

# THE BONSAI Wire

May 2019

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

## FROM THE President



It's hard to believe that we are already into May. The last five months have

been packed with activities and events and so much is happening in the months ahead. I hope that our members will continue to take advantage of the opportunities being offered.

The 6 Week Beginner Bonsai Course is going well. We have already completed two weeks of the course. There are 19 participants. It is exciting to have so many people hungry to learn about bonsai. Next Monday's class will be on wiring. Byron Carr was kind enough to volunteer to put his carpentry skills to work and build 13 wooden "trees" made with three different sized dowels on a wooden base to help teach beginners how to properly wire a tree. I look forward to putting them to good use.

### HELP WANTED!

The last class of the 6 week course is on Monday, May 20th. For that class, the students will be taking raw nursery stock and



President cont.  
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## MEETINGS & Events

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

### Tuesday, May 14, 2019

**Intermediate Study Group 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.

### Thursday, May 16, 2019

**Azalea Study Group - 7:00pm- 9:00pm**

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.

### Saturday, June 15, 2019

**Creating Bonsai from Garden Center Stock**

**City Park Botanical Garden 9:00am - 12:00Noon**

Jim Osborne will conduct a three hour hands on workshop on bonsai basics. Workshop participants will create a juniper bonsai. Some of the more experienced GNOBS members will be assisting. Cost for the workshop (which includes the juniper and wire) is \$35.

For more information or to sign up, visit the Botanical Garden's website (in the calendar section).

<http://neworleanscitypark.com/calendar/category/garden>

### Friday, June 21, 2019

**Intermediate Study Group 6:00pm-7:15pm**

**Program: Pedro Morales Demo/Lecture 7:30pm**

Pedro Morales is an internationally renowned Bonsai Artist based in Puerto Rico with 30 years experience. Though adept at other species, he specializes in all species of tropical bonsai. GNOBS has been interested in having Pedro visit us for a long time and we were lucky enough to acquire his services right after he visits the Texas clubs. Don't miss this opportunity to observe a tropicals master!

*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](http://www.gnobs.org)

[facebook.com/NewOrleansBonsai](https://facebook.com/NewOrleansBonsai) [gnobs.org](http://gnobs.org)

# SPECIES Spotlight

## Bald Cypress as Bonsai (Part 2) (Typical Designs for Bald Cypress Bonsai)

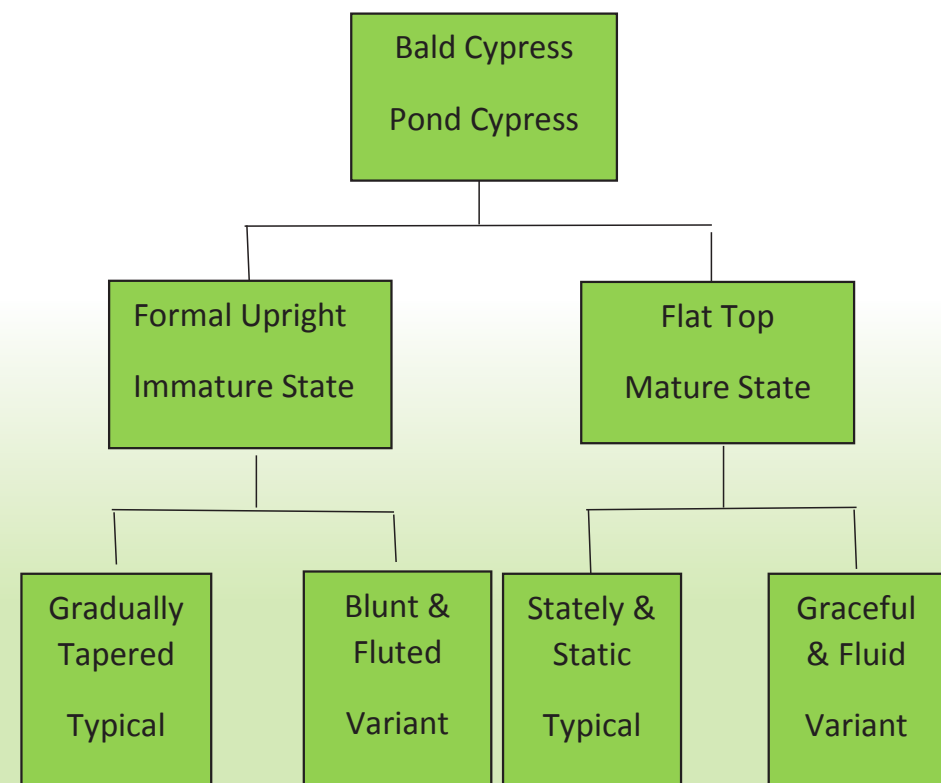
by Randy Bennett

*The following is the second in a series of articles on bald cypress as bonsai*

### Vaughn's Model For Possible Trunk Designs For Creating Bald Cypress Bonsai

**A**s we begin to think about bald cypress as a subject for bonsai, we need to think carefully and consider other growth habits of the species before coming to a decision regarding style. I was fortunate to have Vaughn Banting as one of my teachers and mentors. He spent many years studying the growth patterns of bald cypress. I too, have spent many years studying cypress, documenting their growth patterns as their canopies flatten out, as well as collecting and growing them as bonsai.

For the purposes of designing bald cypress as bonsai, Vaughn offered the following analysis in a program guide for BCI in '93.



In the "Formal Upright", or immature state, the tree has a conical shape, typical of a Christmas tree. And this form can be found in nature, most often as a tall, slender, gradually tapering tree. The branches of this form angle upward and continue to do so until the tree begins to reach a more mature state. As the tree matures, the outer two thirds of the long lower branches begin to arch downward from the weight.

In addition to the typical formal upright, immature form, it also exists as, what Vaughn referred to, as a "blunt and fluted variant". The blunt and fluted variant is a short, squat, formal upright cypress that has the buttressed and fluted base, typical of large cypress, but is very short. An excellent example of this can be seen in a small pond within the city limits of Alexandria, Louisiana, on Hwy 28. There are several bald cypress with massive, fluted bases, measuring four to six feet in diameter but only 10-15 feet tall. You will often see bonsai created after this type of variant to best illustrate the Formal Upright style. You can see several famous

examples of this in some of the bonsai photos below.

*Formal Upright, immature cypress in the typical, gradually tapered form*



On the "Flat Top" side, he describes the more typical flat top as being "stately and static", while the "graceful and fluid" structure is a seldom seen variant. The "stately and static" form embodies a perfectly straight trunk line. This is the form that is most often observed. The "graceful and fluid" form possesses a

trunk line that has slight movement in it. Although there are occasionally instances where cypress can be found growing in a slant style, this is extremely rare and, more often than not, is a result of the tree being slightly uprooted from a severe storm and does not represent a natural growth pattern.

Somewhere, around the 100 year mark, the conical-shaped juvenile form of the bald cypress begin to change shape as they transition into a more mature form.

What is often seen, especially on very old cypress, are flat-tops trees with hollow trunks, trees where the apex has died or broken off during a storm and a new apex has



formed and trees with severe shari extending down the trunk. Jin is also very common on mature bald cypress. The photo below shows an old cypress by Catahoula Lake, in central Louisiana. Its appearance has changed little during the past 40 years.

*Venerable old cypress at Catahoula Lake*

Below are examples of cypress grown as bonsai which typifies some of the growth patterns in trees of the "chokkan" or formal upright style of bonsai.



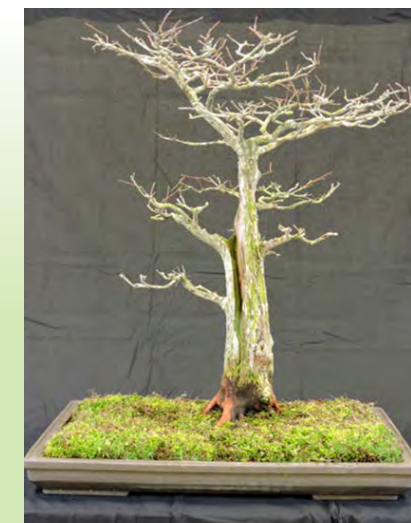
*Immature "Blunt & Fluted" Variant Form*

*Another of Vaughn's Bald Cypress Bonsai in "chokkan" style Immature "Gradually Tapered" Typical Form*



*Bill Valavanis' Bald Cypress with extensive "shari" and hollow trunk Immature "Blunt & Fluted" Variant Form where the original trunk line was destroyed*

*Jim Osbornes' Bald Cypress "flat-top" with hollow trunk Mature "Static & Stately" Form*





**Guy Guidrys' Bald Cypress "Twister" with spiraling deadwood Immature "Blunt & Fluted" Variant Form**

**One of Vaughn Bantings' Flat-Top Cypress Mature "Graceful & Fluid" Variant Form**



**Bald Cypress as a forest planting Immature "Gradually Tapered" Typical Form**

As you can see, they adapt very well to a variety of styles.

**An Ammended Model Of Possible Trunk Designs For Creating Bald Cypress Bonsai**

At this time, I would like to present, for your consideration, an expansion of Vaughns' model on bald cypress. The purpose of this variation is to not only denote the various patterns to which bald cypress may be styled as bonsai, but also to present a representation of physical development and change as cypress' mature. I do not do this lightly. Vaughn was a pioneer in developing flat-top bald cypress design and spent years documenting, photographing and drawing both juvenile and ancient specimens, as well as the many variations of cypress patterns as they transitioned from the juvenile form into more mature forms.

There are many who will be critical of me suggesting a modified version of his model. But Vaughn Banting was not only a mentor, but a good friend. And while he was indeed a pioneer, breaking new ground in the art of bonsai, like all pioneers who pave the way, I think he would be proud to see others build upon what he began. There are always others who follow the pioneers; those that build upon that hard work – not to diminish it, or change it for the sake of change, but hopefully, to add to the knowledge, to refine it and expand it. And to hopefully bring about a greater understanding and appreciation for the work that was begun. That is my intent.

What is apparent, is that juvenile, conical-shaped cypress, all transition into flat-top forms as they mature. Vaughns' model describes the various forms that bald cypress may take when styled as bonsai. He splits them into two categories: immature formal upright and mature flat-top design.

I would add that there are also blunt and fluted flat-top variants as well. Such specimens can be observed in the old Henderson Swamp outside Lafayette, Louisiana. These mature specimens are only 20 -30 feet tall, compared to their more common cousins of 100-150 feet in height. This design was not in Vaughns' original model, but such trees do exist. They are typically a little taller than what Vaughn recorded as the juvenile "blunt and fluted" variants, but it seems reasonable to conclude that the slight increase in height could simply be a result of another 50 to 100 years of growth.

Since juvenile forms, both "gradually tapered" and "blunt and fluted" variants eventually develop into mature flat-top forms, I would alter the model slightly to illustrate that development over time and include the

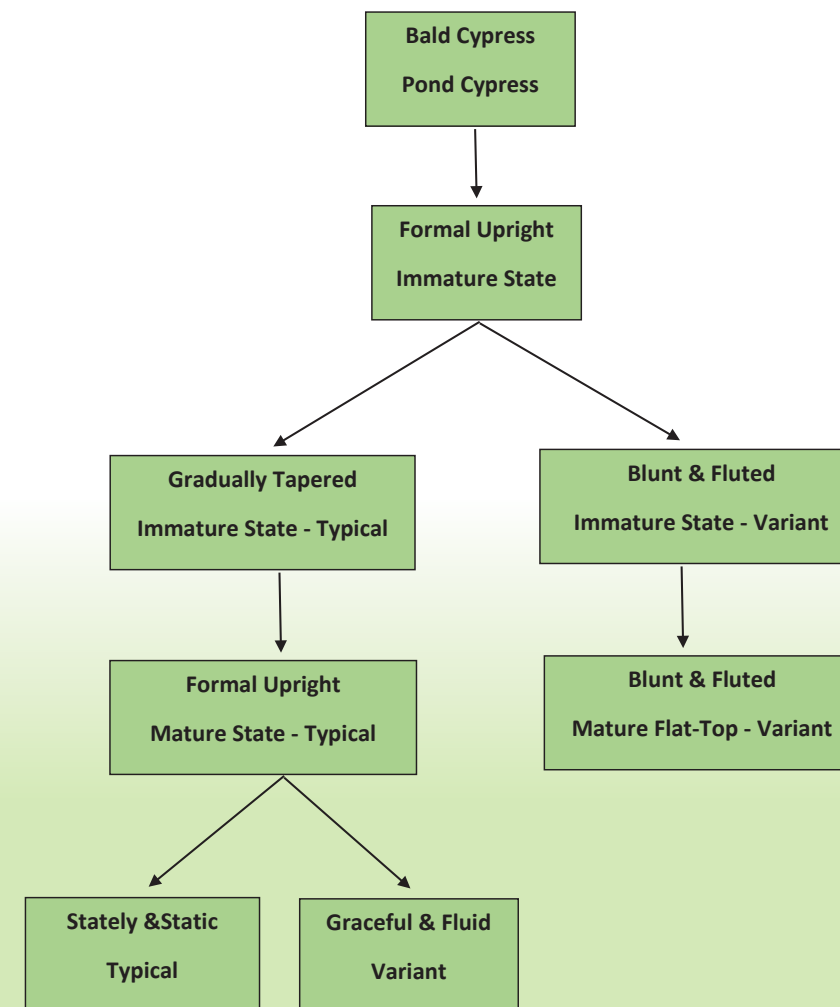
"blunt and fluted" mature flat-top.

The model below states that all bald cypress and pond cypress initially grow in a juvenile form that will either develop into a tall and gradually tapered (typical) form, or a short, blunt (atypical variant) form. Both of these growth patterns are initially an immature or juvenile stage of development.

Both will go through a multi-stage transition into mature, flat-top forms. Vaughn documented these transition stages and the various changes that took place in the branch structures of cypress while going through this process. We will examine them in some detail in the next article, along with how the apexes develop and that makes the bald cypress unique among other flat-top species around the world.

As the model below illustrates, the typical, gradually tapered, immature form, eventually develops into a mature flat-top. And that the gradually tapered flat-tops will either grow in the typical, "stately and static" form, or the occasional variant form that is "graceful and fluid"; possessing minor movement in the trunk line.

The immature, atypical "blunt and fluted" variant form will eventually develop into a flat-top. What I have attempted to do is to illustrate a logical progression of cypress from a juvenile, immature stages to a mature



flat-top form in the various patterns in which pond and bald cypress grow. There are therefore, five legitimate and completely different forms into which one may create bald and pond cypress as a bonsai.

**A Reflection On The Change From The Juvenile To Mature States**

In Vaughns' 1978 article "Bald Cypress: The Flat-Topped Style", printed in Volume 12, No. 3 in the Bonsai Journal, a publication of the American Bonsai Society, he stated that he saw bald cypress growing in two distinct patterns: the juvenile "Christmas tree" shape and the flat-top shape of mature trees. He further proposed that each of those patterns, in turn, developed into two other possible forms.

He was fascinated by what caused the cypress to completely change its growth pattern. He determined that competition for light was not the reason for the development of a flat-topped canopy. Specimens growing in open areas develop this trait when there is no need to compete for light. He wrote, "...after exploring most environmental variable, like wet and dry locations, climate, and various exposures, it appears that the answer is more genetic than environmental. It is as if they are programmed to change at some point in their lives. However, the age at which this change occurs seems quite variable too, and some sort of environmental stimulus may be required for them to realize this genetic potential for a flat-topped branch structure."

An example of this can be seen at the Baton Rouge Garden Center on Independence Blvd. There are two bald cypress growing right outside the building where the Louisiana Bonsai Society holds its' events. Both trees appear to have been planted at the same time, appear to be quite young and seem to be about the same age. One is very clearly in a pyramidal shape, in an immature state. The other would appear to be entering the first transition stage to a flat-top. The top of the main line of the trunk has begun to arch over and the primary and secondary branches emanating from the top portion of the trunk appear to be forming a new apex. The rest of the branching is the same as the cypress planted next to it. Of course, we will not know for certain for many, many years. But it would, at least, appear to be occurring.

What would cause this change at such a young age? Dave DeGroot found it fascinating as we left the center during the Mid-Winter Workshop

# QUICK Tips

## Raintree Defoliation

by Adam Lavigne  
Edited from his blog: adamaskwhy.com

I get this question often when I tell students to defoliate. They say,

“Where do I cut it?”

Well, on a **Brazilian Raintree**, such as is the subject today, here you go:

You’ll notice, just below my crudely drawn crosshairs, the new bud, tumescent and ready to burst.



And above my crosshairs, you see all those things that look like leaves? Well, those are called “leaflets” and the entire structure we are cutting off is the actual leaf. The eggheads call it a compound leaf.

Below, right where my finger is, is all that should be left after cutting off the leaf. Those same eggheads call that part of the leaf a petiole.

It’s really that simple. That’s how I defoliate all my trees. I don’t cut them in half, or thirds, I don’t stare at them menacingly and hope for backbudding....I cut so only the petiole is left (unless I’m being lazy I guess, and I get called out on that often).



## Screaming Trees

by Adam Lavigne  
Edited from his blog: adamaskwhy.com

This tree is screaming at me. Its almost deafening. It’s a ficus salicaria, the willow leaf fig. It’s screaming louder than the last time I spent too much time out with the boys and came home to find my wife, She Who Must Be Obeyed, rolling pin in hand and rollers in her hair, wearing her faded pink bathrobe and fluffy white bunny slippers, “explaining” to me that she was not pleased. Yeah....

I’ve seen many times on the Internet forums, from people not familiar with how trees and plants grow, the question “What’s wrong with my tree?! It’s getting yellow leaves and they drop off!”

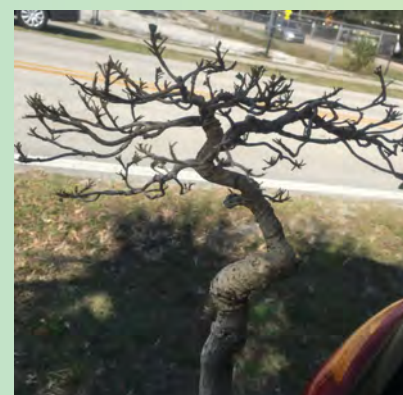
And, in no uncertain terms, this tree is dropping leaves. In terms of an organism with no mouth, tongue, lungs, or voice, I’d say it’s screaming. And, much as with ones wife, we should learn to, not only listen, but to understand what is being said.

What’s the tree saying? Well.....

Trees don’t keep their leaves forever. And, it being springtime, what’s a better time to change your wardrobe than when it’s time to start growing again?

In this case, instead of waiting for the tree to drop its leaves, we can move the tree forward a few weeks by defoliating. I’ll be leaving the growth tips. It’s early spring and leaving the tips on here will kick start the new leaf emergence.

I’ll just let it grow out for now. I should add a bit of fertilizer as well.



## Bonsai Tips for May

by Randy Bennett

1. The time is right for completing thread grafts and approach grafts if you have not already done so.
2. This month begins a prime four week window for taking cuttings.
3. Maintain your fertilization regimen.
4. Stay on top of potential pests. Routinely apply the appropriate pesticides or insecticidal soap to prevent damage.
5. By now, the leaves of most deciduous trees have hardened off and are ready to be cut back to the first set of leaves.
6. Check your watering. It is beginning to heat up and trees will be needing an increased amount of water. Check them daily!
7. If you have not already done so, move heat sensitive plants, such as Japanese maples, into shady locations.
8. Keep checking to make sure that your wire is not cutting in. Things can change on a daily basis. Stay on top of it!

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in January of 2019, and photographed the two trees. Both are approximately 20 feet in height and have a trunk base of about a foot, with no buttressing. Is it environmental or purely something in the genetics of the tree that causes this to occur? If it is environmental, why are both trees not being affected? Why would a tree begin to develop flat-top characteristics at such a young age and others not begin that process for a hundred years?

Why too, do the “blunt and fluted” variants exist? Is this a genetic mutation causing a semi-dwarf species? There remain many questions as to the cause(s) of these varied growth patterns. What remains for us as bonsai enthusiasts is to continue to study these patterns and expand our knowledge and understanding of bald cypress and how we can use these patterns to create authentic bald cypress bonsai.

1 Program Guide to Bald Cypress Forest – the Old and the New, Banting, Vaughn, Bonsai Clubs International, 1993.

2 Bonsai Journal of the American Bonsai Society (vol.12 no.3), “Evolution of a Man-made Flat Top”, Banting, Vaughn, 1978.

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**Saturday, June 22, 2019**

**Workshop: Pedro Morales 9:00am**

Pedro Morales will conduct a tropicals workshop. More details will be available at the meeting. The workshop may be a combination of Bring Your Own Tree workshop along with some trees available for member purchase.

**Sunday, June 23, 2019**

**Black Pine Study Group 9:00am - 12:00Noon**

1816 Fairfax Ave, Metairie, LA 70003 (Randy’s house)  
Discussion and hands-on activity will be candle-pruning

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creating their own bonsai using the knowledge and wiring skills they have learned through the course. They will take it from raw material to a styled design in a bonsai container. If you are available and willing to help, we could certainly use extra assistance for that class. They will need help seeing possible options in the material and through virtually every step of designing, pruning, wiring and repotting to carry their tree to a finished product (if bonsai are ever truly finished). We will start at 6:00 on the 20th for those who can come a little early in order to get a jump on the work at hand. The classes normally begin at 6:30. So if you can make it, your help will be greatly appreciated!



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