



OMAKE: an occasional newsletter of the Bonsai Society-Kalamazoo (BS-K)

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January Meeting

The first meeting of the year was well attended with Al, John Cerovski, Eric, Jenny, Greg, Shu-Tzu, Sechoing, Ben, Betty, Ed, Scott and Dawn present. Apologies if anyone was forgotten.

First on the agenda was Al Jacobs with his "Chinese Origin of Japanese Bonsai". It was a pleasure to revisit this excellent presentation.

Following was Jennie's fertilizer cake workshop. She not only brought several types of fertilizer recipes, but she showed us the components and described how to mix them.

Show & Tell

John Cerovski brought a lovely Mini-orange
Eric Newton brought a Burt-Davyi that was begun in 2003, both a parent and air layer Cork Bark Elm that was air layered last year. Next he brought the Mini-penjing which was seen last at out penjing meeting. Last were a Rosemary, a Curly-cue grass accent plant and Mame Ficus from a cutting.

Business

Ann Arbor Bonsai Society contacted Newt concerning the visits of Suthin Sulosolvist and Pauline Muth. They thought that perhaps we may wish to use them at the same time and lower some of the expenses. Suthin is available on May 26th. and Muth on June 28th. After a membership discussion we decided that at this time we already had two experts scheduled and our budget may become strained. We will revisit this issue later in the year. Newt will check to see if we can go to the AABS meetings.

The April meeting with Sustic was moved to April 15 due to an Easter conflict. Jack will direct us with pines as well a bring a presentation on preparing trees for show.

We approved the Ron Martin meeting but the date was changed to Sept. 16th due to a scheduling conflict. We are still waiting for Ron's approval.

A petition started by Eunice Corp from Sakura Bonsai trying to get a USPS Bonsai Stamp. Email me for more details.

We also talked about reinstating name tags.

The February meeting will be February 11th. See next column for details.

February Meeting-Room Change



February 11, 1:00 PM, Rosemary Styling Workshop, Bring your own plant.

This month we will have a room change. The meeting will be in room 3250 down by the Library.

People are having trouble finding Rosemary for the February meeting. If you cannot find a Rosemary then bring a tropical. Newt will still discuss the selection, care, etc. for Rosemary.

We could also do Ivy as it is easy to find, easy to grow and Newt just learned some good info from the Ann Arbor club on how to fatten Ivy trunks (you will not find a fat one in the nurseries, they take time).

The meeting will be held Sunday, February 11, at 1:00 PM, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Texas Township Campus, 6767 W. "O" Ave. just south of I-94. Go in the main entrance under the towers, head toward the Library which is near this month's meeting area Room 3250.



Plant Care Tips for February

Now is a good time to begin putting together your bonsai compost. A suggested combination would be 1/3 peat, 1/3 garden compost, 1/3 sand or grit, and a slow-release fertilizer (about a handful per 5 gallons). Towards the end of the month, if there are any brief mild spells, it is time to repot and wire those deciduous trees. It is also possible to lift trees from the ground and do some undercutting. Leave evergreens until later. Branch pruning of deciduous and evergreen trees can be done (except Japanese maples and pines). Any major redesign and reshaping of trees can be done now. Pines and evergreens can be grafted now.

*From Great Swamp Bonsai Society
www.arboretumfriends.org*

Letters

Hello Eric,

You are probably way ahead of me on this, but I'm thinking that when you print the water quality article you should add a note to this effect: "Jack tells us that if he were writing this article again today, he would suggest trying 1-2 tablespoons of sulfur per gallon on soil mix."

Jack Wilde

Jack,

Thanks for the further info! I have found that the Osmacote acidic fertilizer pellets dissolve too quickly so this is good info! Can't wait to try. In the past I have mixed in both fine sphagnum moss and long fibered sphagnum moss to my mix to help with acidity (for my azaleas).

Eric Newton

Hi Jack,

I just had one other thought... How long does the sulfur added to the soil last? Or how long before you add more to the soil surface? Thanks!

Eric Newton

Eric,

My understanding is that sulfur is very slowly made soluble by micro-organisms in the soil so it has a very long residual, several years at least. So adding it to the soil with each repotting should be enough.

Jack Wilde

From the Editor,

A special thanks to Eric and Jack for again making my job as Omake Editor so easy. Hopefully I did not put the above letters in the wrong order.

Jean

2007 Coming Attractions

February 11, 1:00 PM, Rosemary Styling Workshop,
February 24, Part 1, Girl Scout Beginners' Bonsai.

March 3, Part 2, Girl Scout Beginners' Bonsai.

March 11, 1:00 PM, Ficus Workshop-Root over Rock

March 31, 9:00 AM, Lawton Nursery Crawl (

April 15, 1:00 PM, Jack Sustic returns with a slide presentation on show preparation and a Pine Workshop.

May 11-13, 2007, All day, Michigan All State Bonsai Show, Fredrick Meijer Gardens, Grand Rapids, MI

May 19-20, All day, Chicago Botanic Gardens, Glencoe, IL Spring Japanese Exhibition and Bonsai Show

May 26-28, 2007 Rendezvous, Brussels' Bonsai, Olive Branch, MS

June 2, All day, Newton's Ranch, Ben Oki

July 8, 1:00 PM, Azalea Workshop

Aug 12, 10:00 AM, Gee Farms Nursery Crawl

August 17-19, Annual Fall show & Exhibition, Chicago Botanic Gardens, Glencoe, IL

September 6-9, 2007 Shohin Bonsai Symposium, Rochester NY

September 16, Ron Martin Workshop, pending.

Oct. 14, 1:00 PM, Pine Workshop

Nov 11, 1:00 PM, Club Dinner, Elections

December 9, 1:00 PM, Executive Meeting

Rosmarinus Officinalis-Rosemary

An evergreen shrub found throughout the Mediterranean region. The trunk is light brown and scaly, the leaves are sessile, lanceolate, and slightly revolute, rough on the upper side, whitish and downy on the underside. The flowers are usually pale blue, arranged in auxiliary racemes.

Repotting— Early spring or end of summer, with 60% soil and 40% coarse sand or equivalent material.

Pruning and wiring—Position the root system while repotting, at the same time getting rid of any branches unnecessary to the final design. To thicken the foliage, pinch out new shoots with the nails throughout the growing season or cut them back in early autumn. Position the trunk and branches with wire from spring to summer

Feeding—Once a month in spring and autumn

Notes—The shrub is especially popular for its trunk and its long flowering period. It responds well to pruning but may encounter some difficulties in the initial repottings. To encourage rooting, keep the shrub in bright but indirect light after covering it with a plastic sheet, or keep it in a bright greenhouse, watering plentifully and spraying the foliage several times a day. Normally water is need only when the soil partially dries out. Protect in winter

from Simon & Schuster's "Guide to Bonsai"

Newts Notes:

Hi everyone. Hope all is well. The cold weather has finally hit. This is good news as I was worried that things were starting to move (bud out). My quince especially showed movement, I just hope the cold snap came soon enough that there will be no damage to the buds. I have been packing snow on and around the pots. I do this for two reasons. 1. The snow will melt and water my trees automatically, thus requiring less checking. 2. The snow acts as an insulator. Snow only gets down to 32° and no colder, so if it is packed around the pot then the roots should get no colder than that. I do not add snow to my well pit unless a tree needs water. This is because the pit is well below the frost line and never freezes therefore snow will not last and is not needed for insulation. Do not forget to check your trees while they sleep!

Although most trees are sleeping my tropicals and sub-tropicals are thriving and helping to keep me busy. Other good winter activities include acquiring and sifting your soil components, reading, planning which trees will need a re-pot this year and finding a new pot if needed, and if you really want something to keep you busy get a new puppy (just don't expect to have much time for anything else for a while) like we did. His name is Titus.



I have been reading back copies of Bonsai Today, ABS journal and several on-line forums. Knowledge is power people! Never stop learning! There are many great sites out there. I will list a few here, hope you enjoy!

<http://www.artofbonsai.org/>
<http://www.knowledgeofbonsai.org/>
<http://www.bonsaiforum.com/>
<http://www.pfmbonsai.com/index.php>
<http://www.internetbonsaiclub.org/>
<http://www.andyrutledge.com/book/>
<http://www.evergreengardenworks.com/>
<http://www.greenthumbbonsai.com/>
<http://www.annarborbonsaisociety.org/>
<http://www.wmbonsai.org/>

These should get you started.

I was thinking about the offer that AABS made regarding Suthin and Pauline and wondered about sharing the cost/event with the Grand Rapids club. I shot Mollie an e-mail regarding this but have not heard back yet. I am doing this for you though as I joined AABS to ensure that I could participate in these events (don't worry I am not leaving BSK). AABS said that we were welcome to attend the event but AABS members get priority.

Newt

Could It Be Your Water?

There is no need to read farther --- unless you are curious --- if you are one of those people whose bonsai consistently look healthy and grow well. On the other hand, reading more could be helpful if your trees fail to thrive in spite of your conscious effort to follow some old but good advice: water thoroughly and leach frequently to keep unwanted salts from accumulating in your bonsai soil. This is especially true if you keep seeing the common symptoms of what horticultural scientists know as low quality water: persistently weak green or yellow-green leaves with darker green veins often accompanied by scorched-looking leaf tips and burned leaf margins (most prominent toward the leaf's tip).

By definition, "pure water" is nothing but water. But, being the "universal solvent," water available to us from lakes, waterways, wells, the local Water Department or even a rain barrel is never pure. Actually, the "load" of dissolved minerals and other substances found in water -- even water acceptable for use in human consumption and plant irrigation -- is highly variable.

People dealing regularly with water quality commonly make a distinction between "surface water," the runoff of rain into ponds, lakes and rivers, and "ground water," which typically has seeped deep into the ground through many tons of soil and rock before emerging as spring water or being pumped back to the earth's surface from a well. The reason for this classification is that surface water is relatively "soft," that is, low in dissolved mineral content. Ground water, on the other hand, having accumulated lots of dissolved minerals as it settled deep into the earth is "hard," high in mineral content. Where available, surface water is almost always superior to ground water for plant irrigation purposes.

However we need to be aware that knowing your city's water source is a river or reservoir does not necessarily mean it will be as low in pH and mineral content as one might expect. We are told it is not uncommon for municipalities to add chemicals, typically calcium hydroxide, to surface water to raise its pH (make it less acid) as a way of minimizing corrosion of public and private plumbing. This addition makes water less satisfactory for plant use.

Technical publications directed to commercial growers of irrigated greenhouse and nursery crops make it very clear that water quality is a major factor in their success or failure. The standard recommendation is that a comprehensive horticultural water analysis should be done before settling on a growing site. Tables specifying recommended ranges for alkalinity, pH (not the same as alkalinity), soluble salts (usually measured by electrical conductivity), and six or seven specific elements can also be found in this literature. It is relatively common today for commercial growers stuck with low quality water to inject acid into it to make it better for plant use even though this adds significantly to their production costs.

The main point here is that water, even water satisfactory for kitchen use and bathing, varies greatly in pH and mineral content depending on its source. Good evidence of this is that water softeners are considered essential household equipment in some communities and not necessary in others.

Actually, I have theorized for some years that an unrecognized difference between those people whose experiments in growing bonsai are rewarding right from the beginning and those who struggle for awhile before giving up in frustration because "they don't have the touch," may be the quality of their water. A related observation is that, while cautions against wetting the foliage of one's trees during the heat of midday to avoid burn are common in bonsai literature, many growers do this routinely with no damage. Again, it seems likely that this seeming contradiction is explained easily by differences in water quality.

So, what does one do if poor water quality is suspected? It would be hard to go wrong to begin by obtaining an analysis of your water. Those using water from a municipal supply will find this as easy as requesting a copy of their water analysis from the local Water Department. (The Federal Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996 require "providers" to make water analysis information available to their "customers.") People who rely on their own wells or other private water sources, can learn where a horticultural water analysis can be obtained by contacting their local Agricultural Extension Service office. (Water Standards for Horticultural Use offered by Dr. John C. Peterson at the American Bonsai Society's 1990 Annual Symposium, can be found at the end of this article.)

Another way of evaluating the quality of your water for horticultural use is to obtain a package of radish seeds (radish seedlings are known to be sensitive to high salt concentrations and other water contaminants). Plant these seeds in a relative sterile growing medium in a number of containers. Then water some pots with your household water and others with distilled water or other mineral-free water. Noticeable differences in seed germination and seedling growth between treatments -- better germination and stronger growth in the mineral-free water -- will be strong evidence that your household water is a significant problem.

Once you learn that your water is not good for growing plants, what are your options short of acid injection like the commercial growers do? Of course the amount of water needed for routine watering will be a major factor in deciding what might work for you. For a small number of plants the answer may be as simple as purchasing distilled water. If available in large enough quantity, water discharged from air conditioning equipment or water collected by a dehumidifier will also work very well.

And, even though not pure (we have all heard of acid rain), rain water will typically be far better for growing plants than mineral loaded water. With gutter, and downspout rigged to direct water into a container of some kind, it will be surprising how much water can be collected.

One simple water treatment remedy being used by a number of bonsai enthusiasts in parts of the country with very hard water is to routinely add white vinegar, a tablespoon or two per gallon, to the water used on their bonsai. Others have written of adding as much as a cup of vinegar per gallon of water and applying this as a monthly drench. Actually, a little experimenting with vinegar additions to your water may be all you need to do to learn more about its quality.

Another simple, though slow acting, remedy used some in commercial production is to treat plants with powdered sulfur either by scattering it over the soil surface or mixing it into the soil. One advantage in doing this is that it makes it fairly simple to treat consistently weak and off-color plants while ignoring those that seem to be fine without the extra attention. This dosage doesn't have to be too precise but a teaspoon of powdered sulfur per gallon of soil is a reasonable target rate for experimentation.

A more expensive but almost foolproof remedy recommended as cost effective by horticultural scientists is use of a reverse osmosis (RO) water treatment system. This equipment is now widely available. Actual costs vary depending on the volume of water required. (I know personally two very active bonsai growers who went through considerable frustration with ongoing foliage discoloration and unexplained tree loss before they decided their problems had to be water related and had RO systems installed at their homes.)

To summarize, water varies greatly depending on its source. Unresolved problems with your bonsai may be the result of poor quality water for growing plants. Although having low quality water is unfortunate, there are remedies available. Clearly, there is little to be lost by investigating your options and the potential for improvement in your trees can be great.

Desirable Ranges for Problem Water Parameters

Distributed by Dr. John C. Peterson, June 29, 1990 at American Bonsai Society Symposium at Ohio State University:

- ✦ pH: 5.0 to 6.5
- ✦ Soluble Salts (Conductivity): 0 to 1.5 mmhos per cm (1 mmho is equal to 1000 umhos)
- ✦ Calcium: 0 to 120 ppm (1 ppm is equal to 1 mg per liter)
- ✦ Magnesium: 0 to 24 ppm
- ✦ Sodium: 0 to 50 ppm
- ✦ Chloride: 0 to 140 ppm
- ✦ Boron: 0 to 0.8 ppm
- ✦ Fluoride: 0 to 1 ppm
- ✦ Sulfate: 0 to 240 ppm
- ✦ Alkalinity: 0 to 100 mg per liter CaCO_3



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