

THE BONSAI Wire

July 2022

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

FROM THE President

Get those donations ready as our annual auction is fast approaching! This is our money maker for the year to bring in guest artists and material for workshops. We will need volunteers to run and mark trees with bidder #'s. It's not a difficult task if we have plenty of helpers. If you can't walk trees back we also need help with food replenishing at various times throughout the auction. You will still be able to bid all night long even if you are helping the club out with tasks essential to make it a success! If you decide to help out the club by volunteering, I would like all volunteers in a club shirt if you have one. If you would like a club shirt we will have some available for purchase at the next meeting.

I know I am grateful for the rain we've been having the last few days. It helps cool off the trees and gives us a break from watering. It's still a great time to get those tropicals repotted and to root those clippings that you take off. Tropical species are some of the easiest to start from cuttings. I will have some Fukien tea, Duranta, Hibiscus schizopetalus and ficus cuttings going on the bargain tables at the auction.

Our next meeting is sure to

President cont. pg 8

MEETINGS & Events

Reminder - our new home for meetings is:
American Legion Hall
1225 Hickory Ave, Harahan, LA 70123

Friday, July 8, 2022

Program: Demo/presentation on Water

Jasmine by Mike Lane 7:00pm



Mike will be doing a demo on a nice water jasmine (flowering tropical) from Wigert's Bonsai. 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. (He did a demo for GNOBS in 2020 and was very entertaining and informative.)



Program: Initial Competition for Johnny Martinez Award

All members (including beginners) are asked to bring in their best trees (limit 2) for a friendly competition. All members present will get 3 votes for their favorite trees. The 3 trees with the most votes will be displayed at the Auction. Auction attendees will vote for their favorite tree from the 3 for the Johnny Martinez Award. We ask that you not bring in a tree from a workshop done in the past year. Time permitting, Mike will provide a constructive critique.



Saturday, July 9, 2022

Program: Water Jasmine Workshop with Mike Lane

9:00am

Water Jasmine is a flowering tropical tree that produces fragrant white flowers that hang down below the foliage. They bloom in spring and in fall. A sign up sheet for the workshop will be available at the May meeting. The water jasmine workshop is

Meetings cont. pg 10

SPECIES Spotlight

Schefflera “The Indestructable Bonsai”

By Jerry Meislik

Introduction

Schefflera and Brassia are two related species of plants both commonly called Schefflera. They are found in nearly every nursery and garden center’s indoor foliage area or in the terrarium plant section. They are also found in many homes tucked into a dark corner of the living room or found languishing in a dingy corner of an office building.

Many “true-blue” bonsai purists do not consider Scheffleras as “real bonsai”. Like the late comedian Rodney Dangerfield, Scheffleras just don’t get any respect! With this article I hope to help promote the notion that Scheffleras do make good bonsai and are about as tough an indoor plant as one can imagine.

Natural Range and Growth Patterns

Schefflera arboricola is commonly referred to as the Dwarf Schefflera while Brassia actinophylla is the full-sized Schefflera. Planted in the ground in tropical climates the Brassia can grow to over thirty feet tall. It has huge umbrella-like leaves, about two feet long that give rise to the common name of Queensland Umbrella tree. Brassia also has two-foot long spikes of red flowers that make the tree extremely decorative in the landscape. Even when growing as a “tree” in the ground Brassia is relatively un-branched and typically will have several rather tall stems arranged in a clump. Brassia growing in Florida have proved to be a bit too prolific since they seed so well that they have become a serious pest tree. Brassia is native to Australia and surrounding lands.

The Dwarf Schefflera is a similar but much smaller plant, perhaps reaching 6–12 feet in height. It has smaller leaves and branches a bit more freely than Brassia. The leaves are 4-7 inches across. Plant breeders have realized the potential of the Dwarf Schefflera and have been working on developing new varieties of these plants. Each year they introduce many new cultivars of this tree with varying leaf shapes, tree silhouettes, as well as variegated leaf forms.

In this article I refer to the full sized Schefflera as Brassia and the small leafed form as Schefflera or Dwarf Schefflera. “Scheffleras” will be my name for information relevant to both species.

Scheffleras As Bonsai

Scheffleras have a compound leaf, meaning that the leaf has more than one leaflet per petiole or “stem”. This makes the leaf look larger than it is. Both Scheffleras have a relatively large leaf and petiole which makes the creation of very small sized bonsai difficult.

Full-sized Brassia leaf on top and reduced leaf on right. Full sized Dwarf Schefflera leaf on left and reduced leaf below center.



Scheffleras are not particularly woody and do not form a prominent tough bark or even a significant hardwood core. They do not have true growth rings. The trunks and stems remind me of a palm tree with an external “woody” layer and a central pithy stem. Due to the type of wood and bark on these trees they are a bit difficult to shape with wire. Severe back and forth dramatic bends are difficult or impossible to create by wiring Scheffleras. Cutting the branch and allowing a new terminal to form introduces taper and movement to the branch.

Red arrow shows a Schefflera whose top was cut off and a new apex growing above the cut.



On the plus side, Scheffleras form aerial roots with ease and are very useful for designing banyan tree forms or forms requiring dramatic exposed roots. The strong surface rooting and fleshy roots makes root-over-rock styles very easy and gratifying.

Dwarf Schefflera with aerial roots in banyan style.

The Dwarf Schefflera can be used for smaller bonsai while the bigger leafed Brassia is more logically used for larger bonsai trees. A skilled bonsai grower can even form small bonsai from the Brassia but it takes persistence and skill.

Scheffleras are reluctant to branch freely and spontaneously. They seem to grow longer and longer trunks without developing much in the way of branches while leaves are clustered at the ends of the stems. Even these lanky potted plants can be drastically cut back and shaped into decent bonsai.

Despite these limitations very attractive, tropical appearing bonsai can be formed from Scheffleras given the proper bonsai care. Scheffleras really strong point as indoor bonsai is their toler-



ance of dim light and low humidity that would cause the death of other species.

Indoor Cultivation

Light

Both types of Scheffleras tolerate fairly low light levels and they survive in just about as dim a light as any home living area can have. In fact my Brassia spent two years indoors in an office and received only indirect fluorescent light and no window light. The plant survived these very trying conditions without a problem. It did not grow very much during that time but it did survive.

Giving Scheffleras more light is of tremendous benefit and allows the tree’s leaves to be smaller and the plants to have more growth and vigor. Needless to say, it is easier to shape and form a bonsai if the tree is actively growing. Under dim illumination the leaves are larger, fewer in number and the tree grows very slowly; thus little or no shaping can be done.

Humidity

The thick waxy leaf structure of the Scheffleras makes them very tolerant of low humidity. Very few other plants tolerate the dryness in a modern home without missing a beat. No special humidifying devices are required for the health or growth of Scheffleras.

Moisture and Soil

The two species prefer different soil moisture levels. The Dwarf Schefflera likes a moist soil and must not be allowed to go bone dry. On the other hand Brassia will rot if kept in a constantly wet soil mix; it prefers to have a thorough watering and then to have its roots go almost dry.

A good starting soil mix for the Dwarf Schefflera is one half bark and one half inorganic material. For the Brassia use one-third organic material and two-thirds inorganic material. To make a wetter mix use a higher percentage of organic material like bark or sphagnum moss and less inorganic material like Haydite, Turface, chicken grit, or gravel. Remember also that a finer, smaller particle size also creates a wetter mix. As always adjust the soil mix to your specific tree, micro-environment, growing conditions, and watering preferences.

If you are one of those people who love to water their trees you should grow the Dwarf Schefflera but if you typically forget to water the Brassia has a better choice of surviving.

Fertilization

Use a houseplant fertilizer diluted to half strength and use it at weekly intervals to provide adequate nutrition. Always water your tree well before fertilizing. Reduce the fertilization to once a month during the winter rest period or when the tree is not actively growing.

Insects

Insects rarely bother Scheffleras. But occasionally trees may develop a scale infestation. A treatment with dormant oil at one tablespoon per gallon sprayed at weekly intervals for 3-4 weekly sprays will help control the scale. Remember to cover all plant surfaces with the spray.

Propagation

Scheffleras are easy to propagate from seed. But with the ready availability of plant material from so many nurseries it is unlikely that many will bother growing them from seed.

Both species are very easy to propagate from cuttings. Stem cuttings can be placed into a container filled with a granular soil mix. The mix is then moistened and the whole is enclosed in a sealed plastic bag. In four to six weeks the cuttings will have set roots and can be removed from the bag. Failure to root will likely be due to overly wet soil mix and rotting of the stem.

Bonsai Care and Training

Wiring

Since Scheffleras do not have a really woody trunk they are a bit touchy to wire. It helps to wire them when branches are still relatively young. Stems that are green to slightly woody will be the easiest to wire. Apply the wire a bit more loosely than on other bonsai and bend the branch gradually over a one-week period. Treat the stems like a stalk of celery that snaps if pushed too far. Make the bends gentle and avoid drastic directional changes. With these precautions wiring can be effective as well as safe.

Most growers prefer to use the “clip and grow” technique since this works very well for Scheffleras. Choosing the right point to prune gets the branches to grow in the direction you wish. Remember that above the attachment point of each leaf is a bud hidden on the stem. The new branch will grow out from this hidden bud. So by pruning about 1/2 to one inch above a leaf you can predict the direction in which the new stem will grow. Pruning with attention to the latent bud is called “directional pruning”.

With any large leafed tree individual leaves can be wired. This helps to introduce a proper shape to the leaf as well as orienting the leaves to a more suitable position for the tree’s design. Keep in mind that large leafed plants often look best when styled with a fairly dense or continuous canopy. Well separated right and left and back branches do not work as well for large leafed trees.

The technique for wiring a leaf involves putting one or two turns of wire on the stem and then winding the wire up the petiole of the leaf. The leaflets usually do not require wiring. The wire and leaf are then placed into the proper position just as with a branch that is wired.

It is best to wire the leaf after it is mature and after it has reached its full size. If the leaf is wired before it is mature then the wire may prove to be too tight and the leaf may be damaged or die. Fortunately the damaged leaf is just discarded and does not remain for years, as does a wire-scarred branch. The wire may be removed after about one month and the leaf will stay in position.

Repotting and Pots

Repot the trees every two years, and use a pot that is not overly large. Remove all the old soil from the root ball with careful and delicate work with a chop-stick or wooden dowel. The roots of the Schefflera while fleshy are easily damaged by rough, careless work.

A reasonably sized pot is two-thirds the width of the canopy of the mature tree. This pot dimension will emphasize the canopy of the tree and a properly sized container also helps to keep the soil from staying too wet.

Most often the rounded tropical canopy of the tree will look

SPECIES Spotlight

Schefflera cont. from pg 3

best in an oval or rounded pot. Glazes are selected to match or contrast with the trunk or leaf color.

Defoliating And De-budding

Defoliation is the removal of all the leaves of a bonsai tree. Healthy Scheffleras can be totally defoliated. With the defoliation it is also best to remove all the growing tips. This will result in new branches forming lower on the tree. In addition, defoliating results in new smaller leaves

All the newly formed branches are allowed to grow if they are in the right position or rubbed off if they are poorly situated. Branches and trunks that are left alone will grow longer and longer and tend not to branch. So pruning is the most important part of creating a Schefflera bonsai.

After defoliation the replacement leaves are initially much smaller but each progressive replacement leaf increases in size until eventually each new leaf is back to its normally large size. Repetitive leaf pruning is needed to keep the huge leaves of the Brassia in control.

Controlling the Dwarf Schefflera with its smaller leaves is much less of a problem.

Defoliation is probably best limited to once per year unless you grow the trees in extra artificial light and they are extremely vigorous.

Schefflera with many new branches forming after the top was cut off and the old leaves were removed.



In conclusion, by removing all the leaves and de-budding the ends of the stems will result in new branching as well as the production of smaller leaves.

Reductions Or “Hacking Back”

One of the best ways to obtain a specimen Schefflera bonsai is to find a large “tree” borrowed from a friend’s living room. Many folks are happy to give away a tall, straggly Schefflera since the plant has long ago outgrown its dimly lit corner.

Lanky specimen Scheffleras can be viciously shortened back to a bare stem with no leaves. The Scheffleras will break back from hidden latent buds in the trunk. The difficult decision is to decide how tall you would like the finished bonsai to be. If the finished bonsai is to be three feet tall then cut the stem back to two feet. It is often helpful to shorten the stem back even more for mini-sized bonsai. We all tend to be reluctant to shorten the tree back severely and the result is years after a reduction we need to go back and shorten the stem even more. In the process losing years of time and eventually still cutting the stem back even more.

In doing a severe hack back technique do not re-pot the tree at the same time but re-pot two to four months after the reduction.

Bonsai Designs

When creating bonsai with Scheffleras it is often best to create a full, continuous canopy tree. The solid canopy helps minimize the visual effect of looking at the oversized individual leaves. The true size of the individual leaf is hidden from view when contained within a full or continuous canopy. A full canopy is also characteristic of many tropical trees.

Root over rock styles with lots of exposed rootage, and designs that emphasize aerial roots are also very suitable for this material.

Root-Over-Rock and Exposed Root Styles

Scheffleras grow extremely well planted over a rock, as well as making an attractive display with their thick surface roots firmly grasping the stone. Start with a young tree and wrap the roots over the stone and fix them in place with sting or wire. Plant the tree and stone into a bigger container and keep the surface of the stone at the soil level. Allow the plant to grow strongly for two years and then over a 6 to 12 month period gradually remove the surface of the soil exposing the rock and the attached surface roots. See Root-over-rock Workshop.

Two year old Schefflera seedling planted over a rock, 2000.



Same Schefflera with roots exposed in a shallower pot, 2003.



The same Schefflera, 2006.

The newly exposed roots are white and soft but they gradually harden off and darken as they are exposed to air and light. The whole stone and tree combination can then be planted into a shallower tray to show off the stone and root development

Remember that the stone will get “smaller” over time so plan ahead and do not use too small a stone. The tree gradually overgrows the stone and the tree stone relationship will gradually be distorted.

With the aggressive root systems of the Scheffleras wonderful exposed root style bonsai can be created.



Brassia with many exposed roots by David Fukumoto, photo David Fukumoto.

Schefflera arboricola ‘Manila Ripple’, by Tad Fukumoto, photo David Fukumoto.



Banyan Style

The easy formation of aerial roots on Scheffleras allows them to make great banyan style trees. The logo tree of Fuku-Bonsai trained by David Fukumoto is a fabulous example of this style. David has done the pioneering work over many years to popularize Scheffleras for indoor bonsai without additional lighting and humidification.



Schefflera arboricola, logo tree of Fuku-Bonsai in 2000, photo David Fukumoto.

Conclusion

I hope that his introduction to Scheffleras will convince some of you to try this material for bonsai. If you do create or buy a Schefflera bonsai you will be very happy with this tolerant and easy to care for tropical/indoor bonsai; few other types of bonsai will accept the abuse that these plants will take. If you chose not to grow the Schefflera for bonsai perhaps you can sneer a little bit less at those of us who do!

Special thanks to David Fukumoto the acknowledged expert in Schefflera design and culture as well as in growing materials that will thrive in normal homes. Please see Fuku-Bonsai’s website for more information on Schefflera and Brassia as well as purchasing excellent bonsai material.

BONSAI Basics

Developing Mallsai

An example of developing a standard Mallsai into a healthy, attractive Bonsai.

By Harry Harrington (bonsai4me.com)

Typically, beginners bonsai are purchased from garden centres, shopping malls and chain stores. Almost all originate from China and Israel and are mass produced trees that have been cultivated on large bonsai 'farms' before being lifted and planted directly into a bonsai pot. The result is a tree that is relatively cheap to buy, but will be in poor health, growing in very poor soil and with little in the way of styling other than some trimming of the tree's silhouette. Many beginners are put off bonsai after buying such a tree. Despite being correctly positioned, fed and watered, mass-produced bonsai are often plagued by ill health. Often this is a very off-putting experience and one that causes many potential enthusiasts to be turned off bonsai permanently.

However, with a few simple steps, mass-produced mallsai can be turned into good quality, healthy bonsai.

*Mallsai is a term used by bonsai enthusiasts to describe mass produced trees typically found in malls, chain stores and garden centres around the world.

This Chinese Elm/Ulmus parvifolia was a fairly typical mass-produced bonsai purchased 2002. The tree had many dead branches, was unstyled and difficult to water correctly. As a result of the compacted organic soil it was growing in, water would run off the soil-surface and over the edges of the pot rather than into the soil itself!



Without corrective measures being taken, the health of the bonsai would continue to decline.

The biggest concern I had was that the tree was still growing in the thick, airless clay from a field in China. This soil might have been adequate whilst the tree was growing in a field but once in the confines of a bonsai pot, the clay had become a solid airless mass that is very difficult for any plant to grow in.

90% of health related problems with mallsai bonsai are caused by trees trying to grow in this field-soil. Typically the soil will cause poor root growth and root rot, poor uptake of water and nutrients by the tree and difficulties with watering.

The solution is very simple, carefully wash all the clay off the roots and replant the tree into a good bonsai soil mix. Don't be deceived by the appearance of the bonsai soil on the surface of the pot; this is simply used to cover the dreaded clay that is found beneath it!

*It should be noted that in other areas of the world, such as the USA, mallsai are often found to have a layer of rocks glued onto the surface of the soil! The purpose of these rocks is keep the tree, soil and rootball intact during transport. The glued rocks impede proper watering of the tree and must be removed at the earliest opportunity.



Having bare-rooted and repotted the Elm into a good quality bonsai soil, the tree became healthy and vigorous and over the following three years I was able to train it, using just a few of the many bonsai techniques available to the enthusiast, into the bonsai you see above.



These two images show that however humble a trees beginning, with sound horticultural care and knowledge, a mass-produced mallsai can be turned into a healthy and vigorous work of art.



The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

Annual

Bonsai Auction

(Free and Open to the Public)

August 13, 2022

Viewing of trees prior to auction: 4:00pm – 6:00pm

Auction 6:00pm – 9:00pm

NEW LOCATION

VFW Hall

1133 Hickory Ave

Harahan, LA 70123

- Quality, developed bonsai
- Featured bonsai designed by nationally known bonsai masters
- Starter material
- Pots and supplies
- Bonsai for every budget from the novice to the dedicated enthusiast
- Bargain tables



Light Refreshments

Join us for great bonsai and a great time! gnobs.org [facebook.com/NewOrleansBonsai](https://www.facebook.com/NewOrleansBonsai)

Meetings cont. from pg 1

FULL but you are welcome to sign the waiting list in case anyone needs to drop out. As usual, members not in the workshop may attend as silent observers. I highly recommend this to new members. You can observe the work on multiple trees and the rationale behind the design choices.

Saturday, August 13, 2022

Annual GNOBS Auction

VFW Hall - 1133 Hickory Ave, Harahan, LA 70123

Auction Setup and Donations Accepted –
12 Noon – 4:00pm

Viewing of trees and other auction items –
4:00pm – 6:00pm

Auction – 6:00pm – 9:00pm

Get your donations ready! Now is the time to go through that overcrowded bench and decide which of your trees should go to the auction for a new home. You'll need the space for the fabulous new bonsai that you just can't live without and bring home from the auction. *Note to Members: The annual GNOBS Auction is the largest source of funds for the operation of the club and allows us to bring in bonsai masters for demos and workshops as well as paying our basic club expenses. Please take the time now to cull your collection, pot trees to donate, start cuttings and air layers and go through your books and pots. Keep an eye out at the local nurseries and home improvement stores for nursery material that could be donated for starter material. As always - your generosity is deeply appreciated by the board and the club as a whole!*

Tuesday, September 13, 2022

Intermediate Study Group: Boxwood Care and Info by Dennis Burke 6:00pm

Program: Boxwood Giveaway and Open Workshop 7:00pm

The first 40 presently PAID members attending the meeting will receive a free collected boxwood. The rest of the meeting will be devoted to an open workshop for styling the boxwoods (with experienced members available for help). Bring your tools. Wire will be provided.

President cont. from pg 1

be great with Mike Lane. We are happy to have Mike back, he is a great teacher and presenter on all things bonsai especially shohin and tropicals. If you didn't make it in a workshop spot you can still come and observe on Saturday. I look forward to seeing all of you there.

Dennis Burke
GNOBS President



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