

# THE BONSAI Wire

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

September 2018

## FROM THE President



The first thing I want to do is to thank everyone who donated items for the GNOBS August Auction.

Without the generosity of our members, visiting masters and nurseries who donated items, we would not have had all the wonderful material to auction off. And of course, it would not have been nearly as much fun without our auctioneer, Felix Famularo! Felix does our auction every year and is always entertaining. I especially want to thank everyone who purchased items. I hope you are happy with all the items you won with your winning bids. After all of our expenses, the club raised over \$7,000! So, from the bottom of my heart, I wish to express my thanks for making the auction such a success.

And of course, our auction would not be a success at all without the people that work so hard to make it happen, especially Kathy Barbazon, who lives and breathes "auction" until it is over. I also want to recognize others who helped to pull it off, like Cheryl Mechler, Peggy Howard, Dawn Koetting, Chris Knowles,

President cont. pg 5



## MEETINGS & Events

*Note: Study Groups are for signed up participants. Programs are open to ALL members.*

### Tuesday, September 11, 2018

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

**Program: Japanese Maples 7:30pm**

Randy Bennett, our club President and one of our most experienced members, will do a presentation on Japanese Maples. Japanese Maples can be somewhat challenging in our area. Randy will discuss the varieties most suitable for our climate as well as care and styling.

### Tuesday, October 9, 2018

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

**Program: Open Workshop with guidance by veteran members 7:30pm**

**Program: Halloween Ugly Tree contest 7:30pm**

For our open workshop, we will have four experienced members stationed at tables around the hall. Please bring any tree you would like to work on and join one of the members who can provide styling advice and information.

For the Ugly Tree Contest – just for fun, bring in your ugliest tree. The winner will be awarded a bag of Halloween candy!

### Tuesday, November 13, 2018

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

**Program: Repotting 7:30pm**

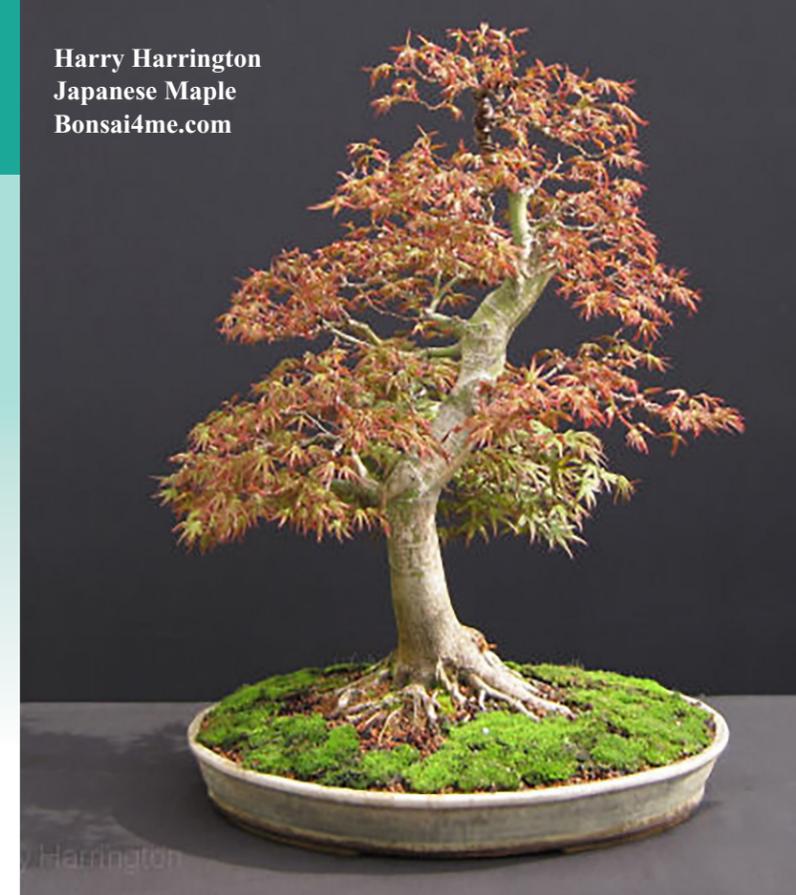
Dawn Koetting, winner of Vaughn Banting and Johnny Martinez awards, will do a presentation on all aspects of repotting.

### Tuesday, December 11, 2018

**Program: Annual Christmas Party 7:30pm**

Bring your spouse or plus one and your favorite covered dish (side dishes, entrées, desserts) for our annual potluck Christmas party. The club will supply a ham, beverages and plates/utensils. Everyone attending gets a free raffle ticket for door prizes.

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)



the fault of the tree but rather our own mistakes in care.

To better understand how to grow Japanese maples, we need to look at where and how they grow in nature and under what conditions. To begin with, Japanese maples are understory trees in the wild, usually attaining a height of between 9 to 16 feet. However, some may reach 25 to 30 feet. They grow in woodland forests among much taller species and are at home in lightly shaded or filtered light. Therefore, they are not going to be happy growing in full sun on your bonsai bench all day here in south Louisiana.

They are found in a wide range of climates and environments in Japan and have adapted equally well here in the United States. Here, in south Louisiana, it can get very hot during the summer months and the green leafed varieties of Japanese maple will tend to get leaf-burn. The best solution for this is afternoon shade. However, I recommend siting all your cultivars of Japanese maples in full sun all day when they first leaf out in spring. As the days get hotter and hotter, they will begin needing more and more shade, especially in the afternoon. Variegated varieties will require even more shade than the green leafed varieties and for longer periods. Red leafed varieties, by the time temperatures hit 85 degrees, need to be moved into filtered to full shade all day. However, without the benefit of full sun for several hours when they first leaf out in the spring, red leafed varieties will not develop good leaf color. Instead of the deep red hues, the leaves will turn a greenish-red or bronze color. And I have not yet seen any red-leafed cultivar that is able to keep its' red color by the time our temperatures hit 90 degrees – even in the central and northern part of Louisiana. So in the spring, have them sited so as to receive full morning sun for several hours. The same is true for the variegated varieties. The pinks and creams will need full sun to develop and hold their color when they first leaf out and the temperatures are still moderate. It should be noted that I do not recommend using variegated varieties on bonsai due to their inherent weakness. Make no mistake, the red leaf varieties are equally weak, but who wouldn't want to see one of them on their bonsai bench? However, some of you may want to try one or more of the variegated varieties, so I do mention them here.

## Japanese Maples as Bonsai

By Randy Bennett

The following is an excerpt from a manual I have been working on regarding the growing of Japanese Maples as bonsai in New Orleans and surrounding parishes. I encourage anyone who has a Japanese maple that they are working on, to bring it to the September meeting.

### A Few Observations About Japanese Maples In General

The basic *Acer palmatum* used to be the only Japanese maple available at nurseries – when you could find them. Now, there are so many cultivars that have become popular and desirable in the landscape, it is hard to find the generic *Acer palmatum* and much easier to find the red leafed varieties and dissectums. I recently visited five nurseries in the New Orleans area that sold various cultivars of Japanese maple. None of them sold the generic *Acer palmatum*. I also recently visited a number of large wholesale nurseries. Not one of them had the basic green-leafed Japanese maple for sale. And the various cultivars now available are almost always grafted onto *Acer platanum* understock. Most often, this results in a pronounced bulging where the two varieties are joined. The green leafed Japanese maple understock has a vigorous root system and usually grows more quickly than the variety that is grafted to it. This bulging will often become more pronounced with age.

There are three main ways to propagate a Japanese maple cultivar: grafting, cuttings, or air-layers. Seed from a cultivar will seldom retain all the qualities and characteristics of the cultivar. Therefore, in the nursery trade, a Japanese maple grown from the seed of a cultivar cannot legally be called by the cultivar's name. They must be vegetatively reproduced by one of the three methods mentioned above. Many of the cultivars will not root from cuttings or from air-layers. Therefore, grafting has become the quickest and easiest way for nurseries to mass produce a crop of sellable plant stock.

As Japanese maples mature, their branches will tend to gracefully arch outward in layers of foliage. As the name implies, *Acer palmatum* typically has a five-lobed leaf. However there are varieties which have seven. There are literally hundreds of varieties of Japanese maple. The dwarf varieties have the smallest leaves. A. *palmatum* 'Beni-hime' will typically have leaves from 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch in length on plants growing in the ground. Bonsai culture can reduce them even more. Some varieties have much larger leaves. So, take the leaf size into account



when determining the finished height of the tree. Scale is very important in bonsai. I recommend that you look for trees having leaves one to two inches in length.

Growing the various cultivars of Japanese maple as bonsai requires knowledge about how each one grows, how they respond to pruning, etc. In order to assist you with growing Japanese maples as bonsai in the simplest way possible, we will break them down into three, specific groups: green leafed varieties, red leafed varieties and dwarf varieties.

### A Few Observations Regarding Japanese Maples In South Louisiana

According to the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map, which is based on the AVERAGE



Harry Harrington Japanese Maple  
Bonsai4me.com

annual minimum temperature, the southern half of Louisiana lies in three zones: 8b (15-20 degrees), 9a (20-25 degrees) and 9b (25-30 degrees). Alexandria, Baton Rouge and Hammond are in zone 8b, with Baton Rouge and Hammond almost on the line between 8b and 9a. Lake Charles, Houma, Opelousas, Lafayette and most of New Orleans are in 9a, with parts of Jefferson and Orleans parish next

to Lake Pontchartrain being in 9b. The primary areas in zone 9b are Plaquemines Parish and the southernmost regions of other parishes along the southwestern coast of Louisiana.

Most Japanese maples are rated to zone 8, with some rated to zone 9. You will find that there are some discrepancies among growers as to which cultivars extend into zone 9. To my knowledge, there is nothing in print giving the precise climatic range of each individual cultivar of Japanese maple. Such knowledge would require coordinated research across all climate zones for many, many years. So all we have are generic estimates.

But, if you review the descriptions that nurseries across the United States offer on Japanese maple cultivars for sale that also include their hardiness range, you will begin to see which varieties trend toward zone 8 and which ones trend toward zone 9.

Also, I have noticed that many prominent nurseries are hiring local

horticultural experts to work with new plant material and assist their customers. If you have one of these nurseries that has been dealing in Japanese maples, talking with their horticulturists can yield reliable information about the tolerance of specific cultivars.

Clearly, the greatest level of success is to be gained by growing varieties that trend into zone 9, but a number of varieties rated to zone 8 will do quite well in our areas as well. And while one should respect the hardiness zones when it comes to selecting cultivars to work with in bonsai, a set of variables that have a much greater impact on success (or lack of success) are: soil particle size, amount of organic matter incorporated into bonsai soil, watering habits, fertilizer and exposure to light, heat and wind. We will examine these variables in more detail below.

Some would argue that because our climate pushes Japanese maples to the very limit of their survivability, we are wasting time growing them and should spend our time and effort on species that are solidly acclimatized to our region. However, I have been growing several cultivars of Japanese maple successfully since 1984 some in the ground and some in bonsai culture.

And we readily acknowledge that trees cultivated as bonsai may actually live longer than the same species of tree grown in nature due to the level of care that can be afforded them. And if they do not live as long, or longer, than their nature-grown cousins, it is probably not



Leaf-burn is caused by evaporation occurring faster than the tree has the ability to transport water to the leaves. The first noticeable burning will occur at the edges of the leaves. The scorching moves gradually inward as more and more of the leaf becomes damaged. Because the damaged leaves cannot carry out photosynthesis at full capacity, the tree becomes weaker. It is exacerbated by wind, which contributes to more rapid evaporation. In bonsai culture, it is best to provide protection from wind as much as from the afternoon sun.

I recently made a trip to a large wholesale nursery in Forest Hill, Louisiana, which is near Alexandria. They had over a hundred Japanese maples in 15 to 30 gallon containers, with heights up to about 12 feet, all growing in the shade of a large grove of pine trees. They were growing varieties such as 'Bloodgood', 'Shishigashira', 'Akashigtatsusawa', 'Sangu kaku', 'Shaina' and others, but none of the red-leafed and variegated cultivars were completely free from leaf-burn. Below is a photo of leaf-burn on a red-leaf Japanese maple in August.



Japanese maples growing in the wild prefer sandy, well-draining soils with low to medium amounts of organic matter. Their roots are not deep and they develop a fibrous root system as opposed to a tap root and deep root structures. They prefer the soil to be slightly acid, much like an azalea. So your bonsai soil should be one that is fast draining and have less organic matter than aggregate material. The most common cause of death in Japanese maples grown as bonsai is overwatering. That, coupled with the significant amount of rainfall we receive in south Louisiana, requires a soil that drains quickly and can dry out quickly as well. We will get into more detail regarding soil later on.

In and around the New Orleans area, the ground is below sea level. Where I live, the ground is three feet below sea level and there are areas of the city that are as much as six feet below sea level. This results in the water table being close to the surface, so when you dig down just a couple of feet, water begins to seep in. Because Japanese maples do not like having their "feet wet", planting them in the landscape requires excavating the planting site and amending the soil with sand. The planting area should then be mounded into a berm, with the maple being planted at the highest point. This affords the tree better drainage

and helps to ensure that the roots do not sit in wet, soggy soil for long periods of time.



Another option is to use timbers and create a raised bed. This is probably the biggest mistake that people in and around New Orleans make when planting a Japanese maple in the landscape. By not amending the soil and creating a planting berm or raised bed, they unknowingly commit their Japanese maple to having a much shorter life span.



(We will cover a wide range of topics regarding growing Japanese maples as bonsai in the New Orleans area at the September meeting. I hope to see you there.)

# TIPS & Tricks

## Tips For The Month Of September

By Randy Bennett

1. While northern states begin to cool down during the month of September, it remains incredibly hot in the south, particularly in New Orleans. We do not usually see our first real cool snap until the end of October. However, we usually see the daily highs beginning to lessen a bit during September and for all practical purposes, you can start to fertilize trees again by the middle of the month, in order to get that last flush of growth and strengthen root systems for the dormant season. That means using a fertilizer with less nitrogen and more phosphorous, or fertilizers with a large middle number.
2. In late September and into October, you will begin to notice that the twigs and branches of most species will begin to swell, so keep checking your wire to make sure it is not cutting in. Simply because you do not see a lot of foliar growth at this time, does not mean that the diameter of branches will remain the same.
3. Stay on top of your watering. It is still very hot and your soil dries out quickly, particularly if it is fast-draining or the pot is root-bound. That is the problem with relying on automatic watering systems for everyday care; some species grow faster than others and thus become root-bound more quickly, some species tolerate our heat less than other species and roots of a tree under stress will react differently and take in less water than one that is not. So, it is important to rely on your own eyes and feeling the moisture content in the soil with your fingers and not rely on an automatic watering system for daily watering.

# NEWS & Events

## 2018 Louisiana Day of Bonsai

**Saturday, 10 November 2018**

Featuring Dana Quattlebaum, LABS will be hosted by Bonsai Society of Acadiana at the First United Methodist Church, 119 Jefferson Street in New Iberia, LA. For details contact Boyd Snellgrove at [radsnell@cox.net](mailto:radsnell@cox.net).

Jim Osborne, Gerald Nolan, Dennis Burke, Bill Butler, Robert Reed, Liz Butler, Clem Barbazon, Donald Koetting, Harold Mechler and many others who helped and contributed.

The funds we raise through our annual auction enable us to bring in quality bonsai artists from around the country. And for those of you who may be curious as to how that money is spent, here is an example: If we bring in an artist from California, we will spend somewhere around \$600 for airfare, \$375 to \$1,000 for hotel accommodations, depending on where they want to stay while they are here. We will typically pay for their meals and their program fees may range from \$250 to \$350, even up to \$1,200, depending on the artist. That fee is applied to each program they provide. So, if we have a quest artist who provides an evening lecture/demo and a next-day workshop and their fee is \$250, their fee is doubled; so \$500 and up.

Not everybody flies in or wants to stay in a downtown hotel, so the costs will vary greatly. In addition to money spent on masters is the cost of material purchased for workshops, wire for workshops and programs, raffle items, food, drinks, snacks, rental of the meeting hall for each function, etc. But I think it important that our members understand how your Board utilizes club funds.

So thanks to everyone who contributed, in some way, to our annual auction.

**Randy Bennett**  
GNOBS President



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