

# THE BONSAI Wire

April 2020

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

## FROM THE President

**W**

ell we're really in a unique state of affairs. It is my most sincere hope that everyone

is alright and in good health, especially your family members. Who knew that every single one of our lives could be turned upside down by something no one can see. Let us hope that this troubling health crisis will be over soon.

If you do not already know, the Spring Garden Show has been cancelled or at least postponed. I have not heard anything from City Park, but I am hoping that they will have an event in the fall. If they do, the GNOBS will hopefully be in a position to have a bonsai exhibit. If things are back to normal by the fall and it looks like City Park will not have a fall show, we will try and find another location to put on an exhibit for the public.

We will wait to see what happens in the next few weeks before making a decision whether or not to have a meeting in May. At the rate things are going, I am having my doubts, but time will tell.

In the meantime, follow the directions of our federal, state and local officials and stay safe and healthy.

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**Randy Bennett**  
GNOBS President

## MEETINGS & Events

*GNOBS Members*

*As you already know from the postcard and our email, club activities are cancelled for the moment. We will update you as things change and hope to resume our meetings and workshops as soon as the risk has abated. The board will continue to meet via email, texts and phone calls. We will miss all of our GNOBS friends, both the new ones and the ones we have known for many years, and hope to see you soon.*

*Stay safe!*

*The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society Board*

## Auction Request

We hope to have the GNOBS Auction on its scheduled date of August 15. As many of you are currently home, we ask that you use some of your time to work on your donations for the auction. Now is a great time to root cuttings for the bargain table, split accent plants, airlayer some branches you were thinking of cutting off and cull through your bonsai and pre-bonsai. Most of us have too many trees and too many of the same species. Take a critical and honest look at your collection. That tree that doesn't excite you or the one that confuses you from a styling perspective could become the jewel of another members collection. You could also purchase an inexpensive nursery tree and practice on it for donation. The auction is the primary source of income for the club and provides funds for the hall rental and guest artists. It will be particularly important this year to help fund the GNOBS hosted Louisiana Day of Bonsai.

*Thank you for all your auction generosity*

**Kathy Barbazon**  
GNOBS Auction Chair

**Acer platanum**  
'Kiyohime'



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)

# BONSAI Basics

## Logic, Proportion, Scale and Locomotives

By Vaughn Banting

*Note: The following article was written by Vaughn 30 years ago, but it is still incredibly relevant today. Vaughn was a mentor and friend and I think about him often. He taught me a great deal and was a source of inspiration. It is my hope that by reprinting this article, that he will be a source of inspiration to you as well.*

Randy Bennett

**N**o serious bonsai student can go very far in his art without understanding the concepts of proportion and scale. So let's understand them. Think of proportion as the comparative relation between parts of things with respect to their size. And scale as the proportion that a model bears to the thing it represents. The two are separate concepts, but absolutely connected.

Your bonsai is a model of a tree (and much more, but we must begin here). To make a good model, the proportions within the model must be equivalent to the proportions within the tree.

On the other hand, the scale you choose for your model will not affect how good or bad a model it is, but only the impact that the finished creation has on the viewer. In other words, you must ask yourself if the scale you choose works with the species you are using, etc. But your models will still be bonsai, even if you design in many scales.

Model train collectors set up models in their living rooms occasionally and debate the relative impact and realism imparted by each of the different scales that models come in. But they are all models of trains, regardless of scale. It may be argued that no model train can compete with the visual impact of a life-size locomotive, but most scale models do fit better in a living room.

Of course we know a good bonsai is more than just a faithful model of a tree. Or more accurately, less than a faithful model of a tree. Less because if we were to include all the branches in our bonsai creation that occur on its life-size counterpart, it would end up having the density of an anvil. And, of course, butterflies don't fly through anvils very well.

So our model must be, to some extent, representational in order for us to enjoy it within the proportions that we see in full-scale trees. This deviation from strict scale is what sets bonsai apart from model trains. That and the fact that model



trains can go months between watering.

Now let us return to proportion and see if this discussion will help us set parameters for appropriate scale in our bonsai. In understanding proportion, the focus is not on how big the



base of the tree is, but how it compares in size to the apex and branches. It is not how thick the trunk is, but how its thickness compares to the overall height of the tree. The thickness of your number one branch is less important than its proportion to the branches up near the apex of the tree. Fortunately, trees are very logical. More logical for instance than how words are spelled in the English language.

Branches at the top of the tree are younger and, therefore, thinner than branches found on older parts of the tree. In fact, by using logic, you can answer a lot of questions concerning proportion without even looking at a full-scale tree.

We use a proportion, or ratio, of one to six of trunk diameter and height respectively. We use this ratio to achieve dramatic proportions in bonsai. A twelve inch high bonsai should, therefore, have a basal trunk diameter of two inches. We rarely see trees in nature with this proportion (Bristlecone pines are a notable exception). But in attempting to recreate believable scale in miniature, we must deviate from strict proportion in the same way that we deviate from strict scale. Because of this deviation, the resultant bonsai has even more impact on the viewer than a full-scale tree. And unlike a full-scale locomotive, it fits nicely in a corner of the living room.

Now, must we use this one to six for our proportion in all bonsai? Not really. Full-scale trees (mustn't say real trees because, unlike model trains, our bonsai ARE real trees) come with lots of different proportions. It is convenient, however, to have a mean or guideline to go by. Cars are longer than they are wide. If you built one that was wider than it was long and drove it downtown, it just wouldn't fit into the normal traffic pattern.

We will conclude with a return to the subject of scale. Somewhere it says that bonsai shouldn't be any taller than 48 inches. I don't know who first said this, but it's why all of my bonsai are under 48 inches. He may be watching me, but for all purposes of discussion, let us say that 48 inches is as tall as tree models can be and still be regarded as bonsai.

At the other end of accepted height guidelines are the little

six inch size, or Shohin size bonsai (Mame' or "bean-size" bonsai will not be included in this discussion, as it would lead us into the subject of models of model trains. We'll leave Mame' scale and proportion to more knowledgeable devotees).

So now, how big is a full-scale tree? Here is the rough part. Everyone agrees pretty much on how big locomotives are. But although trees may be logical creatures, they are not conformists. There are big trees and little trees. Another reason why tree models, or bonsai, have so much individual character and come in so many sizes.

But let us say for the sake of discussion that a tree is normally 45 feet tall and has a trunk

diameter of three feet. So the largest scale we use in bonsai is the ration of one to fifteen, or 1/15th scale. The smallest scale would be 1/90th. Who cares? Right? This is beginning to sound like a dendrologist's thesis who later got into banking!

Actually though... it does matter.

The scale you choose for one species or style may not be appropriate for another. Consider a Japanese magnolia. Because they have large leaves, using a 1/90th scale would make the bonsai grotesque. Choosing a 1/15th scale for a Hokkaido elm would make the already small leaves look unnaturally small in relation to the tree's size. Again, we are concerned with the proportion while considering the scale.

Notice we got through this whole article with few 'must not's or 'must do's and not even one diagram to memorize. Rather than remembering charts, diagrams, ratios and rules of proportion, understand the concepts, then choose the appropriate scale as dictated by the species. Use logic to help arrive at good proportion. Be willing to deviate from strict scale and proportion so your bonsai have the magic of a painting – not simply the realism of a photograph.

Practice these things and you will go farther in your art and your trees will have greater visual impact than their full-scale counterparts. Oh, and since our model train devotees can never really go beyond simple realism in their models, do not be surprised to discover an occasional real locomotive in someone's living room!



# SPECIES Spotlight

Article courtesy of wigertsbonsai.com

## *Ficus retusa* – Melon Seed

by Jason Osborne

With more than 1500 species of Ficus, 800 of which are actual trees it is exciting to find a new cultivar to bonsai. The “melon seed” as we know is great bonsai material due to tiny leaves. I have found that the interior leaves may grow a bit larger when the tree is full due to less light. Keeping the tree pruned on a regular basis will help eliminate some of that.

Training for Ficus occurs almost all year long in south Florida with the majority of the work being done in the summer. Melon seed Ficus grow very quickly when the weather is warm and require constant pruning and wiring to achieve compact foliage. Once branches are established, to maintain shape, pinch out new leaf buds as they form. Remove large leaves completely or leave 1/3 of the leaf along with the petiole.

To achieve full pads and leaf reduction you must constantly work the tree. Watch for scarring when using wire, wire scars occur quickly especially after a repot as the roots are stimulated and the tree wants to grow quickly.

Repotting Ficus is recommended when the night time temperatures are above 65 and the trees are root bound or



making a transition from nursery soil to bonsai soil. Make sure that the tree is defoliated completely to balance the stress on the tree. Gentle root work will ensure a healthy recovery as well as placing the tree in shade for two weeks keeping the soil moist.

Ficus must be protected from cold temperatures. If the weather is predicted to drop below 40 degrees the trees need to be moved to a warmer location. Frost and freezing temperatures will severely damage or even kill the tree.

Ficus are susceptible to thrips, mealy bug, scale, white fly, and spider mites among others. Spider mites may be present when the foliage dulls or turns grey. Look under the leaves for the mites along with spider web like fuzz. Control Mites with Avid. Apply Talstar for white fly, mealy bug and scale. Conserve will protect against thrips.

Melon seed Ficus may be trained into any style the tree tells you. Depending on root structure, attitude of the trunk and overall size it lends itself to many styles.

### **Turtle Back Style or Stump Style- Korabuki**

Although this style is found in nature, the style is rarely seen

in Bonsai collections. This style is closely related to the clump style, except the base is swollen like a turtle shell. The surface roots of Ficus which sometimes swell into a bulgy base are the inspiration for this style. In the Korabuki style the number of trunks is uneven and the trunks never cross. The dominant trunk creates the focal point, and the smaller trunks support it.

### **Clump or Sprout style-Kabudachi**

The clump style is often found in nature where seeds from the same plant or seedpod germinate to form a cluster of young plants. These plants grow together and the base fuse together later on to form a tree with a single roots system but with several trunks. The various trunks develop later on as single trees. To be able to receive as much sun light the trunks grow sideways in some cases to form a multi trunk tree. In Bonsai this style can be imitated by planting multiple trunks close together. These plants will eventually fuse to give the appearance of a multiple trunk tree with one root system. Although the Kabudachi style evokes a feeling of tranquility and seems easy to create, it however is one of the most difficult style to master.

### **Guidelines for developing a multi trunk composition**

- When selecting trees it is important to select trees with different trunk lengths and widths.
- Trees can be grouped together in numbers of three, five, seven or more. The trees should be well developed beforehand.
- It is important that the trunks do not cross.
- In triple trunk compositions there are a few options. The major tree can be placed in the center or on the sides, also the minor tree can be placed in the center with larger trees on each side.
- The silhouette line forms a harmonious unit, and it could be triangular, dome or flamed shaped. The dominant trunk is the tallest and thickest, while the others become gradually smaller and shorter. The various crowns or apexes must be well developed.

**Reminder: Club Discount**  
GNOBS has acquired a club discount with American Bonsai Tool & Supply Co. (AmericanBonsai.com). All club members can receive a 10% discount by using the discount code GNOBS10 on the checkout page. There is no minimum purchase required to receive the discount and shipping is FREE on orders over \$99.

**American Bonsai is known for their high quality stainless steel tools. They also sell pots, supplies, soil, wire etc.**

## *Bonsai Tips for April*

by Randy Bennett

April is my favorite month of the year. Everything has leafed out and the green of the leaves is so vibrant and fresh. This is the month where you need to begin a regular schedule of maintenance.

1. Insects are now active and beginning to do damage to foliage. Start a regimen of applying insecticide to combat these pests. Be sure and spray underneath leaves and not just the upper surface.
2. I have already begun to see fungus on a few elm leaves. The key to keeping your trees healthy is to start applications before the damage is done. Follow package directions and set up a regular schedule of application.
3. If you applied wire during the winter months, start checking it every couple of days. At the rate of growth, it will not take long for wire to cut in.
4. With all the active growth taking place, you will need to begin increasing the amount of water to your trees. But remember to monitor the soil – that is something you should always do.



### **Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society**

PO Box 381 Kenner, LA 70062

President: Randy Bennett 504-402-3646 (cell) 504-888-7994 (home) ourproperty4u@gmail.com	Recording Secretary Peggy Howard 504-715-7228 peggylh@cox.net	Hall Manager Cheryl Mechler 504-452-1222 mechler465@att.net
Vice-President: Dennis Burke 504-224-0038 (cell) dpbonsai@yahoo.com	Newsletter/Website Editor Kathy Barbazon 504-470-8134 (cell) 504-737-6747 (home) kbarbazon@me.com	Past President: Peggy Howard
Treasurer: Dawn Koetting 985-859-3400 (cell) dkoetting@msn.com	Masters Program Director: Jim Osborne 504-458-6956 (cell) wevoodoo@cox.net	