

THE BONSAI Wire

August 2020

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

FROM THE President

The July meeting was well attended for a regular club meeting night. We had about 20 members in attendance. The meeting consisted of a 'bring your own tree' workshop, with tropicals making the strongest appearance, since this is the best time to work on them. A lot of varied material showed up to be worked on and I think everyone enjoyed getting back to work on their trees with other enthusiasts.



We had two people at each table to comply with social distancing guidelines and everyone wore masks. And I would just

President cont. pg 8



MEETINGS & Events

Attendees at our regular meetings will be required to wear a mask. Due to social distancing guidelines, we will not be able to conduct the study group at 6:00pm. With that activity being postponed for the time being, our regular meeting time will be moved up half an hour to 7:00pm.

Tuesday, August 11, 2020

Program: Root Development by Dennis Burke 7:00pm

Dennis will do a lecture/presentation on developing good nebari and correcting root problems. Bring any trees for which you need root advice or examples where you have corrected nebari issues.

Tuesday, September 8, 2020

Program: Preparing your Tree for Exhibition by Dawn Koetting and Randy Bennett 7:00pm

Dawn and Randy will do a presentation on preparing your tree over an extended time period for exhibit as well as matching trees with complementary pots, accent plants and stands for the best presentation.

Louisiana Day of Bonsai CANCELLED

It was determined that, with the steady increase in Covid-19 cases, it was unwise to proceed with the conference. We hope that the other clubs around the state will understand and give the Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society the opportunity to host the event in October of 2021.

Tuesday, October 13, 2020

Program: How to Collect Bonsai Material by Randy Bennett 7:00pm

Randy will lecture on the proper way and times to collect material and how to care for it post-collection as well as discussing the planning of future development. Members should bring in any collected trees for advice on further development.

Meetings cont. pg 4

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

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

Restyling a Juniper

By Randy Bennett

The juniper depicted in this restyling is a Parson's juniper (*Juniperus parsonii*). The tree was originally part of landscape in someone's yard and was going to be dug up and discarded by the homeowner. It was brought to me for the initial design and was originally styled as a twin-line semi-cascade. The owner maintained the tree for a number of years. The specimen had a 4 inch base with a fair amount of jin and shari that I created in the initial styling. Unfortunately, neglect had weakened the tree. Some of the branches had died and the original styling design had become lost.

Six years later, I was approached about wiring and styling the tree a second time, the tree was weak and the branches were quite "leggy" with little interior growth. In order to get the tree healthy enough for a redesign, it was left with me and was fertilized well and allowed to grow without any pruning for another year in order to ensure its strength and to try and promote some back-budding.

The photo below shows the tree after a year of a fertilizer regimen using Bio-Gold organic fertilizer and fish emulsion and no pruning or wiring. At the time of the photo below the height of the tree was 20 inches above the rim of the pot and it had a width of almost 40 inches. It was potted in a large mica pot.



The photo below shows the tree with the original front.



This is another photo showing the tree from the opposite side



This is a photo of the trunk taken from the right side and from underneath the canopy. It shows some of the jin. The left side of the tree has a large shari that extends from just below the apical leader all the way down to the soil level. The bark had been brushed with a stiff wire brush immediately prior to this photo being taken.



Whether you are going to work on a tree for the first time or work on one that has already been designed as a bonsai, never look at a tree from the original potting angle alone. Examine the tree from every possible angle. It is your job as the artist to discover the best presentation of the tree from a visual perspective.

After looking at the tree from many different angles, a new front was chosen. The entire angle of the tree was changed in order to present the viewer with a more interesting line of movement. **The photo below shows how changing the potting angle and reversing the viewing direction enhances the visual impact.** The new front was chosen from this angle but with a slight rotation to make the shari visible.



In our wet climate, deadwood does not last long if it is not treated properly. Moreover, shari that extends down to the soil line will rot even faster, due to the daily watering and the dampness of the soil. There are various products that can be used to preserve dead wood. In this case, I used Wood Hardener by Min-Wax. To achieve the bends necessary for the new design, raffia was applied to several branches which were then wrapped with several coils of copper wire. If you look closely or enlarge the photo, you will be able to see that a steel rod was wired to the trunk and a guy-wire attached to pull the apex into the proper position. Rubber pads were placed between

Juniper cont. from pg 3

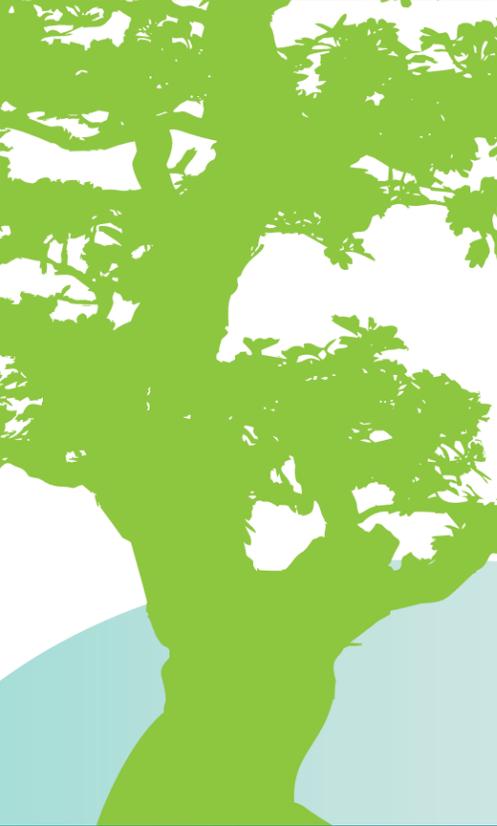
the steel rod and the trunk to prevent damage. Using a steel rod in this fashion enables you to get a bend that raffia and heavy wire alone will not achieve.

Wiring the branches enabled the creation of multiple layers of foliage. The new design is a slanting style and the scalene triangle outline is maintained. The pot selected was a 4 inch deep, 18 inch wide, unglazed rectangle with indented corners. The reddish color of the pot was chosen to accent the reddish color of the bark.

The photos below show the appearance of the tree before the redesign and after. The transformation took one full day.



The finished height of the tree with the new design is 32 inches high and 36 inches across. Completely changing the design is not always necessary in a redesign or restyling, but in this case, the change greatly improved the beauty and value of the specimen.



Meetings cont. from pg 1

Tuesday, November 10, 2020

Program: Black Pine Lecture by Randy Bennett 7:00pm

Black pine can be one of the more beautiful species - and also one of the more challenging. The presentation will cover basic care as well as the various procedures that need to be performed to develop a black pine and the yearly schedule of care and development.

BEGINNER Basics

A Practical Guide To Fertilizing Your Bonsai

By Harry Harrington (bonsai4me.com)

This article was originally published in *Bonsai Focus* magazine May/June 2019

Editor's Notes: Harry Harrington is based in England - so timing will of course be different in our area.

Also - "Fertilizer" is the English spelling of Fertilizer.

high phosphorous levels in a fertiliser, we can encourage flowering at the expense of vegetative growth.

It is however very easy to get bogged down with complex feeding regimes and variations of fertiliser components. My personal opinion is that, in terms of regularly feeding an entire bonsai collection on a season-long basis, there is too little difference between many fertiliser products and it is easier and only necessary to follow a simple and straightforward fertilising regime. Particularly when one then considers that any slight advantage in one product over another can easily be lost to the weather, heavy rainfall or poor watering practises.

The intention of this article is not to provide an exhaustive text on the chemical and biological pro's and con's of any given preparation, nor is it intended as a primer for fertiliser as these are widely available in books and online. Rather, I hope, a practical guide to getting the best out of your trees by giving them a solid fertilising regime.

Types of Fertilisers for bonsai

Slow-Release Organic Fertilisers

Slow-release organic fertilisers are available as pellets that are laid on the surface of the soil. As the tree is watered, the pellets break up and are absorbed into the soil itself. This means that they are not left on the soil surface attracting the local wildlife and looking an unsightly mess!

Although slow-release organic fertilisers are relatively weak, with a NPK of around 3-3-3, they are composed of natural ingredients that are broken down by bacterial and fungal activity in the soil, slowly releasing their nutrients on a continual basis and this means that nutrients are always available to your trees. Compare this to liquid chemical feeds that maybe as strong as 20-20-20 at their peak, but are rapidly dispersed from our inorganic soils during rain and watering. Organic fertilisers are also just that, they add an organic, microbial element to our largely inorganic modern soils and this helps create a healthier ecosystem within a bonsai pot.

Unless temperatures are reliably above 12C (53F), plants do not start absorbing Nitrogen. This fact leads to a number of interesting conclusions. Firstly, fertilisers can be applied to the soil at the time of leaf-burst, typically when daytime temperatures just reach double figures, but they are still not utilised until the tree is ready.

Secondly, organic fertiliser still present in the soil as temperatures drop back down to single figures in the Autumn after the growing season is left unused, and remains locked up in the soil until the following Spring. There is no requirement to feed a low Nitrogen 0-10-10 fertiliser at the end of the growing season as the tree stops absorbing Nitrogen anyway.



Applying slow-release fertilisers to my bonsai in the garden in Spring.

Bonsai need water, air and sunlight in order to photosynthesis and grow.

The combination of these 3 elements is enough for a tree to manufacture the sugars and starches it requires from its leaves. As the keepers of these trees, we can govern how a tree grows, to an extent, with the use of fertilisers. Fertilisers are to our bonsai what vitamins and nutrients are to our children. The better the quality of nutrients they absorb, the better they grow!

We can influence strong vegetative growth using high nitrogen feed, or tight, fine growth using low nitrogen. Using



Slow-release fertiliser pellets.

Fast-Release Liquid Chemical Fertilisers

Fast-Release Liquid Chemical Fertilisers are diluted with water and applied to the soil as one would when watering their trees. I typically use a regular brand high nitrogen fertiliser intended for trees and plants and available in supermarkets and garden centres.

Liquid fertilisers are applied at regular intervals according to the manufacturers' recommendations on the product (typically 10-12 days), and should be considered a short-lived 'boost' to your trees that require strong and vigorous growth and where coarse growth is not an issue. Within hours of application, the levels of the fertiliser in a modern inorganic soil will have started to deplete. This is particularly true after watering and during rainy weather. It is possible that within days the level of chemical fertiliser can become very low and nutrients are no longer available to the tree until the next application.

Note that while it is very very difficult to over-feed a tree with slow-release organic fertilisers, mixing fast-release chemicals at a higher strength than recommended can cause fertiliser-burn.

Feeding Regimes For Bonsai

How you feed your bonsai and bonsai collection as a whole is dependent on the types of growth you require, and how much time you are willing to invest every couple of weeks throughout the growing season, actively feeding your trees.

The most straightforward, all-encompassing fertilising regime is to apply an organic, slow-release fertiliser to the soil surface every 6-8 weeks throughout the growing season. That is, when your trees are actively growing. This will make a healthy mixture of Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium plus trace elements available to your trees from Spring until Autumn.

For a very basic feeding regime, an application of fertiliser to all trees in Spring, and a second at midsummer will keep them adequately fertilised for an entire growing season. This basic feeding regime should be considered essential to keep any bonsai collection healthy and vigorous.

However.....you can start to encourage different types of growth for different bonsai in different stages of growth by using combinations of fertiliser at different times. For the sake of simplicity, I will divide the typical range of trees in a bonsai collection into 5 types. Coniferous species

(Pines and others), deciduous species and flowering species. Trees in development, from raw material upwards, and fully developed trees in need of refinement with short internodes and no coarse growth.

Deciduous Trees In Development

If a deciduous tree still requires growth to build either the trunk, or the primary and secondary branches, then a heavy feeding regime with plenty of Nitrogen can be employed. I use a base feed of 3-3-3 organic fertiliser, applied to the soil surface every 6 weeks from leaf-break to early Autumn. A high nitrogen 20-20-20 or even 24-8-16 liquid feed is then applied every 12-14 days (in addition to the slow-release fertiliser). This is applied from leaf-break until late Summer when growth on deciduous trees typically slows. This "super feeding" will encourage very rapid growth, vigour and development in healthy trees.

For species that typically exhibit very coarse growth in Spring, I will wait until the first flush of growth has hardened off before beginning liquid feeds. This discourages unusably-coarse elongation in particularly vigorous trees that would simply need to be removed at a later date, particularly when developing secondary branches. Once the Spring flush has occurred, further flushes are naturally shorter and repeated fertilising with high nitrogen liquid fertilisers is started.

Deciduous Trees In Refinement

Finished deciduous tree require much more refined growth with short internodes. However, we ideally want them to still be vigorous and offer repeated flushes of growth each year in response to pruning and defoliation.

For naturally vigorous species I hold back from using any fertiliser until the first flushes of Spring growth have finished, then an organic fertiliser is applied every 6 weeks for the remainder of the season. Once midsummer has been reached and any (partial) defoliation has taken place, I then start to additionally fertilise with a high nitrogen fertiliser to encourage as many repeat flushes of growth as possible.

If you feel that elongation on any particular tree is too long, withdraw the liquid fertiliser.

Flowering Species

Some flowering trees will flower regardless of our fertilising regime. Some such as hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), pyracantha and blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) are much more reluctant to flower. Care should be taken to avoid feeding these species with high nitrogen liquid fertilisers from late Summer onwards as nitrogen will encourage vegetative growth at the expense of flowers.

Coniferous Species Excluding Pines

Feed with organic slow-release fertiliser from early Spring, indicated by deciduous trees coming into leaf and the soil of Junipers beginning to dry out rapidly for a 2-3 week period. It is especially important that coniferous species have an added organic element to their soils due to their reliance on microbial activity.

Additional liquid fertilisers can be applied from late Spring

onwards to encourage elongation, as necessary. Be aware that high nitrogen will encourage juvenile growth in Juniper types that are susceptible to it.

Pines/Pinus species

This feeding regime is based on the fact that in the UK and Northern Europe, all pine species can be considered to be one-flush pines. We have neither the temperatures or length of growing season for pines to have two true flushes of growth.

Fertilising a pine as the buds elongate into candles in Spring will encourage longer candles followed by longer needles. If short needles and refined growth are required, withdraw fertiliser until the needle-size is set, around midsummer.

If strong and vigorous growth is required at the expense of having longer needles, for instance when developing trunks, fertilise with organic and/or liquid fertiliser from early Spring onwards.

Typically, Pines are worked on from late July onwards, being pruned, needle-plucked and wired. At this point the needle-size of the current year is set and we want to prompt a vigorous response to late summer pruning and also to fuel production of new buds for the following year. For all pines, an application of organic fertiliser should be applied from late Summer, and for those requiring maximum development, liquid feeds can be applied through until early Autumn when ambient temperatures drop and Nitrogen is no longer required by the tree.

Sick and weak trees including newly collected yamadori.

Fertilisers are not 'plant medicine' and feeding a weak or sickly tree with fertiliser will not make it healthy. Applying fertiliser during this time can have the reverse effect and damage the tree further.

For a similar reason, only start fertilising a newly collected tree when it has actively recovered from the trauma. Fertilising too early will not help the tree survive, rather it may kill it.

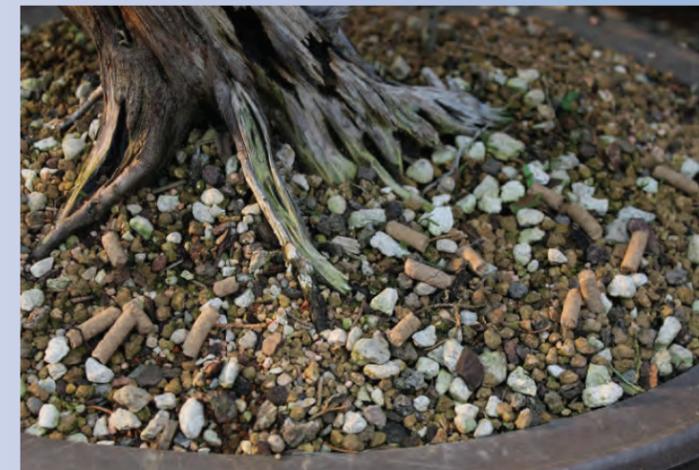
Too much fertiliser/fertiliser burn.

Always follow the manufacturers recommended dilution rates and feeding intervals. By doing this you avoid the possibility of scorching the roots of your tree.

Where trees that have too much unused nitrogen locked up in the soil and are in danger of being overfed, the soil surface will develop a dark-green colour (not to be confused with moss!). This can occur with species and individual trees that require less Nitrogen than normal, such as Elms (*Ulmus*) and Legumes (members of the pea family). In these cases, simply withdraw repeated high nitrogen liquid fertilisers.



Slow-release organic fertiliser pellets



The slow-release fertiliser pellets applied to the surface of the soil. It is not necessary to use many pellets as they will swell to 2-3 times their size once watered. The pellets can be spread evenly throughout the soil as shown here. Or located in specific areas to encourage root growth from the nebari/trunk base or towards the edges of the pot.

Water-in the pellets well and then leave them for 10-15



minutes while they absorb moisture and swell. Once swollen, the pellets can be watered again to encourage them to enter the soil itself.

Some tree species such as this Sabina Juniper require a very large-grained, open, fast draining soil that cannot be routinely changed. For trees such as these, the fertiliser pellets can be inserted into empty tea-bags and placed on the soil surface.

When the tea-bags of fertiliser are watered, they take the nutrients into the soil.



like to express my sincere thanks to everyone for understanding and cooperating with the parish guidelines. We supplied water and soft drinks in individual bottles to avoid multiple people handling the large two-liter bottles. And we supplied the usual individual packs of chips and cookies. And much to the chagrin of Felix, we opted not to have coffee to avoid multiple people handling cups, sugar, creamer and the coffee dispenser. It may be overkill, but the Board would rather err on the side of caution where our members are concerned.

For those of you who did not attend because you are still uncomfortable meeting in a group, we certainly understand and look forward to when you feel you can rejoin us. For those of you who did not attend because you refuse to wear a mask, we understand your distaste for the powers that be telling you how to run your life in a free America. We, likewise, look forward to your return to our meetings.

Again, our focus is on doing everything we can to ensure member safety. We hope you understand.

August Meeting

The August meeting will begin at 7:00 pm. There will be no 6:00 study group until further notice.

The meeting will be conducted by Dennis Burke who will present a program on Developing Rootage. He will talk about and show examples of various methods that can be employed to enhance the nebari on your bonsai. You won't want to miss it!



And if you have any trees that you can show us that have had root enhancement techniques successfully applied, please bring them to share with everyone. It is the sharing of ideas – the sharing of successes as well as failure - that enable our members to improve their skills and increase their knowledge.

Louisiana Day of Bonsai in October

As of the writing of this newsletter, the Louisiana Day of Bonsai, scheduled for the 17th of October, has been cancelled. It was determined that, with the steady increase in Covid-19 cases, it was unwise to proceed with the conference. We hope that the other clubs around the state will understand and give the Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society the opportunity to host the event in October of 2021.



Randy Bennett
GNOBS PRESIDENT

August Bonsai Tips

By Randy Bennett

By this time, the growth on most of your bonsai has either slowed down considerably or has ceased altogether due to the heat. It is as much a factor of heat on the leaves as it is heat in the soil. Pots get quite hot in summer and the dark color of soil will absorb heat as well. When roots get stressed by heat, the leaves will also show that stress.

This is often a good time to provide your bonsai some extra comfort by moving them to a more shady location. This is particularly true with trees in very shallow containers. For many species, the pots get so hot that the roots touching the sides of the pot on the inside, can actually get damaged.

Soil will also dry out quicker this time of year, which can also add stress to your trees. Water more frequently. If you have an automatic mist system set it to provide additional moisture throughout the day.

Because it is hot, we tend to do more overhead watering. That's fine, but remember that it also promotes the growth of fungus on leaves, particularly any new and tender growth. So do not neglect weekly spraying of a fungicide if your tree needs it. Just remember not to spray during while the leaves are in direct sunlight.

Pruning should be kept to a minimum, with the exception of tropical bonsai. If you have any flowering bonsai, pruning them now may remove flower buds that are now forming for next spring.

Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

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