



BADGER BONSAI SOCIETY

Promoting and Enjoying the Ancient Art of Bonsai Since 1972

Badger News | A Publication of the Badger Bonsai Society | April 2011

NEXT MEETING DATE: April 9th, 2011

6:30–8:00 p.m.

Olbrich Botanical Gardens

3330 Atwood Ave. Madison, WI

MEETING AGENDA: **FICUS OR SCHEFFLERA ROOT**

OVER ROCK DEMO. Two tropical species that are great for beginners and have fairly hardy roots. **Feature element:** Ficus

CLUB OFFICERS:

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

"Expose the Essence of the Tree"

By: Matthew

Greetings, Summer has come. Well, the heat has anyway. Now that overnight temperatures are at least in the fifties, even tropical trees can be placed outside. In regard to shade versus sun, that depends mostly on the species of bonsai being kept. Just be sure to stay diligent in your watering. Some bonsai may need water as much as twice a day on some of these sunny windy days. If you haven't started feeding your trees, do it now. Most trees have already put out their first flush of foliage by now and have used up their stored energy from the winter. Water alone is not enough.

During our monthly meeting we will discuss and hopefully demonstrate Sekijoju, root-over-rock, style of bonsai. There are many species of trees that can be trained in this style, but some tropical trees lend themselves especially well to it. Ficus, which will be our featured species, is one of them. In nature Ficus species often grow aerial roots from the trunk and branches that grow into the ground once they reach it. Strangler Figs grow such prolific roots that they can overtake other plants and even buildings. Schefflera and Serissa species also work well for Sekijoju.



Weeping Ficus - Ficus nerifolia

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"...the ultimate challenge for the bonsai designer is to expose the essence of the tree."
-Herb L. Gustafson

From Your Library

By: Greg

As the club librarian I receive three bonsai magazines, just got the June issue of BONSAI, Journal of the American Bonsai Society. Over the last few issues they have changed the format of their magazines, for the best, by adding a few more interesting and informative articles, good photos also. I will bring a few recent issues along with others from your library to the next meeting for members to check out.

One of the articles from the June issue of Bonsai magazine was on Juniper chinensis and its use in bonsai, written by Randy Davis. Chinese Junipers seem to be one of the more common plants used in bonsai. Shimpaku seems to be the most prevalent, probably because of the soft deep green foliage and rough strong looking trunk that can be developed. Some other cultivars to be on the lookout for when you visit nurseries are: Blaauw- upright bluish green foliage, Fomenia- blue green foliage, San Jose- light green foliage with rugged fast thickening trunks, and Heitz Columnaris- medium green foliage and upright growth. These are just a few of the more common varieties of Juniper chinensis that can be used. There are many more so do not ignore others if you come across them. Junipers in general prefer full sun. They can tolerate high heat, and also cold temperatures, (just remember to protect the roots in the winter.) They need alot of water but like to



Shimpaku Juniper (Juniperus chinensis)

get somewhat dry between watering. Be careful of over watering. Junipers in general are prone to root rot and once infected are very difficult to treat. Next to root rot, junipers are prone to infestations of spider mites. Frequent spraying of water on the foliage will help keep the mite population in check, also use a miticide if needed. Diseases are few with Apple Cedar Rust being most common, but that is infrequent. Go try a juniper, they are tough and forgiving and with a little work they can make a very nice Bonsai.

I also came across this other article from the magazine that might interest you. It was based on tree wounds and caring of them. It goes kind of like this. Wounds less than 1/4 inch should not pose any problem, it is when they are larger problems tend to arise. Heartwood when exposed through injury, normally by pruning, will tend to dry out stressing the tree, if kept wet the wood could start to rot. The tree will attempt to heal itself; some help from you will benefit the tree.

When pruning the tree, care needs to be exercised to keep the cut as clean and neat as possible. In most cases trim the cut into a depression about twice the depth of the surrounding bark. This helps allow the tree to callus over flush with the bark. Make sure the edges of the cut are smooth, not ragged. Smooth edges tend to heal faster. Use a small amount of wound

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In time the paste will be pushed out as the callous forms beneath.

dressings/ cut paste to fully cover the wound. The tree will start to callus over at the edges forming new bark, which will over time cover the wound. Sometimes it will benefit reinjuring the callus tissue, this generally will reinvigorate the tree to produce new callus. Do not allow the callus to form over rotted or soft wood, if needed scrape out the soft wood, treat it with a wood hardener (Minwax). At times if the wound is large, callusing tends to produce large unsightly bumps. The author has been experimenting with bandaging over the wound, this tight binding generally results in a flusher covering and with faster results.

Cut paste/wound sealer tends to not have any healing benefits on the tree; it does though tend to hold in moisture so as to not dry out the wood and also serves to seal out external moisture and diseases.

In nature in most instances a tree will heal itself in time, but since in bonsai the tree is already stressed (even though we do everything possible to keep this at a minimum) all things we do to help the tree recover will in most instances create a better tree and probably a happier one at that.

Have fun, Greg

Adventures in Fertilizer: The Miracle Growing Power of Bat Poop and Fish Guts!

By: Devon (reprinted as-is from last year's August issue)

I want to talk to you about fertilizing your trees. When I started cultivating bonsai I knew that too much fertilizer or improper application could kill my trees, so I began by not fertilizing at all, and then very minimally. Now that I am more comfortable with my green-hued opposable digits, I am fertilizing about every 1-2 weeks. To quote Harry Carry "Holy Cow!" The results have been amazing. My foliage is more colorful and abundant. I have more fruits and flowers. Everybody is healthier-looking overall.

When I began fertilizing, about four years ago, I used low doses of Miracle-Gro about once a month with so-so results. Then I got a hold of bat guano and fish emulsion. Guano (poop) and emulsion (guts, etc) are organic as opposed to chemical, like Miracle-Gro. Bonsai books recommend using different fertilizers to vary the macro/micronutrients levels which will increase the odds of providing a well balanced diet (makes sense). I was alternating between the low dose Miracle-Gro one month and a mixture of Jamaican bat guano and fish emulsion the other. The results were better, but I still wasn't amazed. And I wanted to be AMAZED! The next year, after winning a 2lb bag of Green Dream (slow release organic pellets) at the annual club dinner, I began using fewer chemicals and more organics with better results. So this year I took what I learned and pushed the envelope of conventional wisdom.

This spring, I began a more robust fertilizing regime. I started fertilizing every two weeks or so with weaker doses in early spring (starting in April) and will continue applying stronger mixtures more frequently until late fall. The products and solutions I use change as the seasons change - more on that later. I gave everyone a healthy dose of slow release Green Dream or plant spikes around June 1 and every Saturday or Sunday, for three out of four weeks, I use a strong mixture of Mexican bat guano and fish emulsion solution. Just to mix it up, sometimes I use that same solution with a splash of Dyna-Grow (and Pro-TeKt silicone for the deciduous trees). On the fourth week I use Miracle-Gro in a moderate to low dose. For my acidic soil loving plants, like azalea and pine, I supplement with low-dose MirAcid on that fourth week. The results are AMAZING! My foliage is so much healthier looking and more abundant on all my bonsai.

When it comes to using chemically based products I tend to apply weaker doses, but I have taken to using the fish emulsion like a chef adds salt and pepper, by sight and intuition (but never by taste). I go heavy with this product. However, due to the higher nitrogen, I am still using the guano as the directions indicate. Over-fertilization can be as detrimental to plants as under-fertilization. Caution is advised because “fertilizer burn” can occur when too much fertilizer is applied: drying out roots, burning foliage and even killing the plant.

Let's talk about N-P-K

Fertilizers typically provide in varying proportions these elements:

Primary macronutrients:

nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K).

Secondary macronutrients:

calcium (Ca), sulfur (S), magnesium (Mg).

Micronutrients or trace minerals:

boron (B), chlorine (Cl), manganese (Mn), iron (Fe), zinc (Zn), copper (Cu), molybdenum (Mo) and selenium (Se).

Adapted from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fertilizer>

So What Does That All Mean?

(N) Nitrogen for Plant Growth:

foliage production and general health

(P) Phosphorus for Root Growth:

develop roots and increases leaf area

(K) Potassium for Plant Strengtheners:

proper growth of flowers and fruits, helps with the absorption of other nutrients, and toughen plants so that they can better withstand disease and cold temperatures.

What to Apply When;

Suggested Fertilizer Application

These numbers are not to be taken literally, only as a guide to understand how to vary the N-P-K through the course of a growing year to best feed your bonsai.

Spring: 10-5-5

Summer: 10-15-5

Fall: 5-10-15

Winter: none, do not fertilize during dormancy

My Arsenal

These are the products that I have been using. I've placed an ® on the products that are brand names.
SYMBOL KEY: (N-P-K) [purchase] {use}

Organics

Green Dream® (6-6-6) [Ron] {outdoors}

Fish Emulsion (5-1-1 – N-P-K)
[common nursery] {outdoors}

Bat Guano (Mexican) (10-2-1)
[common nursery] {outdoors}

Bat Guano (Jamaican) (1-10-0.2)
[common nursery] {outdoors}

Non-Organics

Dyna-Gro® (7-9-5) [Ron]
{indoors/outdoors}

Pro-TeKt® Silicon Solution (0-0-3) [Ron]
{outdoors}

Miracle-Gro® (20-20-20 and 24-8-16)
[common nursery] {outdoors}

MirAcid® (30-10-10) [common nursery]
{outdoors}

Schultz Plant Food® (10-15-10) [common nursery]
{indoors/outdoors}

Plant spikes (10-10-4 – N-P-K will vary)
[common nursery]
{indoors/outdoors}



From top left: Schultz plant Food, pro teKt, dyna-Gro, Mexican Bat Guano, Jamaican Bat Guano (the BaG Got a hole), Fish Emul Sion; plant SpiKeS, Green dream, Mirical-Gro, Mir a cid and Finally the “Box” i Keep them in.

Precautions and Disclaimers

I want to let you all know that this method is working for me, and I encourage you to use fertilizer, but ALWAYS (x's 3) read the label of what you are using, especially the non-organic chemical stuff. These products can and will kill your lawn, bonsai, pets and even you if you do not use them properly. The organics are not as harsh but caution should still be used. I've already told you about "Fertilizer Burn" so here are a few other things to consider.

A Few DOs and DON'Ts

DON'T

Feed a tree that is under stress

> Stress ranges from over or under watering to newly pruned roots, pests or disease.

Feed trees in winter or when they are either dormant or growth has slowed down

Feed when your trees are outdoors and summers are extremely hot

Feed until temperatures have moderated and growth has resumed

DO

Know what species of tree your bonsai is

> Most broad leaf trees and tropicals can be fed with general, balanced N-P-K fertilizer.

> Conifers, azaleas and certain others benefit from a monthly application of an acidic fertilizer, such as MirAcid.

Feed a tree when in periods of active growth

> This is generally from mid-spring through early summer and from late summer to early fall.

Water

I always water thoroughly the day before I fertilize. I read that this lessens the chances of burning your roots / foliage as well as increasing the capillary action in the roots to take up the fertilizer. This made sense, so I made it part of my routine. Also, I don't fertilize when I know rain is on the way. Instead I wait until after the showers so the food isn't washed away too quickly. It's only a day or two before I water again so I want the maximum effect of the fertilizer.

Dispensing

I have special fertilizer watering containers. I use a one-gallon jug made of sturdy plastic to make my mix (most recipes call for mixing "X" amount of fertilizer to one gallon of water, so this is quite helpful). Then I pour my solution into a small (maybe a quart) sized plastic watering can with a long spout to control the flow as I dispense the fertilizer.

Watch the wire, it will bite you!

Watch your wire! I can't stress this enough. Your plants will be growing faster and the wire will cut in deeper, quicker. Don't rob Peter to pay Paul on this one.

Weeds! And more ^%#\$%^ WEEDS!

Maybe it's because pulling weeds was used as a form of punishment when I was growing up, or maybe because I grew up in the golf course encrusted, over-manicured lawns of the Chicago suburbs, either way I DON'T LIKE WEEDS! However, just as your bonsai like the extra food, so do the weeds. At times I had larger weeds in my bonsai pots than in my yard – OK, I'm exaggerating, but seriously, THE WEEDS, PEOPLE! I was blown away at the amount of undergrowth I was getting. Oy vey! Pull the weeds whenever you pinch or spend any time with your trees.

This Stuff is Poison

I don't like touching any of this stuff and make sure I wash my hands thoroughly when I am done. As many of you know, I have two young children and they have been told to stay away from my fertilizer box. (I keep all the products in a military issue metal ammo case that I store in my basement landing.) The box isn't locked but is latched and won't open without some effort (and when the box is opened, the smell alone would drive most people away anyhow).

What a Wonderful Smell You've Discovered

There is a reason that "emulsion" rhymes with "revulsion" this stuff smells, and I mean smells, NASTY!! As for the guano and Green Dream, well they don't smell too much better. There is however one nice side effect of the smell, no one goes near my bonsai. I have approximately 175 plants, from seedlings to specimens, so keeping the neighborhood kids away is just fine with me. Getting over the revolting smell is one issue you will need to contend with when using organics.

In closing, I just want to reiterate, fertilizing has made a huge difference in the health of my bonsai and I can't recommend it enough. Like most things I took to it slowly but once I learned more, I went full bore and started singing its praises!
No Bull.





The 2011 Crowd Favorite; Ron's Bald Cypress



Another successful show this May. Hundreds of people came through the show on both Saturday and Sunday. Thanks to everyone who participated by having trees, spending time at Olbrich, spreading the word and in general contributing to the show.

All the photos are available on the website:
badgerbonsai.net/category/2011-annual-show

