

# BONSAI Sites

Reference (Note: 2 of these are not in English but have good reference pictures and progressions)

- [rgbonsai.com](http://rgbonsai.com)
- [yamadori-bonsai.info](http://yamadori-bonsai.info)
- [backcountrybonsai.wordpress.com](http://backcountrybonsai.wordpress.com)
- [bonsaiboon.com](http://bonsaiboon.com)
- [bonsaieneltropico.com](http://bonsaieneltropico.com)
- [shohin-europe.com](http://shohin-europe.com)
- [bonsaimary.com](http://bonsaimary.com)
- [animabonsai.com](http://animabonsai.com)
- [bonsaibark.com](http://bonsaibark.com)



Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

PO Box 13212  
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## Why I Look Dry! by Joe Day

**I**f you are watering when you see the leaves on your bonsai looking wilted and not checking the soil you might be over watering and setting up for root rot and other soil problems. Leaves wilt when they are not able to pull moisture from the soil as fast as they are losing water into the air. It could happen if they were in a dish of water. If you do get root rot what can you do? Actually...not a lot. The best thing to do is move the bonsai to a bit more shade and stop watering too much. Let the soil dry, watering only when the soil is on the dry side. You might try soaking the

soil with a fungicide. Any fungicide you can buy is not labeled as effective on any soil problems so don't expect great results. If the soil is broken down into a brown stinking muck... you can take a chance by removing the bonsai from the old pot, trim the roots, soak in fungicide and plant in a mixture of 90% lava rock, 10% pine bark. If luck is on your side and you remember to keep this fast drying soil moist, your bonsai might push out a new root system. Yes, I have done this with mixed results over the years. It has saved some bonsai that are alive and happy in my collection.

# THE BONSAI Wire

July 2014

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

## FROM THE President

**I**would like to take this opportunity to thank those involved in the Boxwood Bunjin workshop. William Majoue went well beyond the call of duty to help his neighbor dig up about sixteen sixty year old boxwoods that he knew would make good bunjin. William was generous enough to put them in pots and donate them to the club. Jim Osborne donated his time and expertise to teach the workshop and Gerald Nolan was kind enough to babysit the trees and host the workshop at his home as well as assisting newer members with styling. Due to their efforts, multiple members were provided a low cost workshop with great material and the club cleared enough to pay our rent at the hall for a full four months. If any of you have not taken these informal workshops, I highly recommend them. It's a great low-key learning experience and a chance to socialize with other members in a very laid back setting. I've thoroughly enjoyed every one I attended and look forward to more in the future. Please let us know if you have access to any unwanted material that could make good bonsai so we can continue to offer these workshops to our members and hopefully also provide material for the auction.

Kathy Barbazon,  
GNOBS  
President



## MEETINGS & Events

### Tuesday, July 8, 2014

**Program: Randy Bennet Presentation on bonsai trees of the National Arboretum**  
Randy, known to you as a past GNOBS President and as an accomplished practitioner of bonsai will give a presentation on the trees of the National Arboretum and their evolution over the years.

### Saturday, August 16, 2014

#### Annual GNOBS Auction

Now is the time to go through that overcrowded bench and decide which of your trees should go to the auction for a new home. All donations contribute to the operating budget of the club and we hope to bring you even better programs next year. Besides, you'll need the space for the fabulous new bonsai that you just can't live without and bring home from the auction.

**Auction Setup and Donations Accepted – 12 Noon - 4:00pm**

**Viewing – 4:00pm - 6:00pm Auction – 6:00pm - 9:00pm**

The success of the GNOBS Auction can be attributed to the generous donations of its members and local businesses. If you have any bonsai material from pre-bonsai stock to well styled trees or anything bonsai related, contact any of the GNOBS board members to make arrangements for your donation. GNOBS members will be available from 12 noon through the start of the auction to accept donations at the Marine Corp League Hall. Thank you for anything you can donate!

### Tuesday, September 9, 2014

**Program: Ryan Michael Bell Presentation on pots**  
**Bonus: Raffle of a nice Japanese pot plus pots for sale**

Ryan is an authority, collector and dealer of fine Japanese pots and now a member of GNOBS. He will give a presentation on the ins and outs of pots - what to look for, how to tell a good pot, appropriate pots for various trees etc.

Meetings take place on the second Tuesday each month at 7:30pm (pre-meeting activities begin at 7:00pm) at the **Marine Corps League Hall**, 2708 Delaware St., Kenner, LA. For more information, articles and everything bonsai, check us out on our website at [www.gnobs.org](http://www.gnobs.org).

Thank You to MELE Printing (985) 893-9522 for donating the printing of this newsletter

*Schefflera cont. from pg 2*

### Banyan Style

The easy formation of aerial roots on Scheffleras allows them to make great banyan style trees. The logo tree of Fuku-Bonsai trained by David Fukumoto is a fabulous example of this style. David has done the pioneering work over many years to popularize Scheffleras for indoor bonsai without additional lighting and humidification.

### Conclusion

I hope that his introduction to Scheffleras will convince some of you to try this material for bonsai. If you do create or buy a Schefflera bonsai you will be very happy with this tolerant and easy to care for tropical/indoor bonsai; few other types of bonsai will accept the abuse that these plants will take. If you chose not to grow the Schefflera for bonsai perhaps you can sneer a little bit less at those of us who do!

Visit Jerry Meislik's website for more information  
<http://www.bonsaihunk.us>

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# SPECIES Spotlight

## *Schefflera* “The Indestructable Bonsai” By Jerry Meislik

Schefflera and Brassia are two related species of plants both commonly called Schefflera. They are found in nearly every nursery and garden center’s indoor foliage area or in the terrarium plant section. They are also found in many homes tucked into a dark corner of the living room or found languishing in a dingy corner of an office building.

Many “true-blue” bonsai purists do not consider Scheffleras as “real bonsai”. Like the late comedian Rodney Dangerfield, Scheffleras just don’t get any respect! With this article I hope to help promote the notion that Scheffleras do make good bonsai and are about as tough an indoor plant as one can imagine.

### Natural Range and Growth Patterns

Schefflera arboricola is commonly referred to as the Dwarf Schefflera while Brassia actinophylla is the full-sized Schefflera. Planted in the ground in tropical climates the Brassia can grow to over thirty feet tall. It has huge umbrella-like leaves, about two feet long that give rise to the common name of Queensland Umbrella tree. Brassia also has two-foot long spikes of red flowers that make the tree extremely decorative in the landscape. Even when growing as a “tree” in the ground Brassia is relatively un-branched and typically will have several rather tall stems arranged in a clump. Brassia growing in Florida have proved to be a bit too prolific since they seed so well that they have become a serious pest tree. Brassia is native to Australia and surrounding lands.

The Dwarf Schefflera is a similar but much smaller plant, perhaps reaching 6–12 feet in height. It has smaller leaves and branches a bit more freely than Brassia. The leaves are 4-7 inches across. Plant breeders have realized the potential of the Dwarf Schefflera and have been working on developing new varieties of these plants. Each year they introduce many new cultivars of this tree with varying leaf shapes, tree silhouettes, as well as variegated leaf forms.

In this article I refer to the full sized Schefflera as Brassia and the small leafed form as Schefflera or Dwarf Schefflera. “Scheffleras” will be my name for information relevant to both species.

### Scheffleras As Bonsai

Scheffleras have a compound leaf, meaning that the leaf has more than one leaflet per petiole or “stem”. This makes the leaf look larger than it is. Both Scheffleras have a relatively large leaf and petiole which makes the creation of very small sized bonsai difficult.

Scheffleras are not particularly woody and do not form a prominent tough bark or even a significant hardwood core. They do not have true growth rings. The trunks and stems remind me of a palm tree with an external “woody” layer and a central pithy stem. Due to the type of wood and bark on these trees they are a bit difficult to shape with wire. Severe back and forth dramatic bends are difficult or impossible to create by wiring Scheffleras. Cutting the branch and allowing a new terminal to form introduces taper and movement to the branch.

On the plus side, Scheffleras form aerial roots with ease and are very useful for designing banyan tree forms or forms requiring dramatic exposed roots. The strong surface rooting and fleshy roots makes root-over-rock styles very easy and gratifying.



Dwarf Schefflera with aerial roots in banyan style.

The Dwarf Schefflera can be used for smaller bonsai while the bigger leafed Brassia is more logically used for larger bonsai trees. A skilled bonsai grower can even form small bonsai from the Brassia but it takes persistence and skill.

Scheffleras are reluctant to branch freely and spontaneously. They seem to grow longer and longer trunks without developing much in the way of branches while leaves are clustered at the ends of the stems. Even these lanky potted plants can be drastically cut back and shaped into decent bonsai.

Despite these limitations very attractive, tropical appearing bonsai can be formed from Scheffleras given the proper bonsai care. Scheffleras really strong point as indoor bonsai is their tolerance of dim light and low humidity that would cause the death of other species.

### Indoor Cultivation Light

Both types of Scheffleras tolerate fairly low light levels and they survive in just about

as dim a light as any home living area can have. In fact my Brassia spent two years indoors in an office and received only indirect fluorescent light and no window light. The plant survived these very trying conditions without a problem. It did not grow very much during that time but it did survive.

Giving Scheffleras more light is of tremendous benefit and allows the tree’s leaves to be smaller and the plants to have more growth and vigor. Needless to say, it is easier to shape and form a bonsai if the tree is actively growing. Under dim illumination the leaves are larger, fewer in number and the tree grows very slowly; thus little or no shaping can be done.

### Humidity

The thick waxy leaf structure of the Scheffleras makes them very tolerant of low humidity. Very few other plants tolerate the dryness in a modern home without missing a beat. No special humidifying devices are required for the health or growth of Scheffleras.

### Moisture and Soil

The two species prefer different soil moisture levels. The Dwarf Schefflera likes a moist soil and must not be allowed to go bone dry. On the other hand Brassia will rot if kept in a constantly wet soil mix; it prefers to have a thorough watering and then to have its roots go almost dry.

A good starting soil mix for the Dwarf Schefflera is one half bark and one half inorganic material. For the Brassia use one-third organic material and two-thirds inorganic material. To make a wetter mix use a higher percentage of organic material like bark or sphagnum moss and less inorganic material like Haydite, Turface, chicken grit, or gravel. Remember also that a finer, smaller particle size also creates a wetter mix. As always adjust the soil mix to your specific tree, micro-environment, growing conditions, and watering preferences.

If you are one of those people who love to water their trees you should grow the Dwarf Schefflera but if you typically forget to water the Brassia has a better choice of surviving.

### Fertilization

Use a houseplant fertilizer diluted to half strength and use it at weekly intervals to provide adequate nutrition. Always water your tree well before fertilizing. Reduce the fertilization to once a month during the winter rest period or when the tree is not actively growing.

### Insects

Insects rarely bother Scheffleras. But occasionally trees may develop a scale infestation. A treatment with dormant oil at one tablespoon per

gallon sprayed at weekly intervals for 3-4 weekly sprays will help control the scale. Remember to cover all plant surfaces with the spray.

### Propagation

Both species are very easy to propagate from cuttings. Stem cuttings can be placed into a container filled with a granular soil mix. The mix is then moistened and the whole is enclosed in a sealed plastic bag. In four to six weeks the cuttings will have set roots and can be removed from the bag. Failure to root will likely be due to overly wet soil mix and rotting of the stem.

### Bonsai Care and Training Wiring

Since Scheffleras do not have a really woody trunk they are a bit touchy to wire. It helps to wire them when branches are still relatively young. Stems that are green to slightly woody will be the easiest to wire. Apply the wire a bit more loosely than on other bonsai and bend the branch gradually over a one-week period. Treat the stems like a stalk of celery that snaps if pushed too far. Make the bends gentle and avoid drastic directional changes. With these precautions wiring can be effective as well as safe.

Most growers prefer to use the “clip and grow” technique since this works very well for Scheffleras. Choosing the right point to prune gets the branches to grow in the direction you wish. Remember that above the attachment point of each leaf is a bud hidden on the stem. The new branch will grow out from this hidden bud. So by pruning about 1/2 to one inch above a leaf you can predict the direction in which the new stem will grow. Pruning with attention to the latent bud is called “directional pruning”.

With any large leafed tree individual leaves can be wired. This helps to introduce a proper shape to the leaf as well as orienting the leaves to a more suitable position for the tree’s design. Keep in mind that large leafed plants often look best when styled with a fairly dense or continuous canopy. Well separated right and left and back branches do not work as well for large leafed trees.

The technique for wiring a leaf involves putting one or two turns of wire on the stem and then winding the wire up the petiole of the leaf. The leaflets usually do not require wiring. The wire and leaf are then placed into the proper position just as with a branch that is wired.

It is best to wire the leaf after it is mature and after it has reached its full size. If the leaf is wired before it is mature then the wire may prove to be too tight and the leaf may be damaged or die. Fortunately the damaged leaf is just discarded and does not remain for years, as does a wire-scarred branch. The wire may be removed after about one month and the leaf will stay in position.

### Repotting and Pots

Repot the trees every two years, and use a pot that is not overly large. Remove all the old soil from the root ball with careful and delicate work with a chop-stick or wooden dowel. The roots of the Schefflera while fleshy are easily damaged by rough,

careless work.

Most often the rounded tropical canopy of the tree will look best in an oval or rounded pot. Glazes are selected to match or contrast with the trunk or leaf color.

### Defoliating And De-budding

Defoliation is the removal of all the leaves of a bonsai tree. Healthy Scheffleras can be totally defoliated. With the defoliation it is also best to remove all the growing tips. This will result in new branches forming lower on the tree. In addition, defoliating results in new smaller leaves

All the newly formed branches are allowed to grow if they are in the right position or rubbed off if they are poorly situated. Branches and trunks that are left alone will grow longer and longer and tend not to branch. So pruning is the most important part of creating a Schefflera bonsai.

After defoliation the replacement leaves are initially much smaller but each progressive replacement leaf increases in size until eventually each new leaf is back to its normally large size. Repetitive leaf pruning is needed to keep the huge leaves of the Brassia in control.

Controlling the Dwarf Schefflera with its smaller leaves is much less of a problem.

Defoliation is probably best limited to once per year unless you grow the trees in extra artificial light and they are extremely vigorous.

In conclusion, by removing all the leaves and de-budding the ends of the stems will result in new branching as well as the production of smaller leaves.

### Reductions Or “Hacking Back”

One of the best ways to obtain a specimen Schefflera bonsai is to find a large “tree” borrowed from a friend’s living room. Many folks are happy to give away a tall, straggly Schefflera since the plant has long ago outgrown its dimly lit corner.

Lanky specimen Scheffleras can be viciously shortened back to a bare stem with no leaves. The Scheffleras will break back from hidden latent buds in the trunk. The difficult decision is to decide how tall you would like the finished bonsai to be. If the finished bonsai is to be three feet tall then cut the stem back to two feet. It is often helpful to shorten the stem back even more for mini-sized bonsai. We all tend to be reluctant to shorten the tree back severely and the result is years after a reduction we need to go back and shorten the stem even more. In the process losing years of time and eventually still cutting the stem back even more.

In doing a severe hack back technique do not repot the tree at the same time but repot two to four months after the reduction.

### Bonsai Designs

When creating bonsai with Scheffleras it is often best to create a full, continuous canopy tree. The solid canopy helps minimize the visual effect of looking at the oversized individual leaves. The true size of the individual leaf is hidden from view when contained within a full or continuous canopy.

A full canopy is also characteristic of many tropical trees.

Root over rock styles with lots of exposed rootage, and designs that emphasize aerial roots are also very suitable for this material.

### Root-Over-Rock and Exposed Root Styles

Scheffleras grow extremely well planted over a rock, as well as making an attractive display with their thick surface roots firmly grasping the stone. Start with a young tree and wrap the roots over the stone and fix them in place with sting or wire. Plant the tree and stone into a bigger container and keep the surface of the stone at the soil level. Allow the plant to grow strongly for two years and then over a 6 to 12 month period gradually remove the surface of the soil exposing the rock and the attached surface roots. See Root-over-rock Workshop.

### Two year old Schefflera seedling planted over a rock, 2000.



Same Schefflera with roots exposed in a shallower pot, 2003.

### The same Schefflera, 2006.

The newly exposed roots are white and soft but they gradually harden off and darken as they are exposed to air and light. The whole stone and tree combination can then be planted into a shallower tray to show off the stone and root development

Remember that the stone will get “smaller” over time so plan ahead and do not use too small a stone. The tree gradually over-grows the stone and the tree stone relationship will gradually be distorted.

With the aggressive root systems of the Scheffleras wonderful exposed root style bonsai can be created.

