

THE BONSAI Wire

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

February 2023

FROM THE President

By the time you read this the frost free date will have passed for us here. I know we are not sure from year to year around here how long "winter" will be for us. It can still be cool here at night for another couple of weeks but it seems that the plants know something as some deciduous trees are leafing out. About two weeks ago collecting cypress in the swamp some of the cypress were putting out new growth already. My Chinese magnolia in the landscape is done blooming and the leaves are now out. Even though it has warmed up early this year there is still time to re-pot any trees that need it. Just be mindful of the aftercare and not put any freshly repotted trees in full sun for a couple of weeks. It is a great time to start any air layers that you plan on doing. I wouldn't fertilize yet, you will want to wait till march at the earliest. The thing to look for is when your deciduous tree leaves have hardened off, which takes about a month. This is one reason why I always say "know your trees". I know not to worry when some of my bald cypress take longer to leaf out than the others right next to them. I know they are on their own schedule even though they all get the same love. Now is the time to select what tree or trees that you would like to display at the Destrehan Plantation Garden fest March 25 & 26 and the City Park Garden show April 1 & 2. Set up day is the Friday before each show. Both shows have 24 hour security. Great time to pot up that tree from the grow pot to the bonsai pot and clean it up to show. If there are any trees that you would

President cont. pg 6

MEETINGS & Events

Reminder - our new home for meetings is:

American Legion Hall 1225 Hickory Ave, Harahan, LA 70123

Tuesday, February 14, 2022

Program: Potting Lecture/Demo by Dawn Koetting 7:00pm

Dawn, for those who do not know, is one of our most experienced and talented members and has displayed and won awards at multiple bonsai competitions. She will discuss all the proper procedures and timing of potting/repotting trees as well as pot selection including the difference between masculine and feminine pots and selecting the appropriate pot based on characteristics and color to complement different trees. Members are invited to bring in trees that either need pot selection advice or already potted trees for evaluation of pot selection. You may also bring an empty pot if you have questions of what type of tree would be appropriate for that pot.

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

Program: Crepe Myrtle Presentation and Open (Crepe)Workshop by Randy Bennett 6:30pm

Randy is a past GNOBS president and has done bonsai as both a professional and gifted amateur for decades. He will do a powerpoint presentation on the care and styling of crepe myrtles. Members are encouraged to bring in crepe myrtles from raw stock to developed bonsai to discuss and then work on in an open workshop. Randy and other experienced members will be available for consultation and assistance.



Saturday & Sunday March 25 & 26, 2023

Destrehan Plantation Spring Garden Festival

Set up is Friday March 24, 8:30- 5 pm.

Show hours Sat and Sun are 9-4

Contact Dennis dpbbonsai@yahoo.com if you can volunteer or submit a tree for display.

Meetings cont. pg 6

Repotting Bonsai: Soils and Substrates

By Dawn Koetting

Soils and substrates used in bonsai are coarser than the potting soils we normally use for container grown plants. Due to shallow pot depths used in the art of bonsai, good draining soils become an important part of preventing root rot. This is because deeper pots have more ability to drain due to gravity, while shallow pots have less of this ability. Shallow pots allow water surface tension to overtake gravity, which causes shallow pots to hold more water/drain less well (commonly called “perching”). When soils hold more water, it is displacing air, and roots then effectively drown = root rot.

Soil choice (and by “soil” we generally mean a combination of substrates), is interdependent with local weather, tree species and watering techniques. Experts will tout their favorite soils when visiting, but without an intimate knowledge of your conditions, your tree species, your weather, and your watering style and water type, it is reckless to suggest one specific soil blend. Said another way, ALMOST any soil type can be used IF you adjust your watering techniques to that soil. Changes in soil types will almost always cause a need for changing your watering schedule, but not a change in how you water - as we should only water when the tree requires it. What makes this so difficult in our area are the days on end it may rain. Because of this, some club members use less and less organic in their mixes (a rockier, better draining mix), but it depends on the species and you will need to water more when its not raining. So my first caveat is - don't listen to anything I'm saying without taking into account your tree, the problems you have seen, and certainly if it ain't broke, don't fix it!

Soil Substrates Locally available: Basic Soil Mix

- 1- **Haydite** - A coarse, rocky substrate that allows for good drainage. It is inorganic, it does not degrade/compact, and it has a low to medium bonding with fertilizers (CAE or Cation Exchange)
- 2- **Pine Bark** - Best local brand I have found at smaller nurseries is Gardenese Soil Conditioner. There are no huge pine bark pieces - it is a finer bark for amending soil verses using as a mulch. It must be sifted prior to use to remove the fines. I like to buy my bags in advance and open them to make sure that they are dry prior to sifting and mixing. Good CAE but degrades rapidly (2-3 years) due to its organic nature and ability to absorb and hold water.
- 3- **Premixed Haydite/Bark** - **Two GNOBS Members, Bill Butler of Bill's Bayou in New Orleans (www.billsbayou.com) and Dennis Burke (dpbbonsai@yahoo.com)** provide bags of several haydite and bark combinations commonly used in bonsai such as 70%haydite/30%bark mix for pine and juniper and a 60/40 and 50/50 mix for general use and deciduous trees, and a 40%haydite/60%bark mix for tropicals or other trees that require more moisture (pre-sifted in several particle sizes). Straight haydite is also available. Bill also stocks red and black lava.
- 4- **Underhill Bonsai** - stocks a proprietary mix which they say has an ingredient that has a High CE like akadama. They are now also handling akadama by the bag.

Other Soil Substrates (harder to find)

- 1- **Pumice** - lightweight rock type volcanic product, allows for good drainage yet absorbs and holds water, does not degrade.
- 2- **Lava** - red and black available - a mix looks nice, keeps air pockets within the soil, allows for great drainage, does not degrade.
- 3- **Granite** - poultry grit, normally small particles so mostly used with small trees, adds drainage
- 4- **Turf** - Calcined Clay, small particles, holds some water, mid CAE, lasts several years
- 5- **NutriAgg** - a rocky product that is supposed to have a high CAE and the ability to hold some water. Lasts several years, American Bonsai in Florida.
- 6- **Akadama** - fired (get High Fired) clay product from Japan, expensive but wonderful when used as an additive. Has a high CAE, is “soft” and encourages fine hair roots, but breaks down quickly in constant moisture and can add to root rot problems if too small a particle or too high a percentage is used. Many don't use in the Gulf South (use pine or fir bark as replacement). If you choose to use, start with small percentages (no more than 10%). Tropicals and deciduous can stand more%, pine and juniper less%
- 7- **Kanuma** - another Japanese clay product that is used when an acid environment is preferred, such as Azaleas. Same issue as Akadama when too high a percentage of mix in high moisture situations - gets mucky, root rot.
- 8- **Fir Bark** - Supposed to not break down as fast as pine bark. Can get from nurseries in other parts of the country. Can be ordered from companies specializing in orchids (rePotme.com has both fir and Monterey Pine Bark)

- 9- **Diatomaceous Earth (DE)** - American Bonsai in Florida. Good CAE, holds up 5-10 years. I have not used yet, but Ryan Neil is experimenting with it to see if it has promise to possibly replace akadama in part.

Mixes for bonsai trees:

Mixes are necessary for a balance of substrates to hold water (but not too much), provide aeration, and have softer organic particles to hold fertilizer (higher CAE), and provide something hair roots can grow into. We've already mentioned the basic haydite and pine bark mix that is most used in our area due to availability and cost. It also works for many people. The bark holds water and allows for roots to grow into it, and the haydite provides for drainage and aeration.

One of the most popular mixes in the bonsai world is known as the “Boon Mix”, popularized by the artist from the west coast. It is 1/3 pumice, 1/3 lava and 1/3 akadama. This mix is wonderful because it provides the water holding capability of pumice (that still drains well), the aeration of lava,



and the root producing and fertilizer holding of akadama. Unfortunately, it only stands up well when the watering schedule is perfect and our rainy “season” makes that a challenge. The soil mix should be almost dry when watered. If akadama particles stay wet most of the day and up to the next watering, it breaks down, makes mud, and can leave the plant prone to root rot due to lack of air. So what to do? Some will say that akadama and kanuma “can't be used in the Gulf South”. However, Hurly Johnson - a Boon student who owns Timeless Trees just southwest of Houston - uses Boon mix on all of his trees. And Houston gets a lot of rain. And I've seen his watering system in action (

crazy wet). So it can be done if adjustments are made (his pine and junipers are watered separately from his tropicals). And he reports growth of fine roots like no other mix has given him.

So what to do? Any bonsai hobbyist needs to make their mix only after considering their trees and their watering schedule. What does your base mix give you? For example, you use 70/30 haydite to pine bark and you find your tree dries very quickly and survives but doesn't grow super well. Your mix may be tweaked by adding pumice and a touch of akadama. Say take it to 50% haydite, 30% bark, 15% pumice, 5% akadama (65% hard, 35% soft). Still granular and good drainage, but additional water and nutrient capability. Without the additional substrates, you could just go to 60/40 haydite to bark and see results.

I have liked trying Boon mix, but it is difficult to get (other than driving to Houston) and is expensive as mixed (about \$60 for 5 gallons). But I don't really want 33% akadama except for maybe moisture loving tropicals or cypress. But I can take the Boon mix and use it by adding haydite - cheaper for me and will decrease the percentage of akadama. If I mix it 1/2 haydite and 1/2 Boon mix, I'll have a good conifer mix for pine and juniper (85% hard particles and bringing akadama down to about 15%). If I want a deciduous mix that is less akadama, I can double the pumice and lava. This gives you 40% pumice, 40% lava, 20% akadama. A similar solution might be adding a portion of haydite to Boon mix, bringing all substrates to 25% - giving 75% hard particles to 25% akadama.

Pine and Juniper here, due to our rain profile, need a more rocky, well-draining mix. Most here start with 70% haydite 30% pine bark, but some find that too much pine bark. One way to add drainage without totally giving up on the ability to hold moisture is to add pumice.

Azaleas normally need more organic for holding moisture, but can also suffer from root rot. If you want to add water holding capability to your current mix but keep it well draining (avoiding more pine bark) you can add pumice. Some azalea people swear by Kanuma, which does provide an acid environment for azaleas and works in many parts of the country. Our problem is that it will turn to mush when overworked (turned to dust during chopsticking during repotting) or overwatered. Peter Warren has his US students in wetter climates use kanuma mixed with pumice to help overcome that problem.

In any case, you will hear about the wonders of these Japanese Soils (Kanuma and Akadama), but know that although they have positive attributes, they also have distinct drawbacks in our area. Choosing to use either as an additive in your mixes will require close attention to how you are watering.

A Florida company called American Bonsai sells premixed soil and several soil components. They are from an area almost as humid and rainy as NOLA. I tried them out this year and really like their mixes. The size is great - they have shohin and regular. They are completely rocky, no soft or organic. So it holds up to lots of water and tropical guys like Adam Levine use it as is. If you want to you can add a small Monterey Pine Bark from rePotme.com or add some small akadama if you feel you need to. American Bonsai also sells the individual components. Shipping soils has always been an issue, but American Bonsai will ship orders over \$99 free, as does RePotme.

What I am encouraging you to do is get intimate with your trees. Watch how your roots are developing at each repot. Watch for differences in your trees drying out or staying too wet. If we are attentive and have a basic mix that we use as a “go to” (say a haydite and pine bark mix like Bill Butler sells), then over time we can make adjustments to that mix in percentages or add additional components and help our plants to thrive.

BONSAI Techniques

Grafting The Roots Of A Bonsai To Improve Its Nebari

By Harry Harrington (www.bonsai4me.com)



My *Fagus sylvatica*/European Beech bonsai pictured in my garden in early March 2018. This tree will be familiar to those that have read my first book "*Bonsai Inspirations I*" as its initial development features heavily within the book.



Over the years, as the trunk and in particular the nebari (surface roots) had swelled with age, gaps in the nebari had become more prominent.



Although pleasing in appearance, the nebari could be improved by addressing these gaps (marked "A" and "B" in the image above). In the same way that the branch structure of a deciduous bonsai can be slowly improved over the years, so can the rootsystem and nebari



March 2018: Repotting the Beech.



After gently combing-out the old soil, it is possible to see how shallow the roots of this tree are after many years of cultivation.



The rootball as seen from the left-hand side. It is sometimes possible to find vigorous young roots that have emerged from below the level of the nebari. As they are, they are too low to be part of the nebari itself. However, they can be lifted upwards and pinned into position, effectively being grafted into place while still attached to the tree.



This vigorous root was pinned into the nebari (at position "A"). A small wedge was cut into the bark and cambium of the tree, and the root held tightly against it with a pin (in this case, made from a length of copper wire).



The root was then bent downwards.....



.....and anchored into position using a wooden stick. As the wedge-shaped channel in the tree heals around the pinned area of the root, they will naturally graft together over the coming years.



After returning the tree back into its pot for another couple of years. Three other roots were grafted into new positions (in area "B"). Although thinner, these roots will be allowed to grow freely until they thicken up to be of appropriate size.



The completed work.

Meetings cont. from pg 1

Saturday & Sunday April 1 & 2, 2023

City Park Garden Show

Set up is on Friday, March 31 from 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Show hours Sat and Sun are 9-4

GNOBS will once again be doing a large exhibit at the Garden Show. We will need volunteers to set up Friday, to man the booth on Saturday and Sunday and to take down the display on Sunday. We also need trees from members to display. We would like to have as many species and styles as possible. Members may submit one tree (or two, space permitting). We will have sign up sheets for volunteers and tree submissions or contact Dennis dpbbonsai@yahoo.com

(For trees - we need species, approx age and/or time in training)

Tuesday, April 11, 2023

Program: Open Workshop 7:00pm

Bring your own tree to work on. Club will provide wire. (Bring your own tools). Catch up on styling and maintenance or seek the advice and opinions of other experienced members. (We are looking into supplying a limited number of trees to purchase - primarily for brand new members acquired from the Garden Show.)

GNOBS Annual Auction is set for Saturday, August 12, 2023

Please start working now on rooting cuttings, air layers and potting trees etc that can be donated!

President cont. from pg 1

like to work on and demonstrate to visitors while at the show feel free to write what you have to bring on the sign up sheet. The City Park Garden Show host, LSU Ag Center, encourages us to put on informal demonstrations throughout the weekend. It is a great interactive tool to engage with anyone interested in bonsai. It is part of our club bylaws to show our trees at a public show and it's a great opportunity to interact with the public. We will also need volunteers for both shows. Even if you don't show a tree it would be great to donate some time at either or both shows. Please sign up at the next meeting so we can plan accordingly.



Dennis Burke
GNOBS President

Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society PO Box 381 Kenner, LA 70062

President:
Dennis Burke
504-224-0038 (cell)
dpbbonsai@yahoo.com

Newsletter/Website
Editor
Kathy Barbazon
504-470-8134 (cell)
kbarbazon@me.com

Hall Manager
Tina & Carl Gilbert
985-346-2974
divercq33@gmail.com

Vice-President:
OPEN

Masters Program Director:
Byron Carr
318-218-4844
bcjcec@aol.com

Past President:
Randy Bennett
504-402-3646 (cell)
504-888-7994 (home)
ourproperty4u@gmail.com

Treasurer:
Dawn Koetting
985-859-3400 (cell)
dkoetting@msn.com

Recording Secretary
Melissa Leblanc
missykobe@hotmail.com