a short amount of time the stems will fuse together forming a thick well branched Shohin sized tree faster than growing one from a single stem. What the article does not go into detail about how long this fusion will take, and how many times this is going to need to be re wrapped. Well hopefully I can start this project at the end of the month, take some photo's and describe the process in future newsletters.

On another note I purchased a Toyo Nishiki' Flowering Quince from an Ohio Nursery, this is supposed to have white, pink, and red flowers on the same stem. Been looking for one of these for a while now, I bought it, they wanted to know when to ship the plant. Since it was February and Wisconsin as well as Ohio is under snow I figured all was dormant, and as the weather was nice I said to ship as soon as possible, you know, before the weather goes bad. Well two days shipping, I thought all might be good since the plant had little time to freeze in transit. I opened the box and saw leaves, now I know Quince are early to leaf out but this is going to take some special care to keep it for another month. Well, put it in the garage and let the 'Monster' guard over it along with the rest of my trees, the garage should not freeze again this spring, I hope.

– Greg



Wiring - The basics

By: www.growing-bonsai.com

So you have brought home your first bonsai tree from a dealer. You have read all about the various forms of styling in bonsai growing, and are raring to go. You have a set of cold, shiny, brand new tools. You have a young sapling in front of you ready for training. "Training" is the term used in growing bonsai to refer to the gradual process of shaping your bonsai tree to grow a certain way. Now what?

You need to learn wiring and pruning, if your bonsai tree is ever going to become the beautiful show-piece you have in mind. Lets start with the basics of wiring for today.

What is wiring anyway?

Wiring is the practice of wrapping aluminum or copper wire around the bonsai trunk or branches, in order to shape the tree gradually. The branches and trunks are wrapped in either anodized aluminum or annealed copper wire (usually available from a bonsai dealer), and held in place for a few weeks or months until they fuse into position. Once the wires are removed, the branches and trunks that were wired, stay in shape and place.

By wrapping the trunk and branches with wire of the right length and thickness in the correct way, the basic bonsai style is created. You should be aware that certain styles may require (much more) wiring than other styles. For example, the formal upright style does not require any wiring, but the cascade style requires a lot of it, in order to bend the trunk over the pot.

The wire material

It's important to remember that the wire should be anodized aluminum or annealed copper, in order to prevent harmful metals leaching out from the wires, and being ingested by the tree, resulting in sickness or death.

Wires are sold by bonsai dealers (online and offline) according to width (in millimeters) and the width depends on the thickness of the branch or trunk you are wiring. A wire size of 1/3 that of the branch or trunk is a rough rule of thumb. Of course, the bigger the bonsai tree, the harder it becomes to wire it properly. You should get a few reels of different thickness, since your bonsai tree is definitely thicker in the trunk than say, the branches; and the lower branches are of course thicker than the upper branches.

You'll need a good pair of cutters as well. There are several kinds of small gardening secateurs that can



double up as wire cutters, and branch pruners at the same time.

Draw up a sketch plan

Beginning with a sketch or computer drawing capturing your vision of the final result helps to define your goal visually. It doesn't have to be final, but you should have an image in mind as your goal. Visiting a bonsai gallery is one way to study firsthand, the results of advanced wiring and pruning techniques practiced by expert bonsai artists.

Before wrapping the intended tree, practice. Start with a simple wooden pole or small ordinary tree branch, just to get the feel of the wire and develop the dexterity to hold the branch and wrap at the same time. Once you're comfortable holding the branch with one hand and wrapping with the other, without bending or tugging anything but the wrapped part, you can move to the bonsai tree.

Precautions

Since wiring puts stress along a trunk or branch, it's essential to exercise essential caution and patience during the process. The alternative can easily result in a cracked branch, or worse, a cracked trunk and a dead tree. Don't wire unhealthy or sick trees; that will delay their recovery. Also, it's possible to wrap too tightly or at the wrong season. The result will be scarring that can kill the tree or create damage taking months or years to heal.

Wiring is a complex subject in bonsai gardening, along with pruning, best learnt through actual trial and practice. In subsequent articles, we'll examine the best times to wire your tree, and the techniques involved.

March Growing Tips

By: Greg

1. Repotting

Healthy deciduous trees that need to be repotted can be repotted if there are early signs of root or bud growth. Buds should be just beginning to swell, once they have opened, it is too late to root prune or repot. Continue to keep newly repotted trees away from hard frosts and drying winds; optimum recovery will occur if they are kept above 45 degrees.

Until the buds have opened the trees have no need of light, so they can be kept inside an unheated building, like a garage, a garden shed, or unheated greenhouse. Once the buds open, trees must be placed outside, but move them into full sun gradually so that they are not fully exposed until about four weeks after repotting.

Do not fertilize after root pruning until the tree has a chance to grow new feeder roots (again, approximately four weeks). Use 1/2 the recommended concentration or less, as strong fertilizer can damage the new roots and even kill the tree. Be patient. Root growth will be promoted if you allow the soil to get a little dryer, not completely dry, between watering. When the soil starts to dry, the tree responds by growing new feeder roots. Be especially careful not to allow newly repotted trees to become

too wet. Place them under a shelter during rainy spells if necessary and tip the pot after watering.

2. Pruning

Because you should always prune to a side shoot or bud that is pointing in the direction you want new growth, wait to prune deciduous trees until the buds begin to show signs of activity. This will ensure that the bud of interest is alive. If you are repotting, pruning should be done at the same time.

3. Wiring

If possible, start wiring deciduous trees before the buds swell. Once they swell, they are easily dislodged and extra care should be taken. Branches will swell rapidly during the Spring. Wire should be checked often to prevent damage to the bark.

Every time that you water it is good to check the wire. If the wire is too tight, but the branch has not set, the old wire should be removed and the branch rewired. Wrapping the wire in florist tape or raffia helps prevent damage to delicate bark. An alternative is to use an anchoring wire tied to the pot with insulation at the point of contact of the bark.

4. General

Inspect the soil surface of trees that are not being repotted this year. Remove any dead or disfigured moss and any compacted, crusty soil, or old remnants of organic fertilizer pellets. Replace it with fresh soil. Check plants for disease and insect pests and treat if necessary. The wiring and shaping of the trees is an ongoing process and should be attended to on a regular basis.

5. Conifers

Most, junipers, pines, etc., follow the same schedule as the deciduous trees, only several weeks later in the Spring. Lift plants from their pots and inspect the root system. Do not repot until new growth (a short segment of very light color) is evident in a few root tips on the surface of the root ball.

These growing tips are ones that I have gleaned from several sources over a period. They are not meant to be all-inclusive and recommendations vary from person to person. For more information, please consult the books, periodicals, and local experts at your disposal.



A Few Words on Indoor Lighting

By: Matthew

Wisconsin is not a good state to grow bonsai trees in. Let's face it; we have to try harder than most states to keep our bonsai healthy and whole. Summer is usually not a problem; in fact, Wisconsin summers are quite nice. We enjoy long days, cool nights, and generally forgiving storms. It's the winters that leave dried up, leafless skeletal trees in their wake.

Some of us go to great lengths to over-winter delicate, deciduous and coniferous trees in green houses and makeshift shelters. Others have just given up on different species that would thrive if we were only a little further south. Meanwhile, our tropical trees that were so happy over the summer are left to sit by a cold window that only takes in life –giving sunlight for a few hours a day. It's really not fair.

There is no question; the sun does it best. The problem is that there just isn't enough of it in the cold months to keep our trees thriving. A sunny south facing window will keep your trees alive over the winter, but more often than not, the trees will go dormant and drop half their leaves. The cold temperature of the window is to blame for some of this, but also, as the days get shorter, there is just less light. In addition to the shortened length of day, the available light is less intense. As our hemisphere leans away from the sun more of our atmosphere comes between it and our trees. This significantly lowers the intensity of the sunlight.

While we can't control what the weather is like outside, we can control what we do inside. We all know that light is one of the main factors that contribute to the health of our bonsai. So why not try to spoil your tropical bonsai over the winter.

There are lots of different light sources to choose from. Unfortunately they do not all give the same results. Even some of the expensive horticultural lights are just not good for bringing out the best in your bonsai.

Florescent lighting offers a lot of options, but is really only adequate for small mame bonsai. The problem with florescent lights is their rapid loss of effective light within inches of the bulb. Even the high-end HO and VHO florescent lights lose their effective intensity very quickly. The evidence of this is in trees that will have lush new growth on top, but the bottom branches will not have grown at all. Over time it will be very difficult to maintain a balanced tree if only the top third of the tree is actively growing.

A much better option for indoor lighting is metal halide. Metal halide is one of several HID (high intensity discharge) lighting options. The other HID light used for horticulture is high pressure sodium. Sodium bulbs are a little more efficient than metal halide but do not offer a full spectrum of light and may cause some stretching of new growth, which is not desirable for bonsai enthusiasts. There are other types of HID lights that are not worth mentioning mostly because of efficiency.

Metal halide lights offer a full spectrum of light, often a little on the cool (blue) side. These are the closest in spectrum to what the sun puts out at noon in the middle of the summer. One big advantage to using metal halide over florescent is the amount of light penetration the plants receive. While florescent lights are only able to sufficiently illuminate the tops of your trees, metal halide lights can encourage growth on the entire tree, giving you even development year around. Another advantage to metal halide light is coverage. Florescent lights are only effective to the plants that they are directly over. A 400 watt metal halide light will effectively cover an area up to four feet square.

When all is said and done and your tropical trees spend half of the summer recovering rather than growing, you may want to consider upgrading your lights.