

THE BONSAI Wire

June 2023

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

FROM THE President

It was great to have Byron Myrick back. He is always ready to answer questions about forming clay and the process of firing it. It is easy to see why he is a great ceramics teacher. He makes some outstanding wares. I know he has made more than a few custom pots for club members, myself included. He does an excellent job of understanding what you want made. He did some sample sketches for me when I requested him make a pot for a juniper I styled in a Jennifer Price workshop last year. I picked the one that represented what I wanted the best. We talked/ texted several times and sent multiple pictures with tape ruler measurements. Byron got the pot spot on for the juniper as it has two limbs curving down in its design and the pot needed two notches in it. I am very pleased how accurate the juniper fit the pot. I would highly recommend Byron for a custom made pot. It was evident that all the participants had a fun time creating their own pots in the workshop. I was pleased to see that the workshop had filled up to capacity. I encourage all participants to bring in their pots to a future meeting so we can see what they created.

I have secured 20 Hollywood junipers for the July meeting styling competition. The club will have them available at a cost of \$14 each. We are not making money on them, just passing on the savings the club got buying them at a wholesale price. They are in 3 gallon containers and are about 3' tall. I will bring one to the next meeting for people to see what they look like. Don't be shy and come out to style one at the

President cont. pg 7

MEETINGS & Events

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

Friday, June 16, 2023

Program: Evan Pardue Water Elm Demo 7:00pm

Evan Pardue, Manager of Underhill Bonsai, will be doing a lecture/demonstration on Water Elm. Evan has a history in art and has been involved with bonsai for 10 years now. As a Louisiana native, he has knowledge and interest in many of our native species. He has been conducting demos/workshops in the Southern region and recently completed intensive training at Crataegus bonsai garden with Michael Hagedorn.

Saturday, June 17, 2023

Program: Evan Pardue Water Elm Workshop 9:00am

Evan will be conducting a workshop on some nice water elms (approx 1" caliper with nice movement). Cost of the workshop will be \$65. If you would like a larger tree, Evan will be bringing some larger trees that you can upgrade to for an additional \$40-\$60 (payed directly to Evan for Underhill Bonsai). The workshop is currently full. All members may attend as silent observers.

Tuesday, July 11, 2023

Program: Initial Competition for Johnny Martinez Award 7:00pm

All members (including beginners) are asked to bring in their best trees (limit 2) for a friendly competition. (Note: Only SINGLE trees - NO GROUPS) 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. Our experienced members will provide a constructive critique with suggestions for further development of the trees.

Program 2: GNOBS Styling Competition 7:00pm

GNOBS will supply some nice 3 gallon Hollywood junipers at \$14 (our wholesale cost) for entrants to purchase. All competitors will receive a randomly selected juniper that they will style

Meetings cont. pg 7

BEGINNER Basics

Your First Bonsai Tools

By Kathy Barbazon



One of the first questions asked by new members with their first bonsai is "What tools do I need". **Many beginners go out and buy a set of tools. I would advise against this.** Unless you are spending a lot of money, most less expensive sets are inferior tools and if you are just beginning the hobby you only need a few tools

to start. Overly cheap tools can have problems with alignment and balance and can crush branch tissue instead of making a clean cut. I feel it is better to start with a couple of decent (but not overly expensive) tools and slowly add to your collection as you go along. If you already bought a set or if you just decide to upgrade later on, many of us keep our old tools to use for the messy job of potting, which can be hard on tools.

Beginning tools

- Concave cutter
- Scissors (Pruning shears)
- Wire cutter

Optional

- Pliers (can start with just regular pliers you have on hand)
- Bypass pruner (Available at any garden center)

When shopping for bonsai tools, you will find they come made from a couple of different materials - carbon steel (black) and stainless steel. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages.

- **Carbon steel** bonsai tools are less expensive than stainless steel and easier to sharpen. Their disadvantages are that they are more susceptible to rusting than stainless steel, so they require more care and maintenance and hold their edge less time than stainless steel.

- **Stainless steel** bonsai tools tend to be more expensive than carbon steel but they are more corrosion resistant and hold their edge longer so they require sharpening less frequently.

Which of these types you choose is really a personal preference and what fits your budget. Either, with the proper care, will give you many years of service. I started with carbon steel years ago (and still have many of my original tools). I have been transitioning to the stainless for my personal preference but I still have multiple carbon steel tools I'm still using.

Sizes:

Bonsai tools also come in several sizes. As a beginner, you are looking for what is often labeled "Standard". As an example, a standard concave cutter is usually about 8" long. These will take care of the majority of trees (especially for beginners). There is a small series of tools for bonsai artists that work on very small trees and a large series for very large trees.

Price point

You are looking, as stated before, for decent but not overly expensive tools. I've listed examples of mid-priced tools below. If you are serious about

the hobby, this is where I would start. However, if your budget will not allow, be aware you can get beginner/apprentice grade tools for \$10-\$20 below the carbon steel tools I list. They can be fine to start. Just know they won't be the same quality and you will probably wind up replacing them down the road.

The three Bonsai-specific tools you need to start

Pruning Shears

A nice pair of bonsai shears will be the tool you use more than any other.

When shopping for scissors, you'll find 3 main shapes.

- The "Butterfly" shaped scissors have large looped handles and feel nice in the hand. The blades tend to be a little thicker and will cut through thicker branches. (I have an old cheaper pair of these to trim roots). Their disadvantage is that their width makes it more difficult to use them in the interior of the tree.

- "Slim" scissors have a slender profile meant to easily reach into the interior of the tree. (I have a pair of these to use when absolutely necessary but they are definitely not my favorite scissors. I find them somewhat uncomfortable and for some reason I tend to pinch my hand with them). They are not as strong as the butterfly type.

- The third type is kind of a cross between the first two mentioned - slimmer than the butterfly, better cutting power than the slim. This type has always been my most used scissors and what I would suggest for beginners.

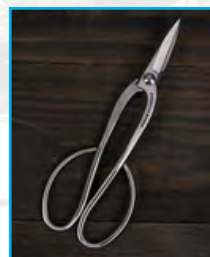
- My personal favorite pair is a "Pro" version of the last one and \$10 more. I'm not saying you should get this one - because it's on the high side, I'm just including it because I've found it both comfortable and a good size with good cutting power.



Butterfly type



Slim Type



Cross between the two



My personal favorite



Basic but usable

Price examples:

- Pruning Shears

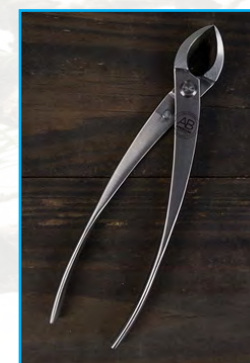
- Carbon steel - \$18 - \$25
- Stainless - \$29- \$49
- Basic but usable - as low as \$8 (I keep a pair of these to use just on ficus because of all the latex they ooze and gum up your scissors)

Concave Branch Cutters

Concave cutters are used to remove branches leaving a slight indentation where the branch was removed so that as it heals there will be little scarring. They will also cut much thicker branches than scissors. Besides material and size, you'll find only three variations on the concave cutter.

- "Flush" concave cutters makes the flush, slightly indented cut mentioned - and is my go to cutter.
- "Narrow" version of the flush cut for tight spaces
- "Rounded" concave cutter are almost a cross between a concave cutter and a knob cutter.

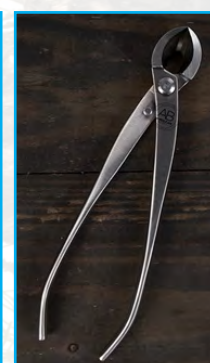
For a beginner, I would recommend the regular "Flush" type. You could easily remove too much material with the rounded type.



Flush cut



Narrow Type



Rounded type

Price examples:

- Concave Cutter

- Carbon steel - \$44
- Stainless - \$48 - \$59

Wire Cutters

As you begin wiring your trees to shape and style them, you will need a bonsai specific wire cutter. Bonsai wire cutters cut at the tip - so that you can easily cut wire off the tree

- There are a few different shapes of wire cutter sold but I'd say there is really only one type you will see most people using (because it works very well).

Price examples:

- Wire Cutters

- Carbon steel - \$40
- Stainless - \$40 - \$59



Optional Tools

Pliers

Pliers are used for placing and removing wire, wiring a tree into a pot and stripping bark from a branch.

- If you are considering buying bonsai pliers, there are basically two types - a straight head or an angled head. I've personally found the straight head to be easier to use and have seen more of them used by other bonsai hobbyists.



Straight Head



Angled Head

Price examples:

- Pliers

- Carbon steel - \$39
- Stainless - \$44- \$59

- If you don't want to invest in bonsai pliers you can definitely get by for a while with regular pliers you have on hand. Just be aware that many pliers have a cutter built in - so if you use one of those, you have to be much more careful or you could wind up accidentally cutting a branch.

Bypass pruner (Available at any garden center)

- If you have bypass pruner for gardening, it can be useful to have one for bonsai. If you are working, for example on large garden stock, you can cut through some very thick branches with a bypass pruner before going in to do your clean cut with a concave cutter.

What about all those other tools?

You may be asking - what about all those other tools I see in experienced members bags. At this stage, you just don't need them yet. In most of our bags/ tool rolls - you'll see at least one saw, knob cutter, root hook, chopsticks as well as possibly a selection of brushes, a transplant sickle, a knife, a trunk splitter etc. We also tend to have different sizes of the same tool. These are all things we acquired over time as the need arose and our collections grew to very different size trees etc. To be perfectly honest, many of us have more tools than we need (myself included). Start with the recommended tools and as you get more into bonsai and encounter different situations where you find needs for a tool, then slowly add to your collection. **Take care of your tools and they will last you for many, many years to come.** (Wipe them clean. Use alcohol to cut through sap and use a corrosion preventer such as Corrosion-X spray. American Bonsai sells Sprayway Stainless Steel Cleaner to clean and protect stainless tools - available cheaper on Amazon.)

- Note: Price samples are from stonelantern.com and americanbonsai.com. There are plenty of other reputable bonsai tool vendors. These are just ones I was familiar with for examples. Prices are approximate and vary depending on sales.

Thanks to Dawn Koetting for her input on this article!

Olive Bonsai



Olea europaea is a tender evergreen that thrives in warm subtropical areas, growing to 32 feet in height. It has opposite leathery, shiny, narrow, small dark-green leaves. Small white flowers in the summer are followed by green olives which given a long enough period of warmth ripen to black. O. europaea has light-grey bark which becomes particularly gnarled with age. This is a broad-leaved species that lends itself well to areas of deadwood. Olea sylvestris is the sought after Wild Olive and older specimens will often feature expansive deadwood and smaller leaves.



UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS: EUROPEAN OLIVE is incredible bonsai material with tiny leaves. Admired because it is a very slow grower. Olive likes full/ partial sun and moderate water and fertilizer (Do not overwater). Cold hardy zones 9-11. Protect from cold (below 43°) They suffer badly if allowed to sit outside in cold, wet conditions and should be protected from excessive rain in the winter.

The cracked bark is particularly advantageous for the design of olives as bonsai. Due to their willingness to sprout out (with suitable bonsai care), styling mistakes can be easily compensated for. Olives are well suited for bonsai with lots of dead wood.

They can be grown as very small or very large bonsai. The reason for this lies in the small leaves and the often bizarre and powerful trunks of old trees collected from nature.

STYLING:

-Wiring: Be careful when apply the bonsai wire and bending older branch-



es. These break easily.
-Pruning: Since the olive grows slowly, you should not prune too often. Pinch back new growth. Often one cut is enough at the end of the growing season.
-Olive trees form strong, gnarled, twisted stems in old age. Such trees can be used to create attractive bonsai trees.
-Olives have very hard wood. This makes them well suited for a bonsai with large areas of dead wood.

-After strong pruning of a bonsai the olive tree willingly sprout out of the old wood.
-Olive trees easily develop new roots in a well-drained bonsai soil. This means that even very old trees can be potted into a bonsai pot after being excavated.
-The bonsai care of olive trees is not difficult. This makes them a good bonsai for beginners.
-If you want to cut back thicker branches, proceed as follows: Slightly cut back the branches with a sharp bonsai scissors - wait for new shoots - wait until new shoots are strong enough - only then cut further
-Suitable most styles and for all sizes.

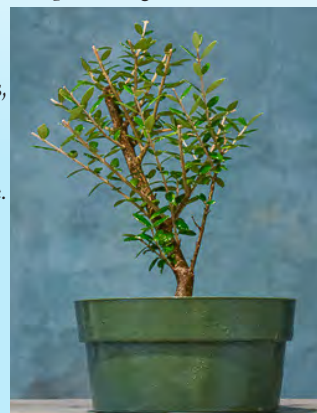
FEEDING: Every 2 weeks from Spring to Autumn, do not feed during the Winter.

REPOTTING: Every second year (or more - root growth can be slow) in Spring
Use a free draining mix.

PROPAGATION: Seed (Spring) or Semi-ripe cuttings in summer. Air layering off older plants is also possible.

PESTS AND DISEASES: Scale, aphids, spiders mites

Sources: wigertsbonsai.com bonsai4me.com, bonsai-shop.com, evergreengard-enworks



Defoliating Ficus (Fig)

By Jerry Meislik (bonsaihunk.us)

Defoliation is the complete or partial removal of the leaves of a bonsai tree. The technique is used to reduce the leaf size thus making the replacement leaves smaller and in better scale to the tree's size. Defoliation is often done 3 weeks prior to exhibiting or photographing the tree. Another benefit of defoliation is the increase in branch ramification that occurs with defoliation.



Fig tree totally defoliated.

How to defoliate

The process of defoliation is simple; using a sharp scissors cut off each leaf leaving the petiole or stem. This may take a few seconds on a very small tree or many hours on a large tree.

Each cut will bleed a small amount of white latex which is normal and not of any concern. In two to four weeks the tree will begin putting out new leaves. Many of these new leaves will be in areas of the tree that never had any foliage. This process is called creating back-breaks. If done properly each twig may develop anywhere from none to three new branchlets on each branch. Back-breaks are a really nice help to creating more twig density on the tree and advancing the look of maturity.

Most of the new leaves will simply replace the old ones, but the new leaves will be much smaller, cleaner and undamaged making the bonsai look very refreshed. After the first new leaf emerges and enlarges a second and third leaf will shortly emerge. As each successive leaf emerges and hardens off it will be larger than its predecessor. Usually by the fourth new leaf the plant's normal leaf size is reached. All growth after that point will be of the normally sized leaf. If you wish to keep the leaves small you must stop the growth after the second or third new leaf by pinching all the tips back. This will hold the plant another two weeks until growth starts again. Unfortunately this second growth will usually be with normally large leaves.



Twig showing the progressive return to normal sized leaves after defoliation.

How often to defoliate

Under typical indoor cultivation I would not recommend defoliation be used except every two years. In tropical areas the fig may be leaf pruned or defoliated two, three or more times per year. But these trees are under ideal growing conditions, and are much stronger and able to tolerate the stress of defoliation, if you are experienced and are growing your trees under strong artificial illumination then defoliation can be done two or even three times each year. Outdoor tropical growers are lucky and with healthy trees can defoliate even more frequently.

Defoliation is a stress

Any defoliation whether partial or complete is a stress to the tree. All green plant with leaves needs the leaves to photosynthesize. Photosynthesis is the only source of energy for green plants to grow and survive. When leaves are removed photosynthesis is greatly reduced until new leaves equal to the ones removed are replaced on the tree. Thus the tree must use its stored energy reserves in the branches, trunks,

and roots to survive and eventually to replace all the removed leaves. Until this happens the tree is in deficit mode. The stores are depleted and can only be restored after the new leaves come out and begin photosynthesizing for several months. Should the tree be further stressed by chilling, over watering, insects etc. the whole tree or parts of it may die.

Care After defoliation.

After defoliating the tree must be kept in its normal position in light. If the tree is moved to less light the new leaves may actually grow out larger than the original leaves. **Watering is reduced since the tree without leaves will not require a normal amount of water.** Keeping the tree wet may result in root rot and damage to the tree. No fertilization of the tree is required until the tree puts out at least two new leaves on its growth points. Do not repot the tree after defoliation; if a change of pot is needed this should be done two months or more before or after defoliation. The double stress of simultaneous repotting and defoliation is not advised.

When to defoliate

Defoliate when the tree is actively growing. That means when the tree has put out at least 3 new leaves at each growth point. A resting or dormant tree can be defoliated but I do not advise this for indoor fig growers. If the tree is under stress such as disease, insects, change of location, large changes in temperature then do not defoliate.

Defoliate three weeks before you wish the tree to be at its peak beauty. This may be prior to photographing or displaying the tree in a show.

Partial defoliation

Defoliation of only some of the tree is used in specific circumstances. Sometimes one branch of a tree is thinner or weaker than it should be. Defoliate the whole tree but leave the weak branch alone. This will allow the weak branch to grow more vigorously and catch up with the defoliated portions of the tree. The non-defoliated branch will continue to grow while the defoliated branches are busy putting out new leaves and not thickening quite as much. Done repetitively over a few years a thin branch can catch up to its neighbors.

Fig showing two lowest branches not defoliated. Upper twigs regrowing after defoliation.



When a tree needs some leaf reduction but the tree is not splendidly healthy it may be possible to remove the largest leaves over the whole tree. This weakens the tree slightly and the replacement leaves may be smaller. Also some trees will have an assortment of leaf sizes present. By removing only the large leaves the whole tree is brought into more harmony.

A third option is to cut all the leaves on the tree in half. Most figs will respond by sending out new leaves that are smaller but not as small as with total defoliation. It's a less stressful means to reduce the leaf size but probably the leaf size reduction is less than maximum. During this time the tree also looks quite scruffy since it has rather funny cut leaves. These cut leaves are removed after the new leaves are hardened off.

Signs of problems

The tree takes longer than 2-3 weeks to begin growing new leaves.
The replacement leaves are larger than the originals.
The tree does not re-foliate.
The tree re-foliates on some branches and not others.
Twig die back occurs.

All these indicate that you goofed. Likely the tree was not as healthy as it should have been. Do not do anything more to stress the tree and allow it grow for one year without interference, and keep your fingers crossed.

Conclusion

Defoliation is a fabulous tool when used properly. Defoliation is not for all trees and should not be done by beginners until they are confident in their horticultural skills. Properly done it can speed up the process of advancing your tree to a higher level.



The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

ANNUAL

Bonsai Auction

& Plant Sale

(FREE and Open to the Public)

August 12, 2023

Viewing of trees and plant sale begins at 4:00pm
Auction 6:00pm – 9:00pm



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



Embracing the Art and Science of Bonsai

Underhill Bonsai is a full service bonsai nursery focused on horticultural science and the timeless traditions of bonsai. We offer products and services for everybody at every level of interest. We support you in your bonsai journey.

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during the meeting. The winner will be determined by a panel of experienced judges. A sign up sheet and more information will be available at the meetings.

Saturday, August 12, 2023

2023 Annual GNOBS Auction & Plant Sale

VFW Hall – 1133 Hickory Ave, Harahan, LA 70123

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. All donations contribute to the operating budget of the club and we hope to bring you even better programs next year. Besides, you'll need the space for the fabulous new bonsai that you just can't live without and bring home from the auction.

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

Viewing of trees and plant sale begins at 4:00pm

Auction – 6:00pm – 9:00pm

President cont. from pg 1

July meeting Styling Competition. Club will provide the wire, bring your tools.

I look forward to Evan Pardue doing a lecture and Demo on water elms this month. It's good to see the workshop full but you can come and be a silent observer on Saturday. Evan attended the ABS show in Denver and I'm sure he'll share his experience there. I look forward to seeing you all there.

Dennis Burke
GNOBS President



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