



# BADGER BONSAI NEWS

December 2025

## President's Message

By Alex S.

As our temperate trees are tucked in for the winter— and even blanketed with an extra layer of snow for protection—it's a perfect time to pause, reflect on the year behind us, and begin looking ahead to 2026.

We'll start that reflection at our December meeting, where we'll gather to mingle, enjoy some holiday snacks, and revisit the top trees from our 2025 show. It's always a pleasure to look back on the creativity, care, and craftsmanship that make our club and our shows so special.



The new year brings exciting leadership changes. We're pleased to welcome Skyler into the role of Vice President

and John to the board as our new Treasurer. We extend our sincere thanks to Mary for her many years of dedicated service as Vice President and to Ken for his stewardship as Treasurer. Mary will continue to serve on the board, and we're grateful for her continued involvement, institutional knowledge, and wise guidance.

With the new year comes renewal—and that includes membership renewals. Your continued participation and support help keep our club vibrant, educational, and growing.

Membership dues can be paid via PayPal, check, or cash. We are also looking into adding a way to pay via a link on our website. If you're renewing in January, dues are: Individual - \$30 Family - \$40 Student - \$20. New members joining anytime after September 2025 are considered paid for 2026.

If you have a personal PayPal account you can make a payment to [badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com](mailto:badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com) at no charge to you. Use this quick link <https://paypal.me/>



[badgerbonsai](https://paypal.me/) or scan the QR code to expedite the process.

Funds will be drawn either from your bank account or credit card as you choose. In the notes field, write your name and indicate that the payment is for 2026 dues.

Bring a personal check made out to "Badger Bonsai Society" to one of our monthly meetings for the Treasurer, John. If you prefer to mail your check, send an email to [badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com](mailto:badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com) and we will send you John's home address. For cash payments (least preferred) John will write you a receipt if you pay with cash at one of our monthly meetings. Exact change is greatly appreciated.

We look forward to another year of learning from one another, sharing our passion for bonsai, and cultivating both trees and community together.

Wishing you and your bonsai a peaceful winter season.



UPCOMING  
EVENT

**December 11, 6:30 - 8:00 pm**  
**Olbrich Botanical Gardens**  
3330 Atwood Ave, Madison

### AGENDA:

- Holiday mingling, bring a snack to share
- Show tree critique and discussion

# BONSAI TECHNIQUES

## Top Dressing

by Ron F

At our November meeting, I presented a number of topics that are often performed during the late fall prior to putting your trees into their winter homes where they will stay for the next three to four months.

One of those tasks was Soji (cleaning the soil surface, removing weeds, and loosening the soil surface that has become compacted) possibly vacuuming the loosened material, and refreshing with new soil and top dressing. My focus here will be on top dressing.

### Top dressing - what is it and why should I care?

In bonsai if we just fill our pot with whatever soil we use and nothing else, here is what happens. When we water, we will likely displace some of the loose soil. If we're using Akadama or Kanuma soil, that water will actually start to break down the soil particles. The other thing we'll notice is that the soil is almost always bone dry on the surface. Because there is nothing there, the water in the pot will evaporate more quickly. These conditions will not encourage fine roots to grow in this zone. *That is the WHY.*

Now for the *WHAT*:

*There are several other uses for long-fiber sphagnum moss in bonsai practice. It can be used with bonsai soil to help hold soil and moisture in certain situations, and some also use it when creating air layers. Both of these topics are subjects that can be covered at another time.*



The top dressing that I was taught to use and have done so for about the last ten years is a combination of long fiber sphagnum moss and collected green moss. The long fiber sphagnum moss can be purchased online or can be found at pet stores. Garden centers may have it but don't confuse this with peat moss, which is often ground much finer and therefore will clog your soil much quicker. So again, NO PEAT MOSS.

This is a picture of a bag of the sphagnum moss I use.



This is what the long fiber sphagnum moss looks like right out of the bag. It is packaged into bales of varying sizes and it is somewhat compressed. Note the stringy texture.



To process the sphagnum moss you will need a set of soil sieves. These are mainly used to sift our soils to different particle sizes and remove the ultra fine dust from the soil components

we use. There are typically three grid sizes that come with these sieves. The largest openings are about 1/4 inch, the smallest openings are round 1/8 inch, and the medium-sized openings are about half-way between the largest and smallest. We use the ones with the largest and smallest openings for making top dressing.

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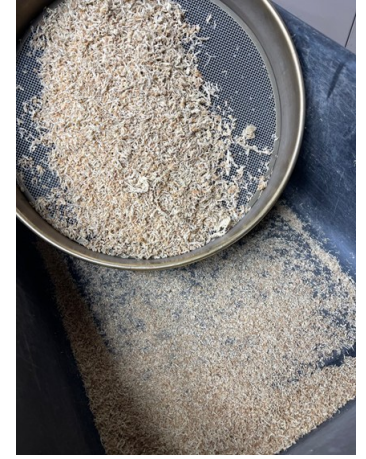
Place a handful of sphagnum moss into the sieve with the largest openings and use your hand to press and rub the sphagnum moss through the sieve. It takes some pressure, you may want to wear a glove.

**!!!! CAUTION IMPORTANT SAFETY WARNING  
PLEASE CONSIDER THIS FOR OWN HEALTH. !!!!!**

Wear at least a COVID-type face mask over your nose and mouth as the grinding of the moss creates a fine dust that can easily enter your lungs and cause serious health issues. I myself use a respirator when grinding moss.



When all of the moss has been processed through the sieve, transfer the ground up moss to the smallest opening sieve. This time you don't press it with your hand, but rather you shake the sieve to allow the very fine dust particles fall through. What remains on the sieve is what you'll use for your top dressing.



Once you have pressed all the moss through the small-opening sieve it should look something like this. Continue shredding the remainder of the moss you want to process. I usually grind up the entire package.



Because bonsai is a visual art some people find the stark whitish tan color of the ground sphagnum moss off-putting. So we will dye this ground up moss to a more calming greyish tone.

Here is a comparison of natural versus dyed sphagnum moss. This completes Step #2



This is done by soaking the ground moss in water and Sumi ink (Chinese brush painting ink). This ink can be purchased online and the brand I have used is in a black bottle with a green cap/nozzle. It costs around \$10. Wear gloves and old clothes as it will stain.



Here's what a bucket of the inked water looks like. Add ink until you find a color you can live with. The moss looks darker when wet so assume it will lighten when it is dry.



Sphagnum moss after dying.

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Now we move on to Step #3 –processing the green moss. Collect green moss wherever you can and try to find moss that grows in full sunlight at least part of the day. Also collect moss that has a short tight nap/velvety texture. But also look for a variety as you really don't want your moss to look like a carpet.



Now with the largest opening sieve you grind your green moss, it is a little harder than the sphagnum moss to grind. Once you have processed everything through the larger sieve switch to the smallest sieve and once again *only shake, do not press the moss*.



That finishes Step #3 and you are just about done. So take your two types of moss and combine them. I typically use 1 1/2 to 2 parts sphagnum moss to one part green moss. Seeing as green moss is a little harder to come by I try to conserve what I have. Obviously the more green moss you use means the mixture will be dryer and you may compromise promoting an environment where the green moss can survive and thrive.

This completes Step #4. A good place to store your top dressing is in a bag or container that does not allow moisture to collect. Consider keeping it out of direct sunlight.

When you apply your top dressing to your tree just put a light layer on so that you cover the soil but not so thick that you cannot see of the soil. Once applied, mist it gently until it is fairly wet. The sphagnum moss and green moss will bind together. Be careful to not put it into higher winds until it is moist/wet, or it could blow away

*Continued on Pg 5*





Finally two pictures, one after just applying top dressing and the second ,after about one years growth.

Pictures and descriptions by Ron Fortmann , Ancient Arts Bonsai

## For Your Reading Pleasure

By Librarian Linda

More than 20 books have been added to the BBS Library cart – from handbooks for beginners to tomes for more experienced bonsai enthusiasts. Please check out the expanded selection during a monthly meeting at Olbrich Botanical Gardens.

All meeting attendees are welcome to browse the book collection, and BBS members can check out books. Preferably, books are checked out for one month, in between meetings. Check-out and check-in sheets are on the book cart.

If you find a book you found especially well-written and informative, feel free to write a blurb about it for BBS News. If you enjoyed a book it's very likely someone else will as well, and we'd love it if you shared your recommendations! . You can send your book blurb for publication to the Newsletter Editor at [badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com](mailto:badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com).

Happy reading!

## Of Interest on the Web



### Have some news to share?

Submit articles, ideas, photos, and events to the Newsletter Editor at [badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com](mailto:badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com)

A few of our suggestions for further study on what's happening this month in the world of bonsai.

How Can Bonsai Tell a Story

- [Andy Rutledge Online Book](#)

[Freeze Damage in Woody Plants](#)

- [Evergreen Garden Works](#)

[Indoor Bonsai](#)

- [Bonsai 4me](#)



Follow [Badger Bonsai Society on Facebook](#) for the latest news, meeting agendas, upcoming events, and inspiring shares from the world of bonsai.

[Badger Bonsai Society Member Group](#)

BBS members-only platform for sharing tips, advice, and inspiration between monthly meetings

## January Dinner at Imperial Garden

By Mary

The BBS 2026 holiday dinner for members and a guest will be on Thursday, January 8<sup>th</sup> at Imperial Garden at University and Allen. There will be a signup sheet at our December meeting. This will be banquet style with 5 entrees as it has been the last few years. The cost will be \$25/person including tip and tax. You will pay at the restaurant. If you miss the meeting and want to come, please send an email to [badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com](mailto:badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com) by Sunday, January 4th.

We hope you'll be there. Let us know if you need a ride. It's always a lot of fun and Santa might drop by!

### Need a Ride to Meetings?

Let us know by sending an email to [badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com](mailto:badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com) and we'll arrange for someone who lives nearby to pick you up.



**BBS 2026  
CALENDAR**

**January 8** - Annual BBS Holiday Dinner

**February 12** - Second Annual Silhouette Show.

**March 12** - Potapalooza!

**April 9** - Repotting workshop.

**May 14** - Show preparations. Members bring trees for consult and mossing instruction.

**May 16-17** - Badger Bonsai Annual Exhibit at Olbrich Botanical Gardens

**June 11** - Nursery stock workshop.