



BADGER BONSAI NEWS

May 2026

Changes to the Judging at the Annual Show

By Ron

Last year was the first time that we had the trees on display judged and ribbons awarded. Lessons were learned. There are usually about 60 trees on display and that in itself takes a lot of effort to give each entry a moment to be evaluated. Bottom line, this process took much longer than anticipated.

Because the club's board feels having our trees critiqued is something our members would like to continue to have, we reviewed the evaluation sheets and decided it was too complicated (14 categories) and we simplified the sheet for this year (4 categories). We will review the sheet at the May meeting to answer any questions. See Pg 2 for a copy of the new Judging Criteria form that will be used for this year's show.

Another change this year involves the judging process itself. While a tree is being evaluated, only the judge and the designated scribe recording the judge's comments and notes may speak with one another or ask questions during the evaluation.

Observers are welcome to watch the judging process; however, under no circumstances may they engage with or interrupt the judging team while judging is underway.

This guideline is necessary to ensure the judge has adequate time and focus to carefully evaluate each tree and complete ribbon selections by the end of the first day of the show. To put the timing into perspective, even allowing just four minutes per tree would require a minimum of four hours of judging time—and realistically, likely longer. Minimizing interruptions and side conversations is essential to keeping the process fair, efficient, and on schedule.

Once all trees are evaluated and ribbons are placed, the judge may be asked questions if time allows.

Each tree entered will receive an evaluation sheet, which will be returned to the owner by the end of the show. These comments reflect how the judge viewed your tree at that moment in time and should be understood as one individual's opinion and perspective. The comments do not mean you must make changes to your tree.

Instead, we encourage you to review the feedback thoughtfully and consider whether you can see the points the judge identified and whether any of the suggestions might help improve your tree. One of the rewarding aspects of bonsai is the continual process of refinement and learning. Bonsai enthusiasts are always exploring ways to help their trees become the best they can be. At the same time, it is important to remember that your bonsai should ultimately reflect your own vision and be a tree that you personally enjoy and connect with first and foremost.

Best of luck to all who enter trees this year.

**UPCOMING
EVENT**

May 14, 6:30 - 8:00 pm
Olbrich Botanical Gardens
3330 Atwood Ave, Madison

AGENDA:
Show Logistics
Interpreting Critiques
Moss Recipe

June Workshop Preview

By Mary

For years I have wanted to have a workshop using nursery shrubs similar to what I use when I do demonstrations at our May Bonsai Show. I think it's really exciting to start with a shrub and end up with a bonsai. Of course, finding inexpensive material that will work is really difficult. I've already been looking everywhere and my dream of dwarf Korean

lilacs for everyone is not going to happen! So our June extended meeting is going to be a bonsai mixer of sorts with many different species and sizes and prices from \$9 to \$30. I will have more details at the May meeting and in the June newsletter. This will include an inventory and prices. It would help a lot at the May meeting to get a count of who is interested. Then I will probably have to really be back on the hunt for even more shrubs!



2026 Bonsai Exhibit Judging Criteria

May 16, 2026

Judge: Chris Augustine

Tree # _____

Total Score: _____

Trees presented for judging will be evaluated in four different aspects:

- 1.) HORTICULTURE and HEALTH
- 2.) STYLING and STRUCTURE/FORM
- 3.) APPEARANCE and TECHNIQUE
- 4.) OVERALL PRESENTATION

Scoring scale 1 to 5; 1 poor quality; 3 average quality; 5 exceptional quality. Half points are allowed.

OVERALL HORTICULTURE and HEALTH (20% of total score)

Proper color or poor colored foliage; sunburned or windburned
Insect/disease damaged foliage; weak branches

Score 1-5 _____

COMMENTS about Health/Horticulture:

STYLING and STRUCTURE/FORM (20% of total score)

Nebari, trunk line and branch placement are appropriate to the style, well formed, in appropriate position
Are branch sizes/taper/position appropriate; foliage pads properly sized and oriented
Does apex show direction, is it sized correctly and well designed

Score 1-5 _____

COMMENTS about Styling and Structure:

APPEARANCE and TECHNIQUE (20% of total score)

Does the tree reflect age; does the tree show evidence of the human hand
Is the soil surface mossed, dressed, weed free; Is the tree clean and void of damaged foliage
If wire is present, is it applied neatly; If Jin/Shari present, does it look natural

Score 1-5 _____

COMMENTS about Appearance and Technique:

OVERALL PRESENTATION (POT, STAND and ACCENT) (40% of total score)

Pot is appropriate size, shape fits style, color appropriate, texture, appears clean, shows patina
Stand/Slab is appropriate size, height, color/texture harmonizes with tree
Accent Plant/Piece pairs well with tree, is placed properly, is sized correctly
If a plant, is it one that would be found in the same environment as the tree
Does the display tell a story, is it purposeful/thoughtful, does it have a good overall balance and feel

Score 1-5 _____

COMMENTS about Overall Presentation:

If you're planning to bring a tree to this year's show, and we hope you are, please familiarize yourself with the [Exhibit Guidelines](#) on the BBS website.

Of Interest on the Web



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

[Inspiration: 2026 Michigan Show](#)

- *Valavanis Bonsai Blog*

[13 Common Shrubs That Can Actually Become Stunning Bonsai Trees](#)

- *House Digest*

[Seven Bonsai Mistakes to Avoid](#)

- *Bonsai Empire*



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

Have some news to share?

Submit articles, ideas, photos, and events to the Newsletter Editor at badgerbonsaisociety@gmail.com

Young Choe Visit

We were fortunate to welcome Young Choe on April 30 during her visit to Wisconsin to teach a workshop for the Milwaukee club that weekend. Young invited members to bring the kusamono they created during last year's workshop, and she guided us through the process of cleaning them up, refreshing their plantings, and preparing them for the growing season ahead. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn from her expertise once again and to see how everyone's compositions had evolved over the past year.



REPOTTING MEETING!

Another successful repotting meeting is in the books! With friends helping friends, members worked together to repot trees, share ideas, and lend an extra set of hands where needed. Repotting season is one of the most important times of the bonsai year, helping set our trees up for healthy growth and vigor in the months ahead. Thank you to everyone who brought trees, tools, advice, and encouragement to make it another great evening together.



More Than Ribbons: The Purpose of Bonsai Judging

By Lisa, Editor

One of the most valuable parts of exhibiting bonsai at a show is the opportunity to have our trees judged. While winning an award or ribbon is certainly exciting, the real purpose of judging is growth — not just for the tree, but for us as artists and hobbyists.

The best bonsai do not become exceptional by accident. They are shaped over years through careful observation, refinement, experimentation, and countless small adjustments. Even the most accomplished bonsai artists continue learning, tweaking, and improving their trees. Bonsai is never truly “finished.” Every season brings new opportunities to improve ramification, refine branch placement, strengthen roots, adjust styling, or enhance presentation.

That is why feedback from an experienced judge is such a gift. A judge brings a trained eye and years of experience that can help us see our trees differently. Sometimes the comments confirm that we are moving in the right direction. Other times they point out possibilities we may not have considered — a branch that could be repositioned, a silhou-

ette that could be refined, or a future direction that could elevate the design. These insights help us become stronger bonsai practitioners over time.

It is also important to remember that judging is not about perfection. In fact, most bonsai in club shows are works in progress. Very few trees are “finished” masterpieces, and they are not expected to be. Developmental trees are an essential part of the bonsai journey, and they deserve to be exhibited too. Seeing trees at different stages of development is one of the things that makes a club show inspiring and educational.

So please do not let the idea of judging intimidate you or discourage you from bringing a tree to exhibit. Your bonsai will be in very good company. Most of us are still learning, refining, and developing our trees right alongside you. As a reminder, we will have [novice and open class](#) categories again this year.

Exhibiting your bonsai takes courage, but it is also one of the fastest ways to grow as an artist. Every tree displayed contributes to the success of the show and helps create an atmosphere of learning, sharing, and encouragement within the club.

Bring your trees. Share your work. Listen to the feedback. Celebrate the progress you have already made — and enjoy the opportunity to continue growing alongside your bonsai.

Behind the Bonsai: Trees in Training & Kusamono

by Lisa, Editor

This year’s show will once again feature both our *Trees in Training* and *Kusamono* displays.

The *Trees in Training* display is designed to help educate the public about the work, vision, and horticultural techniques involved in developing bonsai. Trees in this display may highlight wiring, air layering, propagation techniques, trunk development, branch structure, and other stages of refinement that illustrate both the goals for the tree and the steps still needed to achieve them. Members exhibiting in this display will be asked to complete a card describing where the tree is in its bonsai journey and what they are currently working toward. If you have a tree in training you’d like to include, bring it on Saturday.

We will also again feature a dedicated *Kusamono* display. Our philosophy is that kusamono are an art form in their own right and deserve to be appreciated on their own—not only as accents to bonsai. We encourage members to bring their Kusamono creations for display. Please be prepared to provide information about the plantings so that display cards can be created for each piece.



BADGER BONSAI SOCIETY
BONSAI EXHIBIT

Olbrich Botanical Gardens
 3330 Atwood Ave.
 Madison

May 16 & 17, 2026
 10 am to 4 pm

Demos at 11 am
 and 1:30 pm
 Both Days

Free
 Admission



55th Annual Exhibit

Friday, Jun 26 at 8 am to
 Sunday, Jun 28 at 4 pm

Lynden Sculpture Garden
 2145 West Brown Deer Road
 River Hills, WI 53217

2026 MBS State Fair

Thursday, Aug 6 at 8 am to
 Sunday, Aug 16 at 9 pm

Wisconsin State Fair Park
 640 South 84th Street
 West Allis, WI 53214

Mark Your
 Calendars



**MID-AMERICA
 BONSAI EXHIBIT**

August 15 to 17th, 2026

Chicago Botanic Garden
 1000 Lake Cook Rd
 Glencoe, IL 60022



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- Vice President Skyler
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- Treasurer John
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