



BADGER BONSAI SOCIETY

Promoting and Enjoying the Ancient Art of Bonsai Since 1972

Badger News | A Publication of the Badger Bonsai Society | June 2012

NEXT MEETING DATE: **June 14, 2012**

Olbrich Botanical Gardens
3330 Atwood Ave. Madison, WI

MEETING TIME 6-9 pm

MEETING AGENDA:

Workshop (bring a tree to work on)

CLUB OFFICERS:

President and Interim Treasurer Matthew
Vice President Beau
Librarian Greg
Newsletter/Website Devon
Refreshments Elaine
Past President Tim

President's Message

Hello Everyone,

First of all, thank you to every body that got involved in this years annual show at Olbrich Gardens. It was a busy weekend for a lot of people, but we pulled it off. The results of the popular vote are as follows: third place was taken by Mary's Ginko, second place was Barbara's cut leaf Japanese Maple, and the grand prize goes to Ron for his Bald Cypress. Congratulations to you and everyone else who received even one vote. (And I think that covers every body that brought a tree.)

The growing season is well under way. I do hope that all of you have been able to keep up on watering. We've already had a hot dry stretch and some strong wind. By now fertilizer should be a regular part of your routine. There are many different fertilizer options out there. In general a standard "grow" fertilizer would suit most trees at this time of the year. Also be wary of



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pests. Aphids are out in full force right now. If you see ants and/or sticky stuff on your plants, take a closer look around new growth. Scale insects also have similar symptoms. Again there are many different options for dealing with insect pests. Insect killing soap is one of the most effective and safe way to deal with a good majority of the pests we see on our trees. Some pests like scale and mealy bugs are protected from most liquid sprays as adults. Systemic insecticides like Imidacloprid are more effective against these. Not all insecticides are effective at controlling mites because mites are not insects. Insect killing soap is labeled as a mite killer. Otherwise pyrethrin with piperonyl butoxide is a combination that can kill spider mites. These are the main weapons in my arsenal but again; there are many other options.

This month at our meeting is the first of two summer workshops. There is no official theme so the term workshop gets a little clouded. Instead, I think 'bonsai party' would be a better term. We have been able to secure a full three hours from six o'clock to nine o'clock. This will be a great opportunity to bring in a tree and get styling advice or just socialize with fellow bonsai enthusiasts. I believe that the collective knowledge and experience of our club should be able to provide an answer to any bonsai question. Bring yourself, bring a tree, bring questions, and bring a friend if you like. I hope to see you all there.

Until then, good day.

-Matthew



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

By: Devon

Reprinted from June, 2011 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.



Red Maples from 2010 BBS workshop

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}

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.



Precautions and Disclaimers

Continued...

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.**



2012 ANNUAL SHOW





