

# THE BONSAI Wire

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

February 2018

## FROM THE President

I want to thank everyone who brought trees to the Silhouette Show in January. I also want to thank Robert Reed for helping with the critiques of the trees. My only regret is that we did not have time to provide feedback on all the trees. I hope you enjoyed seeing some of the member's trees and that it was informative. And for those whose trees were critiqued, I hope it was, in some way, helpful.

Your Board is working diligently to bring you educational programs and opportunities in the months ahead. The six-week Beginner Course will begin in March and Jim Osborne has graciously volunteered to act as the instructor. You will learn a lot from Jim He is an accomplished Bonsai artist and very knowledgeable. The course will be very thorough and will cover everything you need to know to begin your journey as a Bonsai artist. We are limiting the number of participants to 10 and will provide the Beginner Course in the future to

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## MEETINGS & Events

### Tuesday, February 20, 2018 (note: 3rd Tuesday due to Mardi Gras)

**Program: Air-layering by Taylor Williams 7:00pm**

Learn the different variations of this highly useful method of propagation. The principal of layering is to force a tree or branch to form new roots at a certain point. You can use air-layering for; reducing the length of a trunk, growing a better Nebari or selecting a branch to be grown as a separate tree.

**Bonus Program: Re-potting giveaway**

**Pay your yearly dues and you will have access to free bonsai soil and wire to pot one of your trees.** Bring your own pot and tree. Experienced members will be on hand to assist newer members in the correct ways to re-pot.

### Friday, March 16, 2018

**Intermediate Study Group (for signed up participants) 6:00pm-7:15pm**

**Program: Brussel Martin Kingsville Boxwood Rock planting demo 7:30pm**

Brussel Martin, bonsai artist and owner of Brussel's Bonsai, will do a demo of multiple Kingsville boxwoods on a lace rock.

### Saturday, March 17, 2018

**Program: Brussel Martin Kingsville Boxwood Rock planting workshop 9:00am**

Brussel Martin will conduct a workshop with a single larger scale Kingsville boxwood on a lacerock. Cost of the workshop is \$100 and includes soil, muck, moss and Kingsville. Sign up sheets will be available at the meetings. Full payment must be made at least one month before the workshop.

### Tuesday, April 10, 2018

**Intermediate Study Group (for signed up participants) 6:00pm-7:15pm**

**Program: Threadgrafting 7:30pm**

Dennis Burke and Randy Bennett will demonstrate and explain the threadgrafting technique to improve the branch structure of bonsai.

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

Meetings take place 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)

# BEGINNER Basics

**Always wire your bonsai SECURELY into its pot!**

Yes - it keeps the tree from falling out of the pot, but there's also another very important reason for doing it. As the wind blows or even as you move your bonsai, if the tree continually shifts in the pot, it damages all those lovely small roots you're trying to develop.

**Resist the urge to stick your tree into a bonsai pot too early.**

We have all done it and it's always a mistake. Give your tree time to develop first. Your trunk and major branches should be the thickness you want them to be before you move your tree to a bonsai pot. Once in a bonsai pot, trunks and branches will thicken very slowly if at all. Wait until your tree has achieved the right girth and its fine development is well on its way and then you can move it to a pot.

**Don't trim your tree to death.**

Prune your tree for shape - but don't constantly prune every stray leaf. Your tree needs to grow sometimes to maintain its health. It may look messy on occasion but it will be better for the health of the tree and will give you a better result in the long run.

# TECHNIQUE Tips

## Root Cuttings

by Randy Bennett



The technique of propagating plants and trees by root cuttings is an old one and one can make use of this technique to create interesting and quality bonsai. The technique of propagation by root cuttings will not work on every species, but it will on a surprising number. In fact, some species are just about impossible to propagate unless root cuttings are used.

This technique is performed by removing a section of root from a parent plant and potting the root section in the soil type preferred by that particular species. The following is a partial list of species which are best suited to propagation by root cutting: maples, elms, cotoneasters, quince, hawthorns, hollies, pomegranates, mayhaws, ficus, barbados cherry, and bittersweet.

The roots can be taken from landscape specimens, collected material, or container grown trees. This is best done in early spring when one would normally transplant trees. One can create virtually any style and any size bonsai because one is working with an established root system which will recover quickly and begin new growth. The important factor is to select root sections that have interesting and workable shapes.

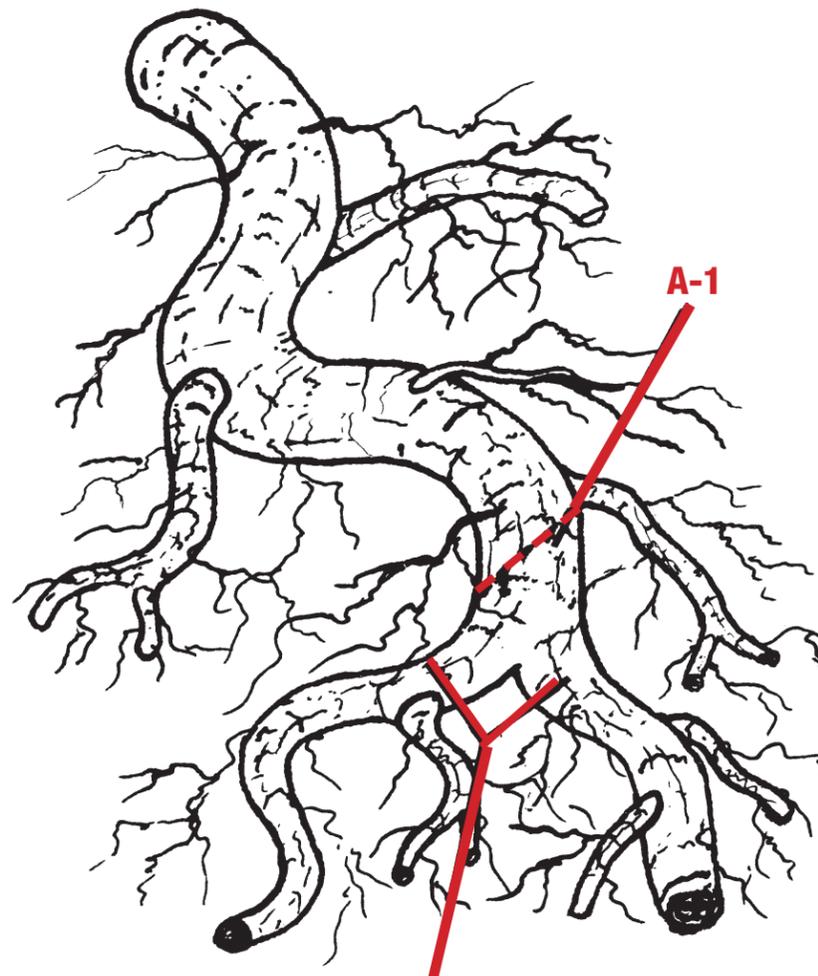
### PROCEDURE

There are two basic routes one may take in creating bonsai from root cuttings. **PROCEDURE A** utilizes the root cutting to serve only as the future base and surface roots of a bonsai whose trunk line and style are determined by the artist. **PROCEDURE B** utilizes the existing shape of the root cutting to form the trunk line and therefore the style of the future bonsai.

Root size as well as shape will dictate which procedure one uses. The roots may be too small to use for a trunk, or they may lack usable taper of shape. Look at the material. Let it determine how you proceed.

### PROCEDURE A

1. Take the cut-away root section of the parent tree and remove all the old soil by spraying water into the root.
2. Look for roots of uniform thickness or a section having an inverse taper. (Remember that roots must be planted the same way they were growing, with end closest to the original trunk being the top).
3. Select sections from 2-15 inches in length and from 1/4" and up in diameter.
4. Select a root section where several roots of similar size radiate out from the main root at the same level. This will form the surface roots for the future bonsai. Leave all of the roots below this point intact. (figure A)
5. Leave a section of the central root above



Surface roots for future bonsai

the location of future surface roots. The length of this section will depend upon the thickness of the central root. In any case, leave a sufficient length so a diagonal cut of about 45° can be made. The low point of the cut should be positioned approximately 1/4 to 1/2 inch above the future root crown. The diagonal cut will assist in the development of good taper in your future bonsai. (see figure A-1)

6. Oftentimes there are insufficient lateral roots radiating out around the central root to form a good base. If such is the case build them. Select an area for the future base of the tree where several lateral roots or even root hairs radiate out from the central root at the same level. Using a sharp knife or grafting tool make several upward cuts into the central root so that one or more of the lateral roots are growing from the flaps you have cut. Place wet Sphagnum moss under flaps to lift them and provide a constant source of moisture.

This will promote rapid development of the future surface rootage. On smaller root sections, tie the moss in place under the flaps with raffia or wire. If there are no lateral roots or root hairs where you wish to build your base, follow the same procedure and apply a rooting hormone to the edges of the flaps. (see figure B-1)

7. Pot the root cutting in a suitable soil mix with only the section of the roots' diagonal cut exposed above the level of the soil. It is best to keep a thin layer of Sphagnum moss over the cut to prevent the root from drying out, especially on larger root cuttings where there is a greater surface area exposed. This is placed fairly loose above the cut so as to allow air circulation and some light to the cut while maintaining a moist microclimate.

8. In four to six weeks the root cutting should sprout along the line of cambium

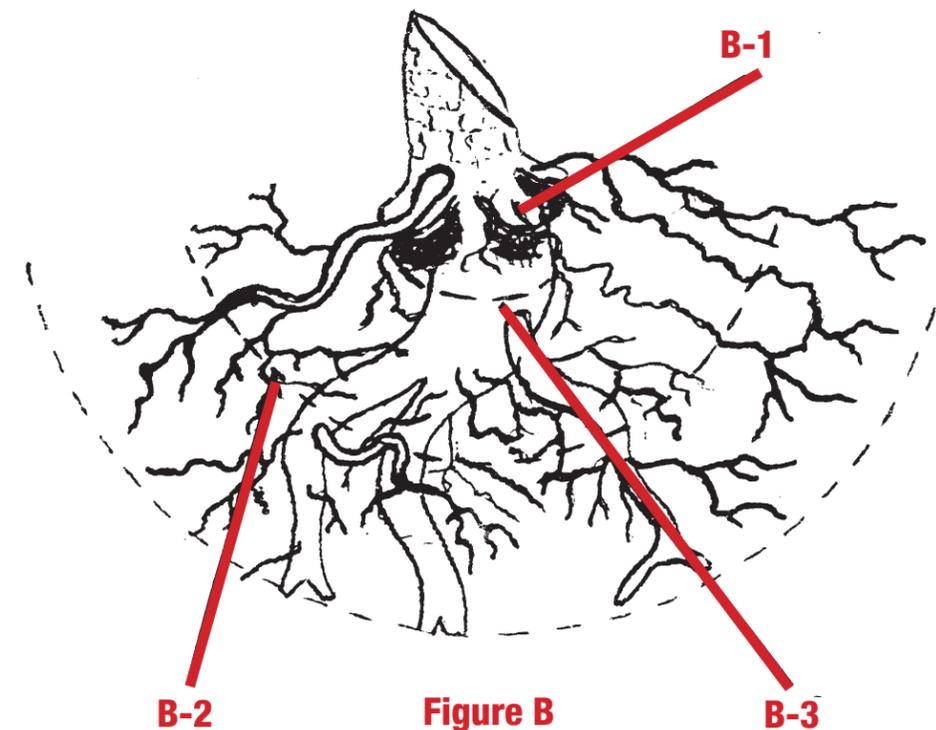


Figure B

tissue of the diagonal cut. When about 4-6 pairs of leaves have formed begin to fertilize the cutting. Allow a central leader to develop and let it grow untrimmed during the first year.

9. The following spring inspect the root system. There should be substantial new development. Cut the leader back to about 2-3 inches above the initial cut and reduce the root system by half. Be careful not to cut or damage the lateral roots that are forming the future base. (see figure B-2) If the lateral roots are one-sided in their development, trim the larger, stronger roots to one third their length. This will encourage the weaker and smaller surface roots to develop.

10. Allow a single leader to once again develop during the second growing season. Cutting back the leader from the first growing season will encourage low branching to develop. Keep the low branches in check by periodic pruning. If low branches are not developing properly then prune back the lateral branches from the upper portion but let the central leader continue to grow.

11. In late fall, when the tree is dormant and the roots have had time to recover and develop from the spring pruning, initial shaping of the trees' shape should begin. This is the time to wire the trunk into the desired shape.

12. At repotting time in spring of the second year, completely remove the lower root structure. (see figure B-3) This will further encourage the development of the surface roots which will have begun to be well established by now.

The leader should also be cut at the time of repotting as well as any branches which are not in keeping with the design elements of the tree. At this time the tree can be potted in a suitable bonsai container. For large root cuttings of two to four inches in diameter it may be desirable to pot the tree in an oversize training pot to allow a greater amount of growth to facilitate the development of the trunk as well as branch size and structure.

## The Importance of Timing in Bonsai

by Harry Harrington (bonsai4me.com)



There are a wide range of techniques available to the bonsai enthusiast that can help keep his/her bonsai healthy, vigorous and in shape throughout the year.

These techniques range from the straightforward but essential, such as pruning and repotting, to the more advanced such as wiring, trunk chopping or grafting.

The key to using these techniques successfully is partly due to the knowledge needed to carry them out correctly, but also very importantly, when they are carried out.

All bonsai techniques must be performed at the correct time for them to be successful. Failure to adhere to the correct timing can kill or injure bonsai and will greatly increase the possibility of the technique failing to have the desired outcome.

A technique such as repotting and root pruning is perfectly safe as long as the timing is correct; root pruning at the wrong time will kill or at very least, seriously weaken your tree.

### Cyclic Timing

Almost all plants and certainly those that are used for bonsai have an annual or cyclic growth pattern. In other words, over the course of one year, a plant will pass through a series of states and conditions that will not be repeated until the following year. These annual growth patterns are closely shaped and defined by the annual cycles of the sun, season and the weather. These annual growth patterns also subtly change according to your own climate and the weather experienced in your area in the previous weeks and months. (Tropical climates and indoor cultivation can and will interrupt or negate these seasonal variations making timing more difficult and in some cases, less important).

All bonsai techniques have recommended 'times' during the year that they can be performed. Dependent on the nature of the technique, the timing maybe described as anytime over 3 or 4 months of the growing season to as little as a 2 week window that occurs only once a year. Unless you have full understanding of the technique, the physiological reasons for the timing and an understanding of the risks of ill-timed work, always adhere strictly to the recommended timing you are given. Never be tempted to carry out ill-timed work in the belief the tree will be 'finished' more quickly; very often this results in a weak tree whose development time is greatly increased.

It should be added that it is important not to be tied to calendar dates when deciding when to repot, prune, wire or carry out any other bonsai technique. The exact timing necessary depends on your national, local climate and the climate or conditions that your trees are subject to, the health of individual trees, and the actual species of tree. It is not unusual to have trees of the same species and same position in a garden that require repotting maybe a month apart!

For this reason you must learn to time your work according to the condition of an individual tree. For instance, repotting of a deciduous tree should be carried out as the new buds start to extend and not because some guy a continent away says to do it in February or March. Many bonsai books will give you a set date to try and adhere to. This is probably done to simplify timing explanations but it may well also cause problems with the health of your bonsai.

It maybe a harder way to learn and remember at first but by learning to react to your trees, your timing will be better. Instead of learning a calendar date,

learn the signal that the tree will give you. Try to find sources that explain which signals in your trees to look for.

### Recuperative Timing

The second form of timing that must be considered is recuperative timing. This is the amount of time a tree requires to recuperate or recover from work carried out on it.

When a tree is worked on there is a period of time where it is in a weakened state and/or it's resources are tied up in response to the work. During this time, additional work may reduce the already weakened tree to a state where it is unable to recover and either grows very slowly or even dies.

An example might be defoliating (removal of all the leaves in midsummer) and root pruning. Either of these techniques can be carried out with great success on healthy, vigorous trees. However, defoliating a tree at midsummer that has yet to recover fully from it's spring root pruning can have a devastating effect on a bonsai.

Not allowing enough recuperative time between work is a common mistake to make, particularly for beginners. Judging the time needed to recuperate depends on many factors such as the vigour of the tree species used, the individual trees health at the time of work and the nature of the actual work that is carried out.

On a general basis, the more invasive the work, the longer a period of time is required for recovery. Recovery can be counted in days for the trimming of a vigorous tree (such as a Chinese Elm) to months for the root pruning of a weaker species or even years for trees that have been collected from the wild.

Learning how much time a tree needs in order to recover from work is difficult to generalise and comes largely with experience but is ideally learnt by studying the reaction of the tree to work and knowing when a tree is growing with renewed vigour.

A good general indicator of renewed vigour and recovery in many trees is the appearance of new shoot growth (extension) and successful hardening off of these shoots. Note that new buds and new leaves on their own are not indicative that a tree has or will recover from work that has been carried out.

### Patience

A healthy nursery tree is bought during the summer and you style it immediately. Pleased with your efforts, you are unable to resist the temptation to plant it straight into a bonsai pot even though it is late Summer and your timing is wildly wrong. The result is a tree that is too weak to respond to your styling and fails to grow for the remainder of the Summer and early Autumn, though luckily for you, it doesn't die.

The following Spring the tree starts growing, but a few branches have died back during the Winter, your styling is wrecked and the tree is still too weak to put out any new shoots. A year later, your lack of patience has resulted in a bonsai that may take another season before it actually recovers from all of your work.

With a little patience, your newly styled tree could have been allowed to recover and have been repotted just 6 months later, at the correct time, during the following Spring. This tree will have been given recuperative time after styling and repotted at its correct cyclic time. The resulting bonsai would be vigorous, suffer no dieback and be ready for further wiring and trimming within a few months. Most importantly it would be much better developed than the tree that had the ill-timed repot.

Patience is the hardest part of learning to use correct timing practises to your advantage. The temptation to plant your newly styled tree into it's first bonsai pot can be difficult to resist. However, with experience you learn that by obeying the rules of timing, your trees' progress and development will be always be much quicker.

President *cont. from pg 1*

accommodate those who did not have the opportunity to sign up and for people who may join the club in the months ahead.

We had sufficient interest in the Intermediate Study Group to form two groups. Due to the fact that these groups will be digging much deeper into bonsai culture and techniques, we are limiting the number of participants to six. One will be led by Dawn Koetting, an accomplished Bonsai artist and long-time club member with a wealth of knowledge and skill. The leader of the second group has yet to be determined, but we anticipate that both groups will be able to start in March. In order to provide opportunities for everyone who wishes to participate, we are scheduling one group to meet from 6:00 – 7:15 on the regularly scheduled GNOBS meeting nights, with the monthly meeting to begin at 7:30.

We are not sure if this will allow enough time for the group to sufficiently cover the content each month, but in the interest of trying to make participation easier, we are going to temporarily try it on a meeting night. If a lack of sufficient time is an issue, then we will schedule the Study Group on a Saturday morning, at one of the local libraries. The second Study Group is going to be scheduled for a Saturday morning at a local library. There are members who must man the sign-in table, welcome guests and collect dues when the hall opens that wish to participate in one of the Study Groups. For that reason, another day and place was chosen.

These groups will be ongoing and will meet monthly. Our goal is to provide our membership with multiple opportunities for continuing education in the art of Bonsai. We will be communicating the details with those who signed up via email in the next couple of weeks. The Intermediate Study Groups are for Bonsai practitioners who already have a sound foundation in creating Bonsai and is not for beginners.

The Advanced Study Groups on Satsuki Azaleas and Japanese Black Pine will begin in March as well. These groups will meet three to four times a year, at times when species specific tasks are required. Jim Osborne and myself will be leading the Black Pine Study Group and I will be leading the Satsuki Azalea Study Group. If there is someone else in the club with some knowledge and expertise in working with Satsuki Azaleas, I welcome your assistance.

I would like to have the first meeting of the Black Pine Study Group in March to have an in-depth discussion on Black Pine so we can schedule meeting dates, but more importantly, so we can assess each participant's knowledge level and help determine what needs to be covered before we begin working on trees. We will also lay out a scope of work that each participant will need to do during the months prior to our first work-session in June.

I would also like to meet with the Satsuki Azalea Study Group in March, so we can do the same thing. However, March will also (by necessity) be our first work-session, so bring a tree. I have been asked to conduct a Japanese Maple Study Group for the Baton Rouge Club beginning in March, so we may have to do some creative scheduling. I'll let participants know soon.

**Randy Bennett**  
GNOBS President

## Selecting Nursery Material

1. It is most important to select healthy material and a species which is appropriate for bonsai.
2. Look for a plant with a well shaped trunk, tapering from a broad base to a slimmer apex.
3. Carry garden gloves so you can dig into the soil to find the surface roots and to locate what will be the base of the tree. Your goal is to find a plant with strong and evenly spaced surface roots. Avoid trees with many crossing and twisted surface roots.
4. There should be strong and healthy lower branches which are attached no farther than one third the way up the trunk of the bonsai once styled. There should also be plenty of branches higher up on the tree.
5. Consider the size of the leaves and needles; they need to be in proportion to the expected size of the bonsai.



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