

Hard Water cont. from pg 3

of bonsai in hard water areas is very unsightly and the deposits can be very difficult to remove without damage.

However, I have found that the acidity of vinegar is excellent for neutralizing the lime without causing damage to tree or pot. Removing this thin layer of chalky-white lime is ordinarily very difficult, however the use of a strong solution of vinegar and water (1 part vinegar to 20 parts water) neutralizes the lime enough for it to be brushed off with a soft brush (such as a toothbrush). If necessary the vinegar/water mix can be 'painted' on and left for a period of time without causing any damage to the roots or the tree itself.

Once the lime-scale has been removed it is worth thoroughly flushing the soil with water to dilute and remove the vinegar as at this strength

it can cause damage to any fine feeder-roots.

Where the foliage of my bonsai has been sprayed with hard tap water, particularly during the heat of Summer, the leaves can and will develop a milky-white layer of lime on their Surface.

Obviously cleaning each and every leaf with a vinegar solution would be impractical. A weaker solution of vinegar and water (1 part vinegar to 50 parts water) is sprayed onto the entire foliage mass so each and every leaf is soaked; the soil is then saturated with tap water to flush away any run off of the vinegar/water solution from the leaves. After 5-10 minutes (and before the leaves begin to dry), the foliage mass is then sprayed with clean water to remove the vinegar solution. Though not as cleansing as one would hope for, this technique will remove a lot of lime-scale without causing any discoloration or damage to the leaves.

Cleaning Lime-Scale from Bonsai Pots

Bonsai pots will frequently display a serious build-up of lime-scale in hard-water areas and the method for its removal is straightforward; use 100% vinegar and a soft-brush to break down and remove the deposits of lime, quickly and efficiently. Vinegar will not cause any damage to the pot or its glaze.

The ideal or optimum pH ranges of many tree and plant species used for bonsai or found within our gardens. If the pH of the soil is outside of the bonsai's ideal pH range, the tree may simply lack vigor. In other cases the tree can begin to suffer ill health.

*For a list of common bonsai species with their pH - go to bonsai4me.com, *Advanced Techniques, Hard Water, pH And Its Effect On Bonsai*, page 2 of the article.*



Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

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THE BONSAI Wire

November 2015

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

FROM THE President



big thanks to Guy Guidry for an excellent workshop on Hinoki Cypress. Everyone left with beautiful trees they

could be proud of. This month we host Dorothy Schmitz on junipers for a demo and workshop. There are a couple of spots available for what promises to be another great workshop. Contact Peggy Howard if you are interested. For anyone not in the workshop - members are always welcome as silent observers at no charge.

Annual board elections will be held at the November meeting.

December brings our annual Christmas party with a potluck dinner. Bring a covered dish but leave your money at home. Everyone attending gets a free raffle ticket for our many door prizes - a bonsai from NOLA bonsai and lots of bonsai related mystery gifts.

Annual dues are due in January but this year we have a **special surprise** for members. The first 30 members that pay their dues and show up at the January meeting will receive a free **Kingsville boxwood**. You may have seen these trees at a previous meeting when they came in. If not, I can attest to the fact that they are really nice trees. Thanks to Jim Osborne for putting together the deal to acquire them.

Kathy Barbazon
GNOBS
President



MEETINGS & Events

Friday, November 13, 2015

Program: Dorothy Schmitz Juniper Demonstration 7:00pm

Dorothy Schmitz is a professional full time bonsai artist from Southwest Florida with a Southern European origin. Dorothy was elected twice among the national finalists of the New Talent Competition, won the open Florida BSF Instructor Scholarship Award in 2005 and the coveted Ben Oki Award in 2006. Dorothy is an active editor at the Knowledge of Bonsai Forum and the Art of Bonsai Project and owns a Bonsai Studio in Bonita Springs. She specializes in conifers and tropicals, as well as in carving with hand and power tools.

Saturday (morning), November 14, 2015

Program: Workshop Dorothy Schmitz Juniper 9:00am

Dorothy Schmitz will conduct a workshop on large 3 gallon Green Mound Junipers from Brussel's Bonsai hand selected by Brussel Martin. Brussel promises even better quality than the Shimpakus he provided last year. **A sign up sheet will be available at the meeting for the workshop. Bring your checkbook, cash or credit card, you must pay when you sign up.** There are a couple of spots open. Contact Peggy Howard if you are interested in signing up. As usual, all members are welcome to attend the workshop FREE as SILENT observers. You can learn a lot by watching 10 different trees being worked on.

Tuesday, December 8, 2015

Annual GNOBS Christmas Party 7:00pm

Annual Christmas Party: Bring your spouse or plus one and your favorite covered dish (side dishes, entrees, desserts) for our annual potluck Christmas party. Call Bill Butler (504) 455-5282 and let him know what you are bringing if possible. The club will supply a ham, beverages and plates/utensils. Everyone attending gets a free raffle ticket for door prizes. Featured this year will be at least one raffle tree and lots of wrapped "mystery" prizes.

Members are always encouraged to bring any tree to meetings that they wish to discuss or about which they need advice.

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.

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SPECIES Spotlight

Swamp Maple - *Acer Rubrum*

by Pam O'Malley

The swamp maple or red maple (*Acer rubrum*) is one species which provides some of the most spectacular color in the Louisiana landscape. Aply

named, *Acer rubrum* can be identified by its red leaves in the Fall, ruby red flowers and fruit in the Spring as well as its reddish twigs, petioles and new leaves. The Onadaga Indians of New York called it "ah-wah-notwah," meaning "the red flower." It is these conspicuous ruby red flowers which are the first to appear in early Spring and which, for some at least, mark the beginning of Spring.

As the arrival of Spring is usually early in New Orleans (mid-February), the dark red samaras (or winged seeds) which appear shortly after the flowers, provide us with easy identification for collecting purposes. The ground surrounding a mature maple will be covered with samaras and, as the seeds germinate quickly upon falling to the ground, seedlings are readily available, making this a good candidate for grove material. As growth is also extremely rapid, bonsai material of a respectable size may be obtained in a relatively short time.

Acer rubrum occurs throughout the eastern United States in moist bottomlands or swamps. Although it can withstand long periods of inundation the swamp maple is usually found on the ridge of land or soilbank which forms along the edge of a swamp. In low-lying areas such as southern Louisiana, the difference of a few inches in elevation is often more important than a hundred feet in a mountainous country particularly in terms of the type of vegetation to be found.

The cypress-tupelo swamps surrounding the New Orleans area make collecting larger swamp maples possible. I have also seen many fair-sized trees growing in roadside ditches along the older highways. Swamp maples are often planted as ornamental shade trees in gardens, providing hundreds

of seedlings every Spring - a nuisance for gardeners but a bonanza for the bonsai enthusiast!

Acer rubrum is a medium-sized tree, oval in shape, and averaging 40-50 feet in height with a one to two foot diameter trunk. In the open, it branches near the ground to form a dense narrow, oblong head; however, in the forest it is usually free of lower branches and forms a more rounded crown. Leaves are opposite, simple, and deciduous. New leaves are red in color contrasting with the mature light green leaves which are palmate three to five lobed, and pale underneath.

Petioles are two to four inches long and red or reddish-green in color. The polygamous red flowers are bell-shaped and appear in dense clusters before the leaves. The fruit is a red double samara, borne on clusters on long slender stalks, and 3/4 inch in length, persistent until late Spring. Bark is thin, smooth and gray at first, becoming thicker and furrowed on older trunks.

Two natural varieties of red maple found in this area are the Drummond red maple and the Trident red maple which are described in Harrar's Guide to Southern Trees, as follows: "Trident red maple *Acer rubrum* var. *trilobum* K. Koch is widespread throughout the South. It may be separated from the species by its smaller, 3-lobed leaves, yellow flowers, and smaller fruits the latter also occasionally yellow Drummond red maple (*A. rubrum* var. *drummondii* Sarg.) is a variety frequently found in the deep swamps of the Mississippi Valley drainage basin. It is characterized by 5-lobed leaves, which are broader than long and woolly or hairy below; the petioles are likewise very hairy. The fruits, which are a brilliant red, are about twice as long as those of the species."

Like other maples, swamp maples tend to have attractive surface rootage, spreading in



all directions. The size of the leaves may be reduced by the leaf cutting method performed in early Summer, and pinching back the buds keeps the foliage lush and compact. It is not recommended that heavy pruning be done in the Spring when the sap is flowing, as maples will bleed, causing the tree to lose strength.

Because of the rapid growth of *Acer rubrum*, I have observed new branches growing to a diameter of 1/4" in just two months - wiring should be done with caution and checked frequently to prevent scarring. This rapid growth and the ability to break buds on old wood gives the bonsai enthusiast the opportunity to build a tree from a "trunk."

Branches can be chosen where necessary, sometimes allowing room for corrections and making it a good choice for beginners.

My interest in *Acer rubrum* began when I was given a large swamp maple (height 24" base 4") collected by one of our members. As a novice, I was somewhat overwhelmed by this tree and so I decided to allow it to grow for one year. Naturally, I became impatient

and began removing some branches which should have remained. This tree was basically a trunk with a large hollow near the top. I wanted to remedy the abrupt sawed-off appearance of the apex, and so after observing Guy Guidry carve one of big cypress trees with an air chisel and upon reading several articles on jin and shari, I became inspired (foolishly perhaps) to carve up the tree myself. Still

undaunted the tree is thriving and new branches appeared this past Spring. I have watched this "trunk" develop over a period of only one year, and have really enjoyed working on it and learning from it.

Follow-up to a Previous article

In a previous issue I published an article by Harry Harrington about using auto wheel cleaner on bonsai tools and wood carving bits. I have since tried this out myself with **Meguiar's Hot Rims All Wheel & Tire Cleaner** with excellent results. I stood the tools in a glass jar, sprayed them with the cleaner and let them soak for a while. The cleaner took off a lot of dried sap and general grunge with no effort by me. I finished them off with a light scrub with a brass bristle brush, rinse with water and oiled them with WD40.

TECHNIQUE Tips

Hard Water, pH And Its Effect On Bonsai

by Harry Harrington of bonsai4me.com

Having spent many years growing bonsai in the North West of the UK using local slightly acidic, soft tap water, I was a little apprehensive of maintaining my bonsai with the notoriously hard water of the South-East when I moved to the London area in 2008.

Having now maintained my bonsai for 4 years with hard tap water that has a high lime content, I feel it is worth sharing the experience that I have acquired. Most importantly it should be understood by all enthusiasts that if their tap water is hard, it does have an effect on their plants and most importantly, their bonsai.

The hardness of water roughly describes the amount of 'lime' or 'limestone' dissolved in the water as calcium carbonate and magnesium carbonate. A 'hard water' having a higher amount of lime (as calcium and magnesium) and a 'soft water' having a lower amount of lime.

The occasional watering of a bonsai with hard water, high in lime content, causes no ill-effect on a bonsai and should not be regarded in itself as bad practice. Nonetheless, over a prolonged period of watering with hard water, the lime content of the water increasingly accumulates in the soil of the bonsai, and in turn, this heightens the pH levels that the bonsai is exposed to. As the majority of tree species prefer a neutral to acidic soil, the alkaline conditions caused by the build up of lime can have serious consequences.

Plants and pH

There are a few notable examples that many of us will be familiar with already as being lime-haters. These are trees that have a strong preference for an acidic soil and include species such as Azalea, Bougainvillea, Camelia, Ilex, many juniper species as well as coniferous species such as Spruce, Larch and Cedar. Prolonged use of hard-water will cause lime-induced chlorosis, often identified in lime-haters by the appearance of pale and yellow leaves caused by a deficiency in iron.

Though the majority of shrub and tree species we use for bonsai are tolerant of a reasonably wide pH range, there are a large number of these that still dislike an alkaline soil (one with a pH higher than neutral or 7.0) caused by the accumulative effects of the lime in hard water. Examples of note that fall

into this category include *Acer palmatum* and Beech, both of which will begin to lose vigor over a couple of years before their health begins to deteriorate.

The Practicalities of Watering Your Bonsai and high pH in Hard Water Areas

The practicalities of regularly measuring the pH balance of the soil of ones bonsai and trying to reach optimum pH levels for the wide range of tree species that many of us own, make the science of soil pH an unwelcome proposition to many of us, myself included.

However the implications of the continued use of hard water on our trees must be addressed or there is a very real possibility of a lack of vigor and deterioration in health in our bonsai.

Watering your bonsai with collected rainwater (which will tend to be very slightly acidic) is an excellent idea and obviously reduces the risk of lime building up in the soil. However, during dry periods particularly during the Summer or when maintaining a large collection of bonsai, watering with rainwater is unfortunately not a practical solution.

In real terms, the regular, fortnightly application of something to reverse the alkalinity of the lime in your bonsai soil is enough to keep your trees healthy. Fortnightly I use a liquid fertilizer marketed specifically for use with ericaceous or lime-hating plants during the growing season and this is more than sufficient to counteract the effect of hard water on lime-hating species such as Azalea.

For the rest of my bonsai that prefer a neutral to acidic soil, irrespective of the bonsai soil-mix, I use an ericaceous fertilizer OR a mixture of ONE teaspoon of vinegar (the type of which seems irrelevant) with 7 liters of water once a month. Again, this is sufficient to counteract the effects of lime in hard water areas.

While 'soft' water which is low in mineral and lime content is excellent for bonsai and can be used without any problem, 'softened' hard water contains a high salt-content and its use will cause more damage than lime and lime-scale.

The Use of Vinegar for Cleaning Lime-Scale

The build up of lime deposits, known as lime-scale, on bonsai pots and the nebari

Hard Water cont. pg 4

BEGINNERS Corner

What Tools Do I Need?

by Randy Bennett

When someone asks me what tools they need, I tell them to take their time. Buying bonsai tools can still present a sizable investment, and to my way of thinking, there is no point in spending a hundred dollars or more on a very basic set of tools unless you know that bonsai is something that you are going to stick with. However, not having the correct tools will make it difficult and even frustrating when attempting to create bonsai. The answer to what tools to buy may be somewhat subjective, but at the very least, your first choice should be a concave cutter. You can make do with any type of quality, by-pass pruner for use on twigs and shoots. Get a second one just for using on roots. But a concave pruner is an essential piece of equipment. A concave cutter will allow you to make sharp, close cuts, and will allow you to remove small branches and shoots without leaving a stub. This allows for excellent healing of wounds and creates scarring that is far less noticeable than you would have with conventional pruning tools. Your second choice should be a wire cutter (the type whose cutting edge extends all the way to the tip of the tool). Any wire cutter will cut wire into lengths. What you need this tool for is to remove the wire from the tree.

Don't try to save wire by unwrapping it from a branch that has been wired with the thought of reusing it. Wire is cheap enough so that you can remove it as you should - by cutting each coil away from the wired branch by using a proper pair of wire cutters. And, the cost of wire is far exceeded by the amount of anger and frustration you will experience in the number of broken branches you will have, due to trying to unwrap wire that is now so bent and weak that it will not hold properly anyway, and looks like hell on the tree.

So first, a concave cutter. Second, wire cutters. From here the choice is yours. Buy tools according to your needs. You can save some money buying tools in sets, but then you are always stuck with one tool or another that you never seem to use. What you buy will be determined by the size of the trees you like to design and work on, as well as the species. Talk to people with experience and don't be afraid to ask questions. Tools for bonsai are like brushes to the painter. You don't mind "making do" with cheap brushes while you are learning the basics, mixing color, blending etc. But, when you start to learn technique, and when you progress to painting that first piece of art - even when it's just a bowl of funky-looking fruit, the quality of brushes you use have a great influence on the effect achieved.