THE BONSAI Wire

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

March 2019

FROM THE President

Thanks to everyone who brought in trees last month. It was great to see some of the projects that people are working on. I would encourage each and every one of you to document the process as you work on a tree and write an article for the GNOBS Newsletter. I know our members would be grateful to read an article from someone other than me for a change. So please, if you will, submit any article you write to our Newsletter Editor, Kathy Barbazon.

This months' program will feature Brussel Martin of Brussels' Bonsai Nursery. He will be conducting a lecture/demo, Friday night, on bunjin style Japanese Black Pine. Saturday morning, he will conduct a workshop on the same material. Brussel showed me the material at his nursery last May and he personally selected the trees for the workshop.

Knowing Brussel, the lecture/demo and workshop will be something special. It is very rare for the club to have access to material of this quality. Don't miss this excellent opportunity.

Randy Bennett
GNOBS President

MEETINGS & Events

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

Azalea Study Groups

March 28, May 16 - both at 7:00pm

Jefferson Parish East Bank Regional Library, 4747 West Napoleon Ave., Metairie, LA 70001
Free species based study group. Sign up at the regular meeting or contact Randy Bennett for more information.

Friday, March 15, 2019

Intermediate Study Group (for signed up participants) 6:00pm-7:15pm
Program: Brussel Martin 7:30pm

Brussel Martin, bonsai artist and owner of Brussel's Bonsai will be visiting to do a lecture/demo on black pine in the bunjin style.

Saturday, March 16th, 2019

Brussel Martin Black Pine Bunjin Workshop 8:00am

Brussel Martin will conduct a workshop on Black Pine in the Bunjin style. Sign up sheets will be available at the meetings. Cost of the workshop (which includes tree) is $140. Several spots are still available.

Saturday & Sunday April 6 & 7 (Set Up Friday April 5)

Mark your calendars for our club participation in the Spring Garden Show at City Park. Sign up sheets will be available at the March meeting for volunteers to set up/man the show. Also available will be sheets to let us know what tree(s) you will be submitting for the exibit (We will need to know common name, species name, years in training, approximate age). (Unless we have a shortage of trees, we will limit participants to two submissions). The public will vote for their favorite tree. We will also have club judging in various categories

Tuesday, April 9, 2019

Intermediate Study Group (for signed up participants) 6:00pm-7:15pm
Program: How to Select Material for Bonsai 7:30pm

Meetings ***cont. pg 7***

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

Preparing Trees for the Spring Garden Show

by Randy Bennett

I encourage every member to put at least one tree in the Spring Garden Show bonsai exhibit at City Park, April 6th and 7th.

1. Select your best bonsai.

2. If you are unable to get an entry card at the March Meeting, email Randy Bennett the following information: your name, the common name of the tree you are going to show, the species name, the source (nursery stock, cutting, seed, air-layer, etc.) approximate age of the tree, years in training as a bonsai. I need all submissions no later than April 1st.

3. Just before the show, thoroughly clean the pot using a scrub brush or scrubbing pad to remove dirt. If you have calcium build up on pot, use vinegar or CLR. But be sure and rinse the container thoroughly with clean water after using either product and be sure not to get any in the soil or on the tree as they are both acidic.

4. When you bring your tree to the exhibit and it is in an unglazed pot, coat the outer surface of the pot with baby oil, vegetable oil or similar product to give the unglazed pot a sheen.

5. Be sure and remove all weeds from the soil.

6. As long as it is not a pine or rough-bark species, clean the trunk and branches with a toothbrush or soft wire brush to remove algae, dirt, etc. Be careful that you don't brush so hard that you expose the green cambium tissue.

7. The day of the show, remove any leaves that are malformed, diseased, discolored or that insects have been chewing on.

8. If your tree has wire on it, make sure that the wire is not cutting in.

9. Get all your pruning and pinching done ahead of time.
Remember… you want to have a specimen that exhibits, care, quality and beauty.

10. Bring your tree to the main entrance to the Botanical Gardens or through the Two Sisters Pavilion on Friday, no later than 4:30 pm. Our exhibit is adjacent to the Two Sisters Pavilion.

11. The Botanical Gardens are open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. We will need volunteers to monitor the exhibit. We will also conducting demonstrations Saturday and Sunday. Demos could be on wiring a tree you already have, repotting a tree, styling raw nursery stock, wiring a tree into a container, pot selection, sifting and making various soil blends, etc. Demonstrations could be anywhere from 15 minutes to 2 hours depending on the topic and material used. If you would like to participate by giving a demonstration, contact either Randy Bennett or Dennis Burke.

12. You may pick up your display tree on Sunday, after 5:00 p.m.

Bonsai Tips for March

by Randy Bennett

Look out! March is here! It's still possible to do some repotting if you have not already done so. Prior to the regular February meeting, Dawn Koetting, along with Dana Quattlebaum, conducted the February Study Group on repotting. There were a lot of questions as Dawn and Dana demonstrated a repot on an American elm bonsai. There were even a few gasps as Dawn used a battery-powered reciprocating saw to cut through the root mass!

Which brings me to a point that I would like to make before getting into the Monthly Tips for March… you miss out on a lot, if you are not attending the monthly Study Group. It is conducted from 6:00 to 7:15 p.m. every month, prior to the meeting, which begins at 7:30. Every month is a different topic. If you want to improve your skill level, knowledge and success, you should attend.

So let's talk a bit more about repotting. First, do not try to repot all of your trees this spring. Schedule repotting so that those needing immediate attention are handled first. Buds swelling on deciduous trees indicate that those trees are about to explode with new spring growth. That is the most optimum time to repot. It indicates that the sap has begun to move up the tree and new growth is about to begin. If you repot as buds are swelling, the tree will not miss a beat.

Second, there are some deciduous trees that can wait a bit longer if they need repotting. Those trees would include summer and fall flowering and fruiting varieties. Pomegranate, crepe myrtle and quince are a few that come to mind. For these species, you can wait until the new spring growth has flushed out and the leaves have hardened off for a couple of weeks.

TECHNIQUE **Tips**

Soil Mixes for Weak and Newly Collected Trees and Yamadori Aftercare

by Harry Harrington (bonsai4me.com)

Editors Note: Climate and growing conditions are very different in England and we need to adapt our soil, timing and care to local conditions. This article explains the possible need for different soil mixes and care for newly collected trees. In addition, in our area, Randy Bennett highly recommends spraying newly collected trees with Wilt Pruf to minimize transpiration.

Newly collected trees taken from the wild (yamadori), or gardens and hedges, have one thing in common with very weak bonsai. They have weak and/or poorly functioning rootballs. In the case of newly collected trees in particular, a huge percentage of the overall rootmass will have been left in the ground. The requirements of trees such as these are very different to those of established and healthy bonsai, and getting the soil conditions absolutely right makes a major difference to whether the tree survives.

This article does not describe what is the 'best' bonsai soil. There is a huge variation in growing conditions and climates across the world and from country to country, as well as variations in the requirements of different tree species. However, this article does describe the soil(s) I use for recovering newly collected, predominantly deciduous species in Northern Europe and some of the conditions I use, based on many years of collecting yamadori as well as 'treating' weak/sick bonsai.

The 'ingredients' for my soil are not necessarily available in shops however they can be sourced online with ease, using Google searches. The time spent doing this will reward you with trees that recover and bounce back into health!

Prepared soil mix for newly collected and/or weak trees (left) and a fast draining soil mix for bonsai (right).

I like to pre-mix the soil I will use for potting up newly collected trees. This ensures that I have enough soil in the garden ready for new trees, and also allows the soil-mix to 'brew' ready for use.

The soil-mix is based on large-grain horticultural pumice, in large 8kg bags that are then sieved into 7-15mm grains (above left) and 2-7mm grains (above right). I use the largest grains for weak and/or newly collected trees, topped off by a shallow layer of the smaller 2-7mm grains. The 2-7mm grains are also used for healthy bonsai, with species such as Olive, Pine and Juniper that require a drier, fast draining mix. Pumice has been used for many years by yamadori collectors for its ability to hold water and importantly, a lot of oxygen.

The large granules ensure that drainage is especially fast, something that is vitally important when placing a tree into the soil that has very limited uptake of moisture from its newly collected (weak) rootsystem. Smaller grains are more water-rententive and can remain wet for too long if the root system of a tree is inefficient.

Large grains of pumice will leave very small air-pockets between individual grains, and the release of moisture from each grain creates a tiny void of very humid air that new adventitious roots love to grow into. It is these voids of humidity that give a collecting mix the edge over ordinary bonsai soil mixes.

Once the large grains (7-15mm) of horticultural pumice have been sifted, I add the following ingredients:

1) Approximately 20% chopped bark 5-15mm. At the time of writing (November 2018), I use a product in the UK known as 'Melcourt Potting Bark' and sift it to remove smaller pieces.

2) Approximately 20% shredded sphagnum moss. I collect sphagnum moss from the area that I collect my trees from, cut it up very finely and add it to the soil mix. Sphagnum has long been used as a very useful aid to encouraging strong rooting in trees.

3) (Optional) A handful of Biochar (Activated Charcoal). Available online and in garden centres, activated charcoal has long been claimed to keep soil 'sweet' although there is some debate as to its true worth as a soil component. Biochar has additional ingredients such as seaweed, rice water and molasses that are a microbe haven and introduce a huge array of beneficial bacteria and fungi into the soil mix as a whole.

4) Chalk/Groundsoil (Optional). The vast majority of the groundsoil from around the rootball of the trees I collect

will fall away at the time of digging the tree. Essentially, the trees are 'bare-rooted' (but never washed). In these cases I introduce a small amount of the groundsoil, and pieces of the chalk bedrock that my trees grew on top of. This re-introduces useful bacteria and fungi from the actual collecting-site into the soil mix.

5) Cannazym (Optional). A product from the manufacturers of Rhizotonic, that is watered into the soil-mix. Cannzym prepares the soil, ready for newly collected trees, helping to colonise the soil mix with beneficial micro-organisms.

These three images compare the three different mixes I currently use for all of my trees and bonsai; 1) shows my collecting mix, as described in this article, with 7-15mm pumice grains. 2) Shows my medium grain mix (2-7mm pumice grains) for coniferous species and also as a topping for newly collected trees. 3) My mix for my healthy, refined deciduous bonsai contains small grains to encourage finer growth and ramification. It contains molar (sold as cat-litter), pumice and chopped bark with a grain size of 1-3mm. I then use a surface dressing of Akadama, primarily for its natural appearance.

Potting up and aftercare for newly collected and/or weak bonsai

The ideal container for newly collected trees is well-aerated and just big enough for the rootball to fit without unnecessary removal of roots. Milk crates or bread-baskets and wooden boxes are ideal for maximum airflow around the rootball. I also use plastic half-pots that have a relatively large surface area and use less soil for the shallow-rooted trees I often collect.

I apply an application of a product called Rhizotonic after potting up to encourage rooting, and then every 2-3 weeks for the following year.

The absolute ideal placement for newly collected deciduous trees (which is predominantly what I collect in the area of the UK that I live in) is away from frosts and rain, in a sunny position until leaf-burst, at which point shading is required for the remainder of the growing season. Soil heating via a soil-warming cable from the time of collection until leaf-burst is extremely advantageous as it increases warmth and humidity around the roots, encouraging them to grow.

Newly collected yamadori Hawthorn

A successful method of aftercare started by Spanish yamadori collectors is to place the entire tree, and its container, into a thin/cheap black binbag. This creates very humid conditions around the tree and some protection from the cold as well as wind and rain. Keep the tree inside the bin bag until after it comes into leaf. The humid atmosphere inside the bag will reduce transpiration/moisture loss from the leaves.

Has it survived?

Newly collected UK natives such as blackthorn, hawthorn and oak will nearly always come into leaf during the months after collection. However, they are able to do this using the stored sugars in their trunks and it is not indictive of survival. Trees that have not successfully begun to produce new roots will suffer a collapse of their new leaves and shoots around midsummer as temperatures rise. **Never purchase a newly collected tree that has not successfully made it through the heat of the summer!**

Newly collected yamadori Hawthorn

Yamadori that do suffer this collapse of new growth should not be discarded. It is not unusual for them to successfully bud out again once temperatures drop in late Summer and go on to survive.

A $2 Auction Tree

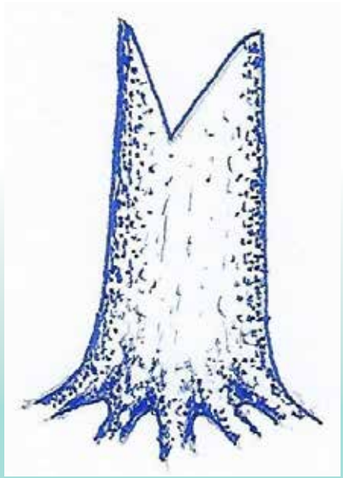
by Randy Bennett

At the August GNOBS Annual Auction in 2014, I happened to notice a Chinese elm in a rather large 15 gallon nursery pot. It stood about 5 feet tall in the pot and had never been worked as a bonsai. It was just a large nursery tree, with no branches until about three feet up the trunk. It had a decent sized diameter trunk, but more importantly, it had great radial roots. I thought it would make a great broom-style bonsai. And I liked the size of the trunk as it was, so the" growth-for-size" stage had already been done.

Because it was not a bonsai, or even a tree that had been cut back to one day become a bonsai, it was not brought up to the auction block until the very end. I suppose no one wanted it because it was just a large nursery tree, or maybe because it wouldn't fit in a car, but to me… it had potential. So my $2 bid was quickly accepted.

I did not do anything for the rest of 2014 except keep it watered and happy. In late January of 2015, the "growth-for-design" stage began and I cut the trunk back to a height of 10 inches above the nebari. At that time, the tree was about 3 ½" in diameter above the nebari. Sadly, and amid the many reprimands of my wife, I took no pictures of the tree when I bought it or of the initial "stumping" of the tree. It is all too typical of me. I get enthused about working on a tree and never give a thought to documenting the process. (I promise to work on it in the future.)

After setting the cut height, I sawed a "V" notch in the trunk, making one side smaller than the other, as see in the drawing below. Each side of the "V" would eventually form a trunk. This put the height of the main trunk at about 7" before dividing into two trunk lines. The cut area was sealed with cut paste. When buds began to appear in February, I rubbed off all but two; one at the apex on each side of the "V" notch that was cut.



I left the tree in the nursery container and began lightly fertilizing after the two new shoots were a few inches long and the danger of any freeze had passed. I allowed the shoots to grow unchecked and allowed secondary shoots to form several inches above where they had emerged from the trunk. The secondary shoots only served to help thicken each side of the two trunks.

They grew all year and reached a height of about 4 feet. In early February of 2016, I pruned the two trunks back to about 3 inches from where they had sprouted. The callous tissue had begun to roll over nicely into the "V" cut, to begin healing the wound.

I allowed the tree to grow with minimal pruning, removing only those shoots that were growing downward and pruning back the tips of branches that were growing too thick. I also did not allow any of the buds to remain that popped on the single main trunk. In late June of 2016, I again pruned away shoots and branches that were not contributing to the design of a broom-style bonsai and wired a few branches that I considered to be critical in the design to achieve proper directional growth.

By September of 2016, it was necessary to remove the wire. In January of 2017, I pruned the tree, removing unwanted branches and did minimal wiring. I continued to fertilize and keep the tree healthy. I pruned shoots that grew excessively long to keep the growth and development in balance. The larger of the two trunks was more vigorous and needed more restraining, while the smaller trunk was allowed to grow more freely.

In January of 2018, I pruned away unwanted branches and removed the tree from the nursery pot, did a severe root pruning and potted the tree into an oval, cream-glazed bonsai container. I used out typical bonsai 50/50 mix for deciduous trees. The bonsai container measured 24 inches across and 5 inches deep. I allowed the tree to grow unchecked for the entire 2018 growing season, since the tree needed to recover its strength after such a severe root-pruning.

In early February of 2019, I decided to prune and wire the tree completely. The photo below shows the trees' appearance before the work began. It still had not lost all its leaves, but they were removed before work began. At this time, the diameter of the trunk is almost 6" above the nebari. This begins the "growth-for-refinement" stage.

I decided to wire every branch, even though they will most certainly have to be removed only weeks after it

$2 Tree ***cont. pg 6***

$2 Tree *cont. from pg 5*

leafs out. Some of the secondary branches were growing at 90 degree angles from the main branches. Others were growing at a 45 and everything in between. I wanted to achieve more acute and consistent angles throughout the tree; something more like 25 to 30 degree angles.

The branches were thinned out and appropriate intermodal spacing was created by removing branches near the origins of secondary and tertiary branches. As branches were wired, they were moved to create a balance by filling in unwanted negative space and creating negative space that was deemed desirable in the design. Many of the dominant branches were shortened, while leaving weaker branches long to gain strength. In late September, growth hormones called "auxins" concentrate at the tips of branches. By pruning away the tips of strong branches, you stimulate auxins further down the shoots, causing back-budding to occur. By leaving weaker shoot-tips alone, you are allowing them to gain in vigor and begin to balance the energy among the shoots. The goal at this point is to begin equalizing the size and strength of each branch.

The photo below shows the tree after pruning and wiring was completed. During the current 2019 growing season, the tips of the branches forming the outer outline will be pinched and pruned to encourage back-budding and the development of greater branching in the interior of the tree.

The tree will be cut back rather hard in September, eliminating the long shoots and using secondary shoots from the 2019 growing season to become the new apices and begin achieving better taper and a more dense branch structure. The current canopy outline will be taken back to about half of what it is currently.

If success is achieved this year in balancing the vigor of new growth, the tree will be allowed to grow more freely next growing season. Balance of the vigor will be the focus each year and cutting back each year to develop greater density and ramification of branches. The ultimate canopy will be a little larger than the current outline. This should take about 4 to 5 more years.

However, the main reason for writing this article is illustrate what can be done with inexpensive material that no one else wants, as long as you have the vision of what a piece of material can be. You have to develop an eye for future design and look for at least one unique or important element that can be utilized in your creation.

SPECIES **Spotlight**

Dwarf African Strangler Fig, Ficus Natalesis

by Erik Wigert (wigertsbonsai.com)

Ficus natalensis
Also known as the natal fig tree

Characteristics:
Epiphytic or terrestrial shrub or tree, if epiphytic sometimes becoming a strangler. In favorable conditions can reach heights of 90 feet tall. Long leathery spatula shaped leaves.

Temperature:
Grows well between 59 and 75 degrees. However will tolerate hot summers in south Florida up to 95 degrees and above if properly watered. We do not winter protect our plants at the nursery and they tolerate drops to 38 degrees with no ill effects.

Watering:
Moderate, more required in hot summers, can reduce watering in winter. As with most ficus, natalensis is tolerant of being over or under watered making them ideal for beginners.

Feeding:
We use a 6 month time release fertilizer 18-6-8 with good results.

Pruning & Wiring:
Natalensis is suitable for most styles of bonsai. It readily forms aerial roots so it works well for root over rock and other such styles. Can be defoliated in the summer, this will cause some leaf size reduction. We have defoliated up to two times in the summer with good results. Wiring can be performed year round, and natalensis shoots for the most part are quite flexible. Natalensis like other ficus tends to outgrow wiring very quickly. Use one size heavier wire than is needed to reduce the risk of scaring branches if the wire is left on to long.

Repotting:
Repotting should be performed as needed and will be determined by the size of the pot. We usually repot every one to two years. Repotting can be performed from late February to late October here in south Florida. Natalensis can be heavily root pruned, but remember to balance this with foliage pruning.

Pests:
They will occasionally get scale however not as prone as other species of ficus. Very tolerant of pesticides, either foliar sprays or systemic. If using a foliar spray try to use in the evening to avoid leaf drop.

Editors Note: From personal experience with this species, it has EXTREMELY fast root growth (both regular and aerial). Keep an eye on on the bottom and sides of your pot. Roots will quickly jump the pot and adhere to your bench or anything else close.

meetings *cont. from pg 1*

GNOBS President Randy Bennett will lecture (with examples) on how to evaluate and select the best raw material for bonsai.
Bonus: Nursery stock material used as examples will be raffled off at the end of the meeting

Tuesday, May 14, 2019

Intermediate Study Group (for signed up participants)
6:00pm-7:15pm
Program: Open Workshop 7:30pm
Bring your own tree(s) to work on during the meeting. More experienced members will be available to assist you with styling and to answer questions.

Reminder: 2019 Dues are due!

March is the last month we send newsletters to unpaid members. Please pay your dues so you can continue to receive information on all the club news and events.

Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society
PO Box 381 Kenner, LA 70062

Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society Board