

# Elephant Bush

Grove Planting Demonstration

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## Elephant Bush – “Spekboom”

Portulacaria afra. Drought tolerant from Africa. Can be 80% of the elephant’s diet. Needs well-draining soil. Water when soil is dry, looks best with regular watering in hotter months. Tolerant of light frost but best to provide protection.

Purchased at Home Depot in March 2020 for \$22.98.



The pot contained 7 nice little trees with varying size trunks. Perfect for a grove planting.

Right away in March – I separated them and planted them in a shallow pot to let the roots develop for each tree.

I haven't done any pruning at all – just let them grow all summer.



## Guidelines For Creating Perspective and Asymmetrical Balance –

Use an uneven number of trees that should vary in height and trunk thickness.

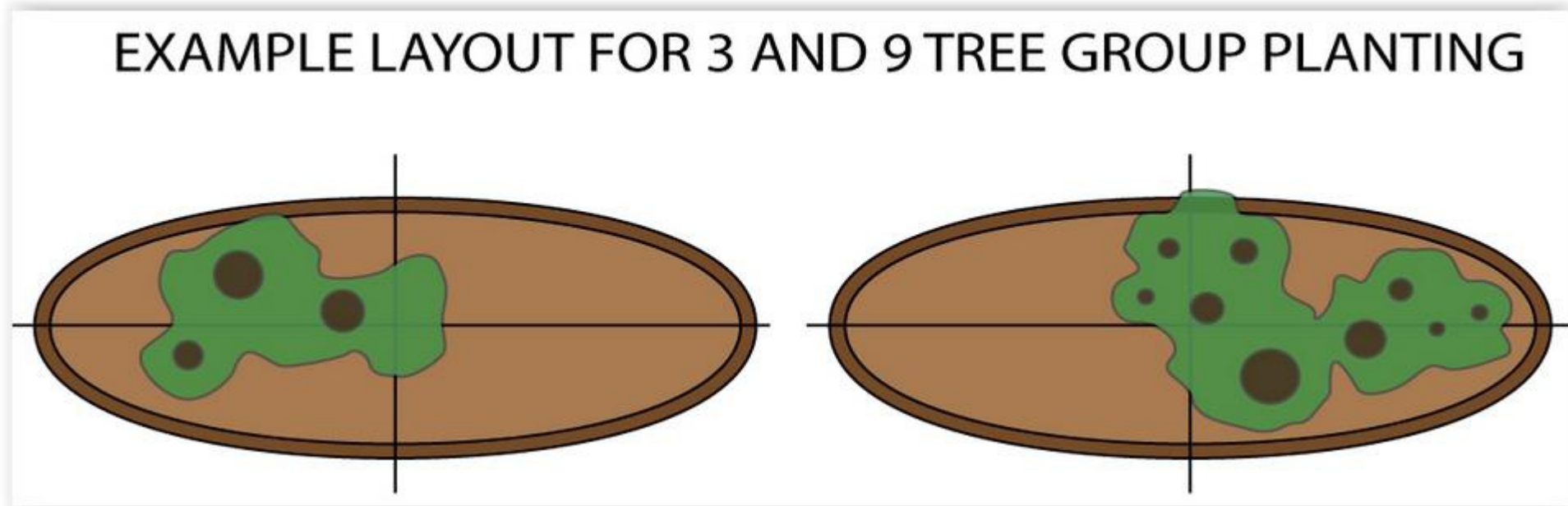
The tallest and thickest tree is in front with smaller trees in back to create a feeling of depth.

Trees should be planted at unequal distances from each other and no tree should conceal another.

No trees should be parallel and no three trees should be in line with each other from any angle.

Trees at the front should have branches higher up the trunk to be able to “glimpse through”.

Which of these examples already breaks the “rules”?

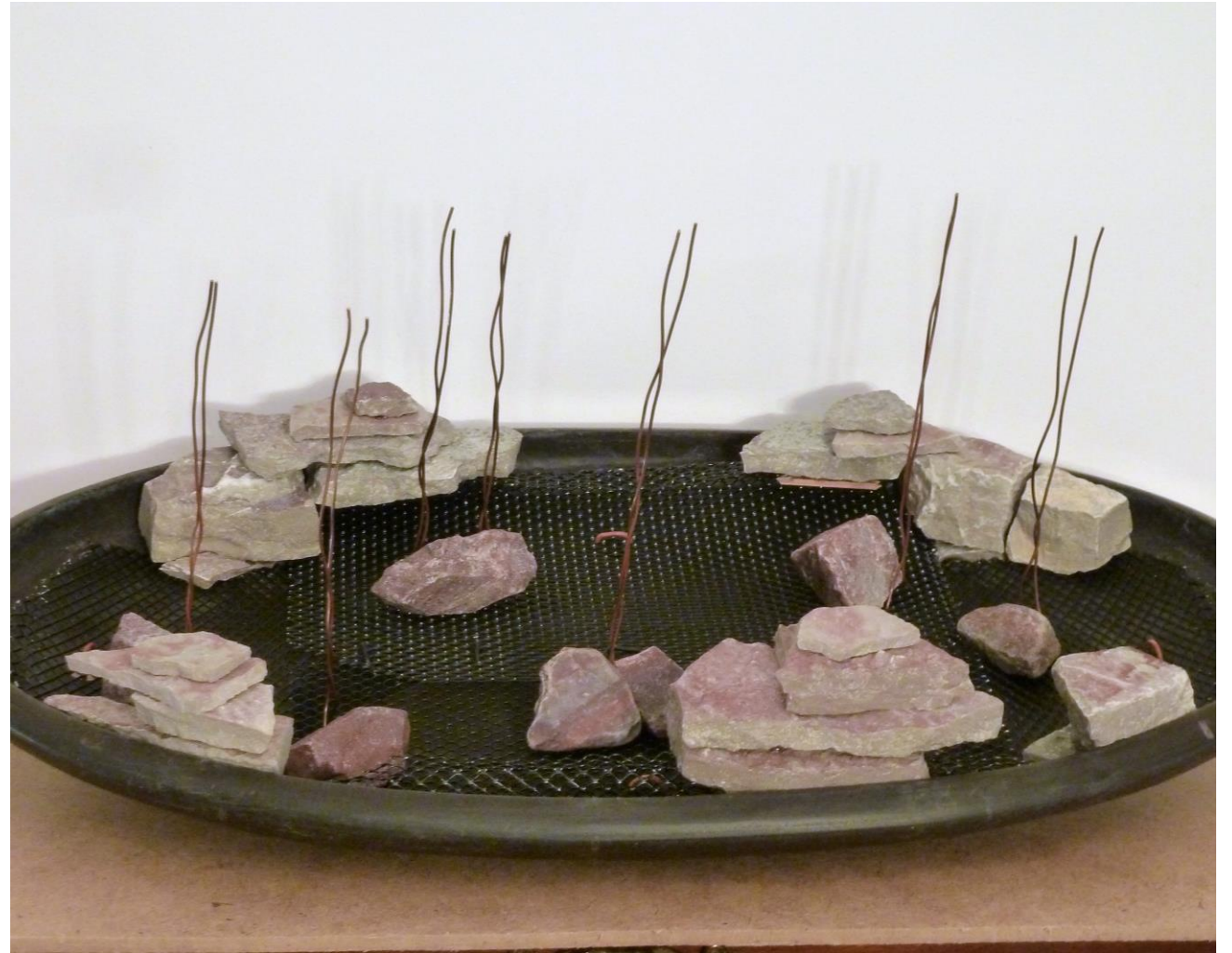


Now this gets interesting and fun!

Black mesh has been cut and attached to a 12 x 21 oval tray. This gave me unlimited choices for placement of the anchoring wires for the trees.

The rock formations along the edge of the tray have all been glued in to provide what I hope will be an arid African bush look in keeping with the tree species.

Along with the mesh edge the rocks will also help to provide a soil barrier that will not wash away.



This is a closer picture of the mesh. The long copper wires are for anchoring the trees and the small loops are where the mesh is firmly anchored to the tray.

The size of this mesh seems a little small but I think drainage should be OK. I found a hardware cloth with  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch holes but you had to buy a giant roll.

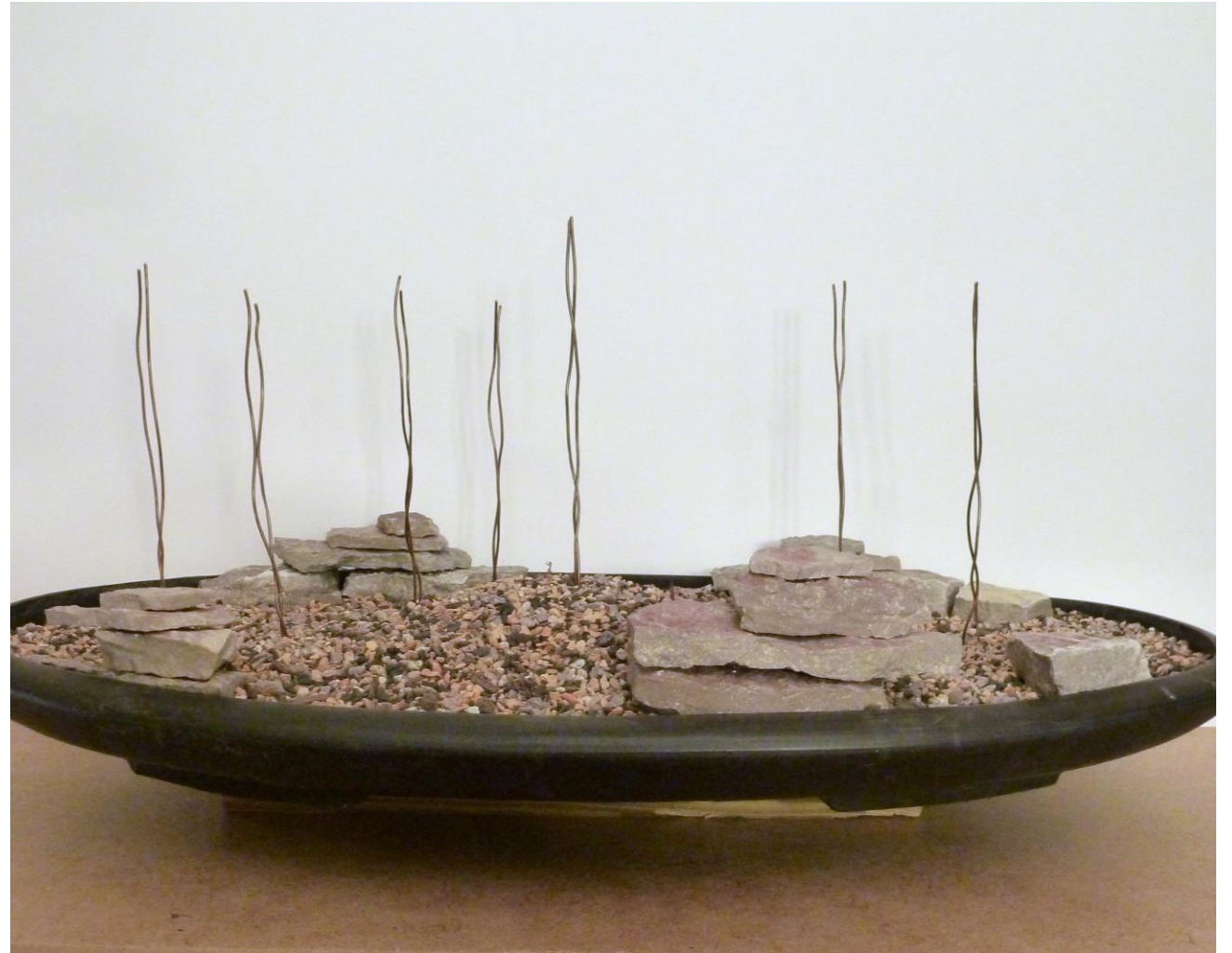
The rocks in the center are just holding up the wires right now but I plan to use them in the final design.



The first layer of soil is the same course bonsai mix that I use for most everything. The second layer in which the trees will be planted is the same mix with about a third cactus mix added.

The terrain is higher in the middle and slopes down to the back and sides.

Interesting note - this picture shows me that the primary tree will be too centered on the tray. I will adjust that to the left when I position it.



When I separated and removed the trees from their temporary planting I found that all 7 trees have better roots than I was even hoping for.

Look at what almost 6 months of sun, fertilizer and love can do!

I'm pretty sure that would work for me too right about now. Especially with margarita brand fertilizer!



This photo shows just the primary and secondary trees with the wires wrapped around the lower trunks.

I can see that I could have used a heavier gauge wire for this but it's working with some additional temporary bracing until everything settles in. After that I will remove all the wires or tuck them below the soil.

I did move the center tree a little more to the left.



All 7 trees are now in position. Nothing has been trimmed yet and I still want to do a little branch wiring.

I was able to follow most of the guidelines for creating perspective and asymmetry. I think that can be enhanced with the trimming that comes next.

This looks a little too “wild” right now but maybe that’s how it is in the African bush before the elephants have lunch!

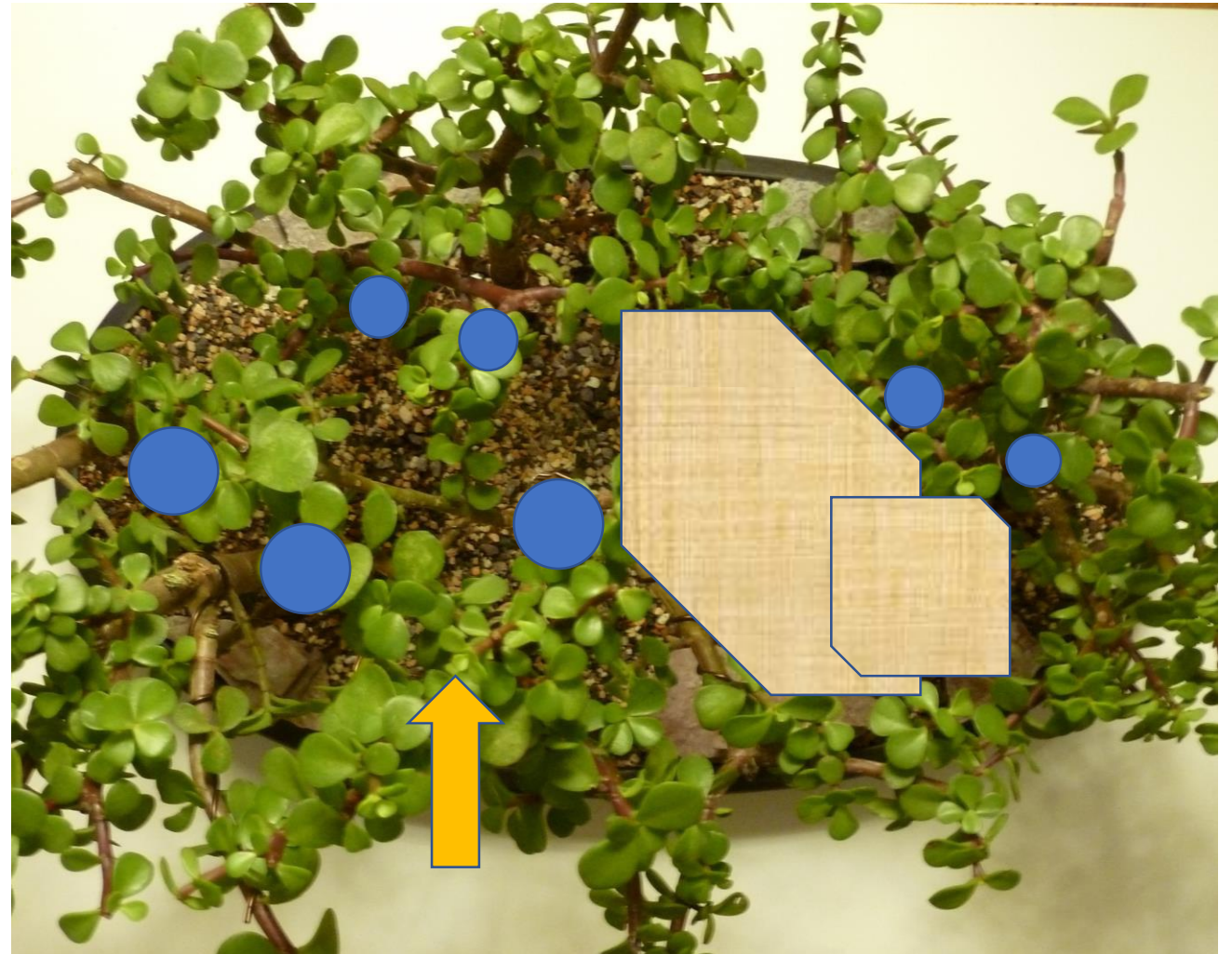


This view from the top shows the canopy but what I really want to do is show the trunk placement. It's hard to see that in a picture from the front.

The blue dots show the relative trunk size and placement of the 7 trees.

The arrow shows the “glimpse through” to the back trees which really does add depth.

The tan area is negative space.



Almost finished – time to just look at it for a few days and keep my hands off the scissors!

I also have a few more rocks to place and that could take forever – it's a Zen kind of thing!

I'm also considering using some fine surface from my sifting as the top layer of soil. The tan color might look more like an arid landscape.



Some additional rocks have been added – they are all a light purple color.

I also decided to add some fine surface on only some portions of the surface. Maybe these look like “wash” areas where water has flowed or maybe not?

What I do like is the tan color – it seems more like sand to me and I might put it on the entire surface.



# The Finished Grove

I trimmed off quite a lot and will let it grow over the winter and trim again in the spring when it goes back outside.

The tray is tipped forward for this picture to show the surface. A feature that I like about grove plantings is that they change when viewed from different angles.

I had a lot of fun with this project. I encourage you to keep an eye out for a promising pot of something with separate plants to create your own grove or forest planting.

