

# THE BONSAI Wire

November 2020

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

## FROM THE President

I want to thank everyone who attended the October GNOBS monthly meeting. I regret that we didn't have time to get around to everyone's trees that were brought. But I feel like we had some good discussions and I hope the information that was shared about how to collect and care for collected trees was beneficial. There is a great deal of satisfaction that comes from finding a tree growing in nature, collecting it and transforming it into a bonsai.

We are excited to have as our guest in November, Mike Lane. Mike works at Wigert's Bonsai Nursery in Florida, where he teaches classes and helps to style and care for the bonsai specimens at the nursery. He has won numerous awards for his bonsai creations and we are indeed fortunate to have him visit GNOBS.



Mike will be traveling to Louisiana to attend the Fall Bonsai Show in Baton Rouge on the weekend of November 14th. He

President cont. pg 5

## 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.**

### Friday, November 13, 2020

**Program: Lecture and Demo on Shohin by Mike Lane 7:00pm**

#### 2021 GNOBS Board Elections

Though GNOBS can still not do workshops due to social distancing, we are pleased to announce that we will have a lecture and demo on Shohin by Mike Lane. Mike studied and worked under Erik Wigert and had additional training with Mauro Stemberger, Min Lo, Robert Steven, Vlad Novak, and Enrique Castano. He began teaching and doing workshops in 2012. He specializes in Shohin and tropicals.

### Tuesday, December 8, 2020

**Program: Annual GNOBS Christmas Party 7:00pm**

Bring your spouse or plus one for our annual Christmas party. After discussion with club members on the best way to provide a safe experience for everyone, Gerald Nolan generously volunteered to cook our Christmas dinner. Board members will do the serving gloved and masked. Water and soft drinks will be available as well as wine. If you prefer to bring your own wine you are welcome to do so. Everyone attending gets a free raffle ticket for some great door prizes. **In order to buy the appropriate amount of food, we would like to get a head count as soon as possible. Please RSVP to [kbarbazon@me.com](mailto:kbarbazon@me.com) or sign up at the meeting.**

### Tuesday, January 12, 2021

**Program: Silhouette Show 7:00pm**

The Silhouette Program is a study of branch ramification and evaluation of plans for further development of our deciduous bonsai. Bring in a deciduous tree for display and discussion. If you don't have a deciduous tree, you are welcome to bring in any tree. Advanced members will make suggestions to further refine your trees.

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

## Louisiana Native Species as Bonsai Part 2: Swamp Maple (*Acer rubrum*)

By Randy Bennett

In the South, we call it Swamp Maple. To the rest of the country, it is referred to as Red Maple, Soft Maple, Scarlet Maple, Carolina Red Maple, Water Maple and Drummond Red Maple. The Onadaga Indians of what is currently the state of New York, called it “ah-wah-notkwah:, which means “tree of the red flower”. It is *Acer rubrum*, regardless of whatever else it may be called and it is prolific in the eastern half of the United States.



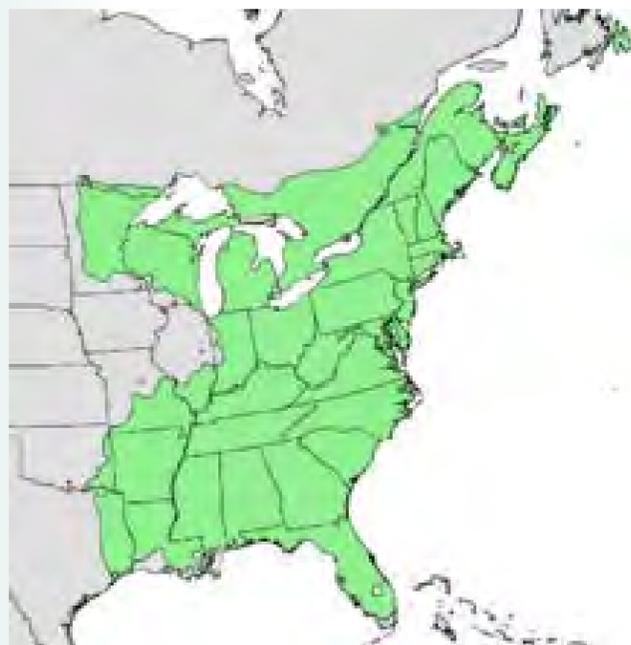
### Habitat

Its' range extends from southern Florida, north to Nova Scotia and from the east coast west to southern Ontario, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois. Below is a range map showing where it grows in nature.

It is common to wetland areas and here, around the New Orleans area, it is as prolific in the swamp as bald cypress. Many foresters consider the tree inferior and undesirable because it is often poorly formed and defective, especially when found growing in wetland areas, where it is in

competition with other species. On good sites, however, it may grow fast with good form and quality for saw logs. Red maple is a subclimax species, which means that it can occupy overstory space but is usually replaced by other species. This is what we typically see around New Orleans, although one can observe them competing well with bald cypress. However, the cypress will ultimately overcome them with regard to height. It is classed as shade tolerant and will produce prolific sprouts.

While it is prolific in the swampland areas of the southern United States, it will not tolerate having its' trunk base constantly underwater like bald cypress. It prefers higher ridges of soil, but most assuredly like to have its' “feet” wet.



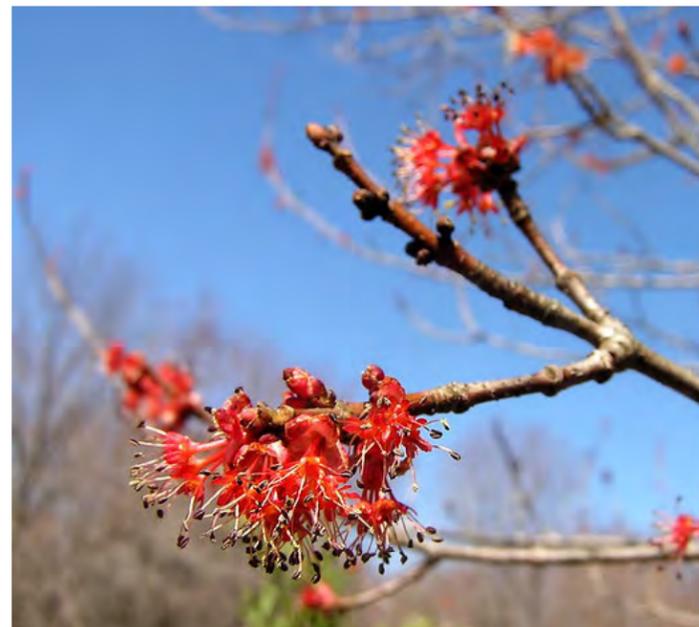
### Characteristics

It typically has red petioles, red twigs, red flowers and red seeds. In the fall, depending on temperature, the foliage will range between yellow, orange and red. Here in the New Orleans area, we tend to see more yellow and orange. The farther north one goes, they take on more of the bright red and scarlet hues.

In our area, it is the first sign that spring is not far off. Due to our moderate winters, Swamp maples may, in fact, flower more than once, creating what we refer to as a “false spring”. We will have a period of warm weather, causing the trees to partially flower, only to be followed by some very cold temperatures, sending the Swamp maples back into another dormancy. Then, when temperatures rise back into the 70's,

more of the flowers will shoot forth.

The photo below shows the Swamp maple in bloom. In our area, this begins to occur in mid-February and continues into March. Swamp maples begin to bloom before anything else leafs out in the wetlands around New Orleans and creates a beautiful display of bright red. If you look at the photo below, you will observe that some of the flower buds have opened, while others remain closed. If warm weather persists for an extended period, all of the flowers will open. However, if the warm weather is followed by a cold snap, the remaining buds will sit tight until it warms up again.



The seeds quickly follow the flowers. They will germinate with very little light, do not require pre-germination treatment, like other maples and only require moisture. About 80% of the seeds will germinate in only 2 to 6 days. My granddaughter was playing “helicopter” with the seeds in my driveway a little over a week ago. There are now swamp maple seedlings popping up in my flower beds and in my bonsai pots!



Swamp maple initially grow in a pyramidal form when a sapling and only growing for height. However, they quickly start to spread their canopy into a more rounded shape. Mature trees tend to average between 40 and 70 feet. However, given

enough room, they can grow much larger. Currently, the largest Swamp maple recorded is currently near Armada, Michigan. It is 125 feet high and over 16 feet in circumference.

The branches are ascending, which allows bonsai practitioners to use more clip-and-grow techniques while training and rely less on wiring. The exceptions to this are, of course, if you are trying to create specific bonsai styles such as informal upright, wind-influenced, formal upright, slanting, semi-cascade, etc. The natural form would be more broom-like, with a round canopy.

A couple of interesting side notes: while Swamp maples grow in a wide range of environments and climatic conditions, they are genetically pre-dispositioned to their native habitat. For example, while Swamp maples grow wild in Nova Scotia and survive temperatures of 40 degrees below zero, a Swamp maple transplanted from the southern states to the north will not survive. Another interesting observation is when Swamp maples grow in wetland locales, the do not develop tap roots and their surface roots tend to widely spread, while Swamp maples growing on drier ground will develop strong taproots.



The leaves occur in pairs, opposite of one another along the stems. They are mainly three-lobed, but may also occur with five lobes. When they occur with five lobes, the two basal

lobes are much smaller than the upper three. All of the lobes are serrated and are sometimes incised. The average size of the leaves is 3 inches long and 3 inches wide. The leaf size is the biggest complain among bonsai practitioners, but the size can vary greatly among trees in the wild. There is a variety of Swamp maple occurring in northern Florida that consistently has a leaf size of 1 ½ inches! They will also reduce with leaf-pruning, but it is much better to try and find a specimen that already possesses smaller leaves. It is not difficult to find trees where the leaf size is consistently 2 inches. The trick is, if you are collecting a tree from the wild, to locate one with appropriate leaf size during the growing season and tag for collecting during the fall or early winter.



**Cultivation**

Swamp maples, compared to other trees, are not long-lived. They typically live about 100 years and rarely exceed 150. They are fast growers and can be developed into good quality bonsai. They have a thin bark that can be easily damaged. If damage to the bark occurs, it should be sealed as quickly as possible. The same holds true with any cuts made with pruning tools.

Many cultivars of *Acer rubrum* have been developed over the years. I am familiar with 18 cultivars, but there are probably more.

**Light**

While Swamp maples will do well in partial shade, you will find that the leaf size has a tendency to become larger in order to gain sufficient “food factories” for optimum growth. Full sun is much better and will give you greater success at leaf-reduction, provided your soil and water are correct.

**Soil**

Swamp maples prefer a moist soil that is on the acid side with a PH of 4.5-6.5. Many people have complained to me over the years about die-back on Swamp maples and leaf burn. I recommend thinking about the soil and what soils they prefer in nature. While they will certainly adapt to traditional bonsai soil, it is my contention that typical bonsai soils dry out too quickly for this species. They like to keep their “feet wet”. Use a commercially available potting mix like Miracle-Grow Potting Mix. It is acidic, contains perlite and extensive organic material. Putting a drainage layer of haydite on the bottom of the bonsai pot is fine, but the roots need to stay wet or at least moist. When you grow water-loving species like Swamp maple, bald cypress, water elm, etc. in fast-drying bonsai soil, the trees get stressed and will often show that through leaf burn and yellowing and sometimes by sacrificing entire branches.

**Water**

Remember that they grow along stream banks, ponds, wetland areas and around New Orleans in the swamp. They like water! And you must water thoroughly during the warmer months. The larger leaves transpire more moisture than other trees. You must keep these things in mind and if you see that your soil is drying out too quickly, consider siting your Swamp maple bonsai in a shallow container of water or at least provide a humidity tray with pea gravel during the summer months. Another option is to cover the soil surface with long-fiber sphagnum moss. This will help to retain moisture. Moreover, surface roots, if they are exposed to direct sunlight, can actually



burn, causing the top of the surface root to die. So protect them in the heat of summer.

**Fertilizer**

Swamp maples, like most maples, are not heavy feeders. Stay away from chemical fertilizers and rely instead on organic fertilizers. Chemical fertilizers can, over time, cause a build-up of salts in the soil. Swamp maples will not tolerate salts in the soil. Also remember to begin fertilizing any deciduous tree after the leaves have “hardened-off”.

When trees are initially pushing out new growth, they are using the starches and nutrients stored in the roots, trunk and branches over the winter months and are not absorbing or breaking down fertilizers that may be placed in the soil. Only when the leaves have darkened, signaling that they are now actively producing food through photosynthesis and beginning to replenish starches for the systems of growth, will the trees begin utilizing fertilizers. Before that time, any applications are wasted.

**Potting**

Swamp maples need more room for their roots and should therefore be slightly over-potted – meaning, place them in bonsai pots that are a little deeper than the diameter of the trunk and even a little larger when considering the two-thirds rule. For example, let’s say that you have a Swamp maple bonsai with a height of 18 inches and a trunk diameter of 2 ½

to 3 inches. Instead of potting it in a 12 inch pot that is 3 inches deep, pot it in a 14 to 15 inch pot that is 4 inches deep. This will help to keep the roots cooler, give them the room they need to grow and help retain more moisture in the soil.

Pot and repot Swamp maples in the late fall to early winter. Avoid repotting in the spring. Their roots develop rather quickly and they can fill up a pot in just a couple of years if the tree is healthy and putting on a lot of growth.

**Pruning**

The best time to prune branches is in the fall. Maples are “bleeders”. Pruning them in the spring when the sap is rising, results in sap flowing from the wounds. This loss of food needed for growth will weaken the tree. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to get the bleeding to stop. If you are pruning off a branch because it is too large for that area, but still need a branch in that location, leave the collar of the branch next to the trunk. Dormant buds are located there and a new shoot will sprout.

If you are removing a branch and do not wish for new growth to pop from that area, make a flat cut close to the trunk. As previously stated, the bark of Swamp maples is thin, so you do not want to use a concave cutter to remove the branch. Use

a root cutter to make a flush cut, then smooth the cut area with the sanding drum of a Dremel tool, maintaining the contour of the trunk and seal the wound with cut paste.

If you are removing two branches that are very close to one another, it is better to join the two cuts into one. The tree will have less difficulty healing the wound.

**Container Selection**

Because Swamp maples are deciduous, the container should be glazed. White or cream is always a good choice due to the light gray color of the bark. A pale blue would be a good second choice. Pot shape will be determined by the character of the tree, whether it is primarily masculine or feminine in its design.



## Why Not Winged Elm for Bonsai?

By Evan Pardue

**T**he winged elm is not a species you hear a lot of bonsai enthusiasts talk about. Instead, if anyone is talking about native southeastern trees that are desirable for a collection you always hear about bald cypress. This is justified for the bald cypress is an outstanding species for our bonsai practice. I personally find the winged elm to be the second runner up for best southeastern collected species.

A lot of credit is given to bald cypress because it is the tree you cannot overwater, and it is encouraged that you absolutely soak it most days of the year. What about a species you do not have to fear underwatering? How about a species of elm that you do not have to worry too much about keeping the soil media evenly moist throughout the day? I am not saying that you treat winged elm like a cactus, not even close.

How about a species that helps you learn proper watering practices to further improve your overall bonsai water techniques? Winged elms are very forgiving when it comes to learning how to water your collection properly. I find that they fall somewhere between the Japanese black pine and bald cypress when it comes to learning how to gauge the amount of water each tree needs throughout each season.

So, what is a winged elm? It is the most unique species of elm locally available in the southeastern states. They are set apart by their corky somewhat wart like growth that occurs along their branches. They are fully deciduous to our range and when bare of leaves they can look like a gnarly and spooky mess of branches. This look causes some to call them the “witch elm”. They can be further identified by their double toothed ovate leaves that are asymmetrical at the base. These leaves are naturally smaller than the American elm and reduce well over time. Another thing that sets them apart from other elm species is the plated like bark. Deep fissures run throughout the bark patterning and can sometimes build up its own wart like texture sort of like a hackberry can have.

So, we have an elm that has small leaves, short internodes, corky bark, and an interesting “winged” feature on their branches. What are the cons of this species?

Not many to be honest. They are relatively pest free save from the aphid season and the occasional basket worm, typical sap sucking insects that are easily removed. Dutch elm disease is not much of a concern either due to the fact it takes a significant amount of heart wood to get infected by the disease. We are growing bonsai not full-sized shade tree elms.

Keeping them thriving is straight forward. They enjoy organically rich soil, so use organic fertilizer cakes to feed them throughout the year. They are understory trees that sometimes occur in the edge of thickets, so keep them in indirect sunlight for most of the year. They are found growing in our temperate zone, so keep them outside all year long only dropping them to the ground to get some ground radiation heat to their root systems for the winter season.

Sources for winged elm varies as they are not a species used in commercial nursery trade. The best way of acquisition of this species is yamadori (wild) collection or a bonsai nursery that specializes in the growing them.



“New Hope”, collected as yamadori by Doug Green in Alabama 1990. In training for 30 years.

# BONSAI Techniques

## Fall Pruning Techniques

By Evan Pardue

**N**ow is the time to start making a list of trees in your collection that need a proper fall pruning. Typically, these techniques are used to not only set buds up for next year’s push but also to improve the image of your tree’s winter silhouette. The best example of these practices can be seen on deciduous bonsai specimens as this is the best time to be able to see what has been happening

underneath the lush canopy throughout the growing seasons. The signal to begin work is when fall color has just begun and the first leaves begin to fall.

Evergreens and conifers can be fall pruned as well but it takes a little more observation to know when to begin work. Having a mix of deciduous and evergreen trees in your collection can help you make this assessment easier. If you care to only have evergreens and conifers in your collection then the signal is usually when your trees begin to harden off the late fall flush, which is common most years in



southeastern Louisiana due to unpredictable weather.

As stated before, the purpose of fall pruning is to set buds for next spring. Keep in mind that this is not a time for the concave cutters but instead a time for thinning shears. It is best to hold off larger branch cuts or branch removal until the early spring so that your trees have more of a chance to react to the damage. Pruning too heavily could result in bleeding out on some species and in most cases leaves a large open wound that will be retain too much moisture and attract bugs and disease throughout dormancy.

This is also a good time to wire out trees that would otherwise be difficult to style, for example, bald cypress. Bare branches on deciduous trees are easier to wire and ensure that valuable buds are not crushed or blocked from extending. For evergreen or conifers, a light thinning of interior growth can be removed at this time to make wire application easier as well.

Since we are not removing larger branching at this time, we should instead be more worried about building taper and bifurcation on finer branching. Consider the length between internodes before each cut and make a consideration of where the branching you are working on occurs on the tree. I have the tendency to leave more internodes on the lower branches of my trees. This encourages these branches to bud back with more strength. The higher up I trim, the further back I trim to the next set of buds on those upper branches. This process will showcase that the lower branches are the oldest part of the tree. The lower branches should be longer and have more elongated sections. Whereas the higher parts of the crown of the tree should be denser as they are closer to the sun light.

I usually wire as I trim and then once I have traced my way through the entire tree I step back to see if any further adjustments need to be made. This is the time to pull out the small finer wire to point buds up slightly on the ends of each “cloud” or pad as you form them. Although this is dependent on the style you are going for with each individual tree, it is still a good practice. It sounds silly but pointing the growing tips up towards the sun light will make them grow stronger when they open in the spring.



# 2021 Board Elections

**Elections for the 2021 Board will be held at the November meeting.**

## **Current Nominations are:**

Dennis Burke - President  
**OPEN** - Vice President  
Dawn Koetting - Treasurer  
Cheryl Mechler - Hall Manager  
Kathy Barbazon - Newsletter/Website Editor  
Byron Carr/Evan Pardue - Masters Program Director  
Peggy Howard - Secretary  
(Randy Bennett - Past President)

**All members are welcome to run for any board position with the exception of President.** Any nominees for President must have served on the board previously. *If you would like to run for a position please call Randy at 504-402-3646.*

## Bonsai Tips for November

By Randy Bennett

Finally! Some cooler weather! Sunday morning brought a big smile to my face when I stepped outside to check on the trees. I know most of you are enjoying it as well. And with cooler weather comes a shift in how we care for our bonsai.

1. First and foremost, you should be cutting back on your watering. Check for dampness in the soil with your finger. If you feel moisture, don't water.
2. Continue applying fertilizer with little or no nitrogen. This is especially important if you want to help ensure that shoots and twigs that formed late in summer have the nutrients they need to build stronger cell walls to prevent dieback. This is especially true of re-leafed Japanese maples, swamp maples, bald cypress and hackberry.
3. As trees begin to lose their leaves and sugars and starches are sent into twigs, limbs, the trunk and the roots, there is a tendency for branches to swell considerably. So check any wire that remains. You want to avoid any unnecessary scarring.
4. This is a good time to start thinking about what pots you are going to need for the spring. Order them soon.
5. Continue with insecticide applications. This is the time of year that a lot of insects begin laying eggs in the cracks and fissures in the bark of trees.
6. Also, start getting together ingredients for soil mix that you will need for repotting
7. Take inventory. Don't forget about ordering any wire you might need.
8. Continue to be on the lookout for pests and conduct preventative spraying for fungus and insects.

President *cont. from pg 1*

will conduct a lecture/demo on Saturday as part of the show and exhibit. Our club will take advantage of him being so close and have him conduct a lecture/demo for us on Friday, November 13th at 7:00 at the Marine Corps Hall, where our regular monthly meetings are held.

One of the things he is known for is his expertise in developing Shohin bonsai. And so Creating Shohin Bonsai will be the subject of his lecture/demo for GNOBS. Mike will present a lecture/Powerpoint presentation to explain shohin bonsai at the beginning of the program and follow up with a demonstration. He will be using pre-bonsai stock from Wigert's Bonsai Nursery and will design several shohin bonsai. The trees will be cared for by one or more of our members and will be auctioned off at the GNOBS Annual Auction next August.

You can find out more about Mike Lane and see examples of his work by following the link below.

<https://mikelaneshohinstudio.wordpress.com/>

See you November 13th!

**Randy Bennett**  
**GNOBS PRESIDENT**



**GNOBS would like to thank Evan Pardue with Underhill Bonsai (underhillbonsai.com) as well as our members who have been donating some very nice items for our monthly raffles!**

## **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 peggylh526@gmail.com	Hall Manager Cheryl Mechler 504-452-1222 mechler465@att.net
Vice-President: Dennis Burke 504-224-0038 (cell) dppbonsai@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	