



BADGER BONSAI SOCIETY

Promoting and Enjoying the Ancient Art of Bonsai Since 1972

Badger News | A Publication of the Badger Bonsai Society | MAY, 2011

NEXT MEETING DATE: May 12th, 2011

6:30–8:00 p.m.

Olbrich Botanical Gardens

3330 Atwood Ave. Madison, WI

MEETING AGENDA: ~~NURSERY HUNTING PART 2;~~ **The**
Trees, Choosing a style, when to repot.

Feature element: boxwood

CLUB OFFICERS:

President Matthew
Vice President Beau
Communications Devon
Treasurer Gary
Secretary/Librarian / Newsletter Greg
Refreshments Elaine
Past President Tim

"Make One Hundred and Keep Two or Three"

By: Matthew

Greetings Friends, May is here and the frost-free date is fast approaching. That means the bonsai season is getting into full swing. Flowers are opening up and our bonsai show is only a couple days away. Hopefully all your trees that needed repotting are spreading their roots in fresh new media.

This month's meeting will be in the format of a small workshop. We will be looking at different nursery plants and their potential as bonsai. Keep in mind that nearly any woody perennial can be trained in the bonsai style, but some species are easier to work with. Please bring a plant to work on. A "raw" nursery plant would be ideal. We will focus on basic styling and "beginning" the process. If you are still not comfortable going into a nursery and buying a plant for bonsai, don't be discouraged.



Rosemary as a bonsai.

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Read on, and come to the meeting anyway. If you do come to the meeting with a plant, please be prepared to briefly discuss the plant and your plans for it.

There are a couple of different approaches to take when you enter a nursery. The first is to have a pretty good idea of what you

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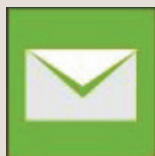
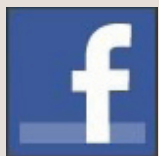


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want to find. This can be based on tree type or bonsai style. For example you may look specifically for a nice boxwood or yew and choose a style that suits the plant you find, or you may be looking for a good candidate for a cascade style tree and be less concerned with the species you bring home. In either case, having an idea of what you are looking for can really streamline your search and help minimize inevitable distractions. The other approach is to simply browse the selection and let the tree choose you. This strategy is a dangerous one. You may spend hours and leave empty handed or be overwhelmed with possible candidates.

When selecting material from a nursery for bonsai, the first thing many people will look at is the base of the trunk. The size and shape of the trunk sets the feel for the entire tree and is the most difficult to change and manipulate over time. Many nursery shrubs are grown to be as bushy as possible. This often means that rather than one stem, they have many small stems grouped together. These are good for your landscape but less desirable as bonsai unless you're putting together a forest or clump planting. Look for a plant with a strong well-developed trunk. If possible, try to see the collar of the plant (where the trunk meets the roots, *nebari*, in bonsai terms) and look for roots that spread evenly away from the trunk.

Aside from the trunk, pay attention also to the overall health of the plant. This is fairly straightforward. Look at the leaves to see if they are all the right color and shape. If the plant has been pruned at all, look for healthy scarring around the cut. Check the plant for pests. Pests shouldn't be a problem at a reputable nursery, but it never hurts to check. As far as the roots are concerned, when I think no one is looking, I try to actually pull the plant out of the pot enough to see what condition the roots are in. Look for nice white healthy root tips. If all the roots are brown and dead, look for another plant. Some plants can tolerate hard pruning of the roots, but in general try to avoid overly root-bound plants as well.

This month we will be looking at boxwoods, members of the *Buxus* genus. These are generally small evergreen shrubs that are often seen as pruned hedges in decorative gardens and landscape. The Kingsville boxwood is the cultivar that is often the most sought after for bonsai.



A fine example of a boxwood bonsai. It is most likely a *Buxus sempervirens*, but *Buxus microphylla* is also popular.

“To develop a fine Bonsai collection, make one hundred and keep two or three.” (Toshio Kawamoto) I chose this quote for this month because I want to encourage everyone to get their hands dirty and make some trees. But there’s more. Don’t be greedy; pass some trees on from time to time. Let me caution you though, bonsai trees don’t always make good gifts. Unless you know that someone is really interested in keeping a bonsai tree and prepared to take care of it, don’t give it to him or her, or it will very likely meet an untimely demise. I really don’t mean to sound negative, but I’m speaking from experience. The other option would be to sell some of your bonsai trees. Don’t quit your day job. I’m only suggesting that if you have trees that you’re not enthusiastic about, you could make room for new material while refining your collection. This would also provide opportunities for newcomers to pick up new material that’s a little further along in the process than raw nursery plants but not necessarily an expensive (relatively) fully developed showpiece tree. One benefit of being a member of a club or society is that you have a connection to a community of other members and everyone can exchange not only information, but material as well. Maybe this is less true for bonsai than, say; hosta, but I feel it is something to consider.

I hope to see you all at the upcoming meeting and our annual show. Until then, enjoy the weather (but watch for overnight freezing), tend your trees, and have a nice day.

Cheers, Matthew

One From the Archives

By: Greg

In going through some old magazines in our Badger Bonsai Societies’ Library I came across this article from a Spring 1990 Bonsai magazine. It is an article from author

Mas Imazuma. Take note of the months that are used in this article and remember that California’s weather is a few months ahead of ours. The rest of the techniques are good.

Thanks - Greg

BONSAI TECHNIQUES: Bonsai in the Spring

by Mas Imazumi, 1990



The late Mas Imazumi

Now that the long, cold winter is past, our bonsai are perking up, bursting with new growth, putting forth blossoms and generally lifting our spirits. It is now that the bonsai-ist’s real work begins. Deciduous trees that need potting or repotting should be done now, and also March is an ideal time to pot/repot the evergreens. After this task is completed, please be sure to leave the newly potted tree in the full sun, out of the wind, in order to promote root growth and faster recovery from this trauma. Now to specific chores:

PINCHING

Of course, you wish your deciduous trees to have small leaves, short internodes and a generous compact appearance. To accomplish this, you must give close attention to pinching new growth. On Maples, when the first



set of new leaves appears, pinch back the new growth in the center of the set. On trees with alternate leaves, leave two leaves and then pinch. If you wish longer branches, pinch back after the second or third set of leaves appear. The net result will be a finely branched, attractive deciduous bonsai. One caution: **DO NOT PINCH FLOWERING/FRUITING TREES AT THIS TIME.**

If your tree has developed larger foliage than you desire (in spite of all of your care), defoliation may be done in April or May. Defoliation creates smaller foliage and finer branching. (Do not defoliate Beech however.) When defoliating, do not pull leaves off, but CUT them at the stem.

With evergreens, especially junipers, cypresses, etc., pinch as needed (which can be frequently!). On the Black Pine, when candles on strong growth are 3-4" long, break them back 2/3. The reason for this is, if you leave full candles, the branch will become overly strong and unsightly. On the 5-needle pine, when candles are 1/2-3/4" long, keep 3 to 4 sets of needles on the candle and break off the balance.

AIR-LAYERING

From about the middle of April through May is an ideal time for air-layering (especially from a neighbors tree- if the neighbor is nice and lets you!). Air-layering is an excellent way to create bonsai in a relatively short time. You can also use the air-layer technique to correct faults in your existing bonsai.

FERTILIZING

You may start your fertilizing program on evergreens as soon as evidence of new growth appears, using rape seed cakes or a mix of 70% cottonseed meal/30% bone meal, or other fertilizer you have found satisfactory. If you can't find rape seed cake, the cottonseed/bone meal mix is its equivalent, and I strongly recommend using it. You can make a cake of this by mixing it with lukewarm water and a tablespoon or two of Malathion, mixing well and placing in a container to dry - then cut into cakes. (The Malathion addition prevents maggot growth.)

Hold off fertilizing deciduous or flowering/fruiting trees until the middle of May to prevent over development of foliage and long internode growth, thereby maintaining your fine branching pattern.

BUGS

Along with tree growth, we have bug growth in spades! So, get out your favorite insecticide and get to work with the spray can. The best time to spray is early morning.

WATERING

Evergreen trees like overhead watering, and it is well to do this every so often. Also, this helps keep spider mite infestation away.

Of course, don't overhead flowering/fruiting trees during the blooming season as this not only ruins the flowers, but prevents pollination. Be sparing of water on all deciduous trees, as overwatering causes overgrowth of foliage and

long internode development.

I hope you have no lop-sided trees - If you have, you haven't read my articles all the way through!

ROTATE TREES OFTEN

is my closing comment. And also, enjoy this beautiful time of the year.

P.S. When I was invited to the Minnesota Bonsai Society last year, I noticed some of the bonsai foliage burned from the sun. My first impression is that this was caused when the bonsai was removed from its winter quarters into direct sun. I strongly suggest that you place them first in filtered sun for a week to ten days, and then gradually place them in full sun. I think this will reduce the burning effect.

- Mas Imazumi



Show Prep in Preparation for the Spring Show

by Eric S / <http://www.bssf.org/>

Now is the time to be doing critical clean up and wiring of trees that you plan to put in the spring show.

Show prep is a little bit maintenance and a little bit of putting off maintenance. The goal is to make the tree look as good as possible for the show, and sometime that means doing things that are not what you would normally be doing to the tree. But it also means a little trickery and showmanship.

Take for example a branch or pad of foliage on a conifer, as a tree grows through the summer it will start to look messy: junipers get fluffy looking and start having downward growing foliage, year-old needles on pines go from all neatly pointing in the same direction to dangling down at an odd angle. The underside of a pad of foliage has to be flat and clean for your eye to recognize it, so in both cases old needles have to be cleaned out from the bottom to bring the picture that you are painting into focus. But at the same time you can leave some of the old needles if they are needed to keep the tree looking full and lush for the show.

Wiring and unwiring are another aspect that can be controlled. While conifers are very often shown with wire on some or all of the branches, deciduous and broadleaf evergreen trees look better when the branches are shown free of wire so that bark and the subtle movement of the branching can be appreciated. But what to do if you need to move a branch? Wire it now and leave the wire on until the day of the show, then remove it just before the show, the branch may have set; and even if it hasn't in many cases it will take a few days to spring back to its position, giving you enough time to show it.

Mossing should be done so that the tree looks nice for the show. Many times moss that has been growing on the soil by itself looks untidy and should be removed and replaced with a more uniform covering.

Timing of flowers or new leaf opening is also critical to the show. If you have a tree that you are showing in [April], think back to when exactly it flowered or leafed out last year. If the timing was perfect treat it the same as you did last year, but if it flowered too late bring it inside your house each night for a few weeks leading up to the show so that the flowers open during the show. If it flowered too early last year try keeping it out of direct sunlight as spring approaches so that the opening of the buds is delayed slightly, or if you have a walk-in refrigerator put it in there for a couple nights (ha!)

Think ahead to the show and consider whether the tree that you have is in the best pot

possible. If not, start looking now for a better pot. The same thing applies to display stands: if you don't have a display stand that is appropriate for your tree (or you don't know what is appropriate) start looking now. Ask club members during workshop about what stand would be good for the tree. If you don't want to buy a stand try to borrow one from someone who is not using their stands (a member of another club or a member of our club not showing as many trees as in the past.)

Finally, consider which trees could be shown in conjunction with others. Formal displays often contain only one tree if the tree is large, or contain one medium size tree and one smaller tree. Running displays of trees need to have variety in both size and species. Take a look through the photos on our website from last year's show and think about how your tree will be displayed. Plan to bring accent plants or stones or scrolls if you want them to go with your tree.



Badger Bonsai Society's 2010 Annual Show at Olbrich Gardens