

# You can do **WHAT** with that?

## Bonsai uses for non-bonsai objects

by Kathy Barbazon

Since coming to bonsai, I have learned from both frugality and necessity through other members and experimentation that there are many ordinary objects and substances that can be useful in bonsai.

**Titebond II** (exterior wood glue): can be used to seal cuts instead of cut paste. Joe Day also says Titebond II can be mixed  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  with water and used as a wood hardener.

**Silicone glue brush** (at woodworker supplies or Amazon): Use to apply your Titebond. After glue dries, it just peels right off the bristles

**Minwax or Elmers wood hardener**: used to preserve jin, shari, or prevent further deterioration of wood. (Minwax is a very thin liquid and seems to penetrate best. The glue based hardeners are thicker and can be useful in some situations)

**Superglue**: If you crack a branch only halfway through and still have bark intact on the other side, you can use a dot of superglue on the woody part of the branch and bring it back together. Just don't try to bend it until it completely heals.

**Aquarium tubing or small clear plumbers tubing**: Run your wire through a small piece of it and use it to cushion a branch when using a guywire or to cushion an exposed root when wiring your tree in so you don't leave wire marks.

**Vetwrap** (stretchy bandages used on pets): can be used instead of traditional wet raffia to bind a branch and protect it from breakage and scarring when wiring. The human version sold as athletic wrap also works well and can sometimes be bought in widths as small as an inch wide.

**Plastic needlepoint canvas** (at craft stores): Cut up and use instead of the pricey squares sold by bonsai supplies to cover drainage holes. The number on the canvas is the number of holes per inch - so #5 will have 5 holes per inch and is a good size to use for adequate drainage.

**Burlap garland** (at craft stores): can be used to bind roots to a rock. Naturally deteriorates over time.

**Mortar pans or bus pans** (normally used to bus dishes): Drill a few drainage holes and you have large training containers for collected specimens. Mortar pans can also be used as a potting tray.

**Bulb pans**: These are short flowerpots used for bulbs – perfect for bonsai training pots. (I order the plastic ones by the dozen from an online greenhouse supply

**Aquatic Mesh Plant Baskets**(at aquatic pond supplies): These plastic pots which are perforated all over can be used as traing pots. Roots automatically air prune at edges so you won't get roots wrapping around a pot. They can also be used in treatment situations where you need something with a lot of drainage - like fungal problems. **Plastic colanders** may also be used for the same purpose.

**Window screen**: You can cut pot size circles of it and use as drainage mesh in the bottom of your training pots (especially good for pots with a lot of drainage holes like the bulb pans)

**Fiberglass mesh sheetrock tape**: can also be used to cover drain holes in training pots. If the pot is reasonably clean it will stick to it.

**Dramm Heavy duty brass shut off valve**: Bill Butler suggested this to use with your bonsai watering wand (which I highly recommend over a hose nozzle). Some of the good wands do not come with a shut off so these make it easy to control your water flow at the wand. They work very well. Note on the bonsai wands: I had a little trouble getting a tight

seal from the wand to the valve (possible slight difference in the thread) – plumbers tape will give you a tight seal.

**Simplegreen:** Joe Day makes a weak solution with water and cleans the trunks of his trees with this and a toothbrush

**O'Reilly's Molten OptiSorb Or NAPA Super Absorbent part 8822:** both of these are calcined clay made from diatomaceous earth (normally used to absorb the oil in your driveway): They can be used as bonsai soil or part of a bonsai soil mix. You must sift them first to remove small particles. Do this with a mask—you shouldn't breathe it. Both absorb and release water and fertilizer well. I do find the OptiSorb usually has better size particles with less waste. If you rinse off the diatomaceous dust, the resulting slurry can be used as a natural pesticide and sprayed on your trees (add additional water as needed so your spray leaves a fine dust coating).

**Hydroponic clay balls:** Some of us noticed large red clay balls in the bottom of Eric Weigart's bougainvilleas. It turns out they are normally used for hydroponics but can be used in bonsai soil. They absorb a lot of water.

**Hurricane or freeze preparedness items (if you have to bring your trees inside):** Jim Osborne uses a blow up kiddie pool so he can add a layer of water to the bottom. I use disposable steam pan lids (a few bucks for a pack at Sam's) on top of a tarp so I can water the trees and not the floor.

**Clip on Reptile heat lamps** (at pet stores): In case of a freeze or very low temps, I move tropicals inside my unheated shed. These can be clipped on to shelves or anything available and directed toward the trees to just raise the temp a few degrees. Or you could surround your trees with a few strings of Christmas lights (incandescent).

**Blowtorch** (regular or the small butane type): Guy Guidry demonstrated how after removing the bark for a jin you can blowtorch the area to make it more bendable and then set it in place with cold water.

**Aluminum foil:** used to shield the rest of the tree if you are using the above blowtorch technique. Can also be used over the plastic of your airlayers to shield the emerging roots from sunlight.

**Large plastic tub** (I have the flexible type with handles that people put ice in or bring to the beach): Filled with water it can be used to help soak stubborn soil from plant roots or if ants set up housekeeping in you plants (they like the garden pots with regular soil) – submerge the pot until they drown. You just have to kill off the stragglers that make it up the tree or try to float to safety. It can also be used when you sift soil to catch the fines. The flexible handle type is easy then to just pick up and dump in the garden.

**Multipurpose heavy duty shears/snips** sold at home improvement stores: Use these to cut down nursery pots, cut the pots off of pot bound plants or for cutting window screen for drainage mesh (better than ruining your good scissors)

**Loop Hoof Knife** (horse supplies or Amazon): Quickly scrape off bark from a branch you are jinning

**Plastic garden tray** (from greenhouse supply): I have one that is 24" x 24" and about 3" deep. Perfect for repotting gives you enough space to get the tree out of a nursery pot and remove the soil and repot into a bonsai pot. Deep enough to contain the soil and shallow enough not to get in your way.

**5 gallon plastic buckets with lids:** great to hold your soil and various amendments.

**Metal garbage cans with lids:** great to hold your soil and various amendments.

**Repti Bark** (pet store bedding for reptiles): Another member suggested this as the bark component for soil. It is pure fir bark and about the right size. I have recently tried it – so far so good.

**Mixing Paddle** (Harbor Freight/Home Depot): You normally stick this in a drill to mix mortar, grout or paint. I've found it works great for muck as well. Just throw your ingredients in a 5 gallon bucket, insert the paddle (attached to your drill) and mix away.

**CLR Bath & Kitchen Cleaner or Vinegar:** for removing mineral deposits from uour pots (just make sure to keep it off your trees)

**Tool Bags:** For the newbies among us – no you don't need a specialized tool case for your bonsai tools. Husky (Home Depot) makes an open top all purpose tote for about \$17 that is popular with a lot of members (lots of pockets). Some members prefer a smaller version that just holds the bare essentials. I am personally fond of the canvas riggers bag from Harbor Freight (\$15 but goes on sale for \$11). I find it light with multiple pockets and just the right size for me.

**Hand Lotion with Paraffin** (or any other type that forms a coating on your hands): Put it on before working with any plants you are sensitive to (like juniper). Seems to help by forming a barrier. **OR Gloves in a Bottle** - protective hand lotion available on art supply sites.