

THE BONSAI Wire

May 2024

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

FROM THE President

I had the opportunity to attend Bonsai on the Bayou a few weekends ago in Houston. This was the first time

I have attended such a gathering of Bonsai professionals, enthusiasts and hobbyists all in one place. I was a bit overwhelmed with all that was going on. The Houston club and volunteers that organized the show did a phenomenal job. The amount of material for multiple raffles they had was astonishing. The amount of vendors and material for sale was great. The amount of pre bonsai, finished bonsai, Kusamono, pots, tools and scrolls was very distracting! They even had a guy offering tool sharpening services! It was a good study on the programs, layout of show, raffle material, type and variety of vendors for us to use as a guide for the '27 convention we will be hosting. I met a good number of fellow Bonsai lovers and made a lot of new friends. It was great to see Randy Bennett conduct a Bald Cypress workshop and lecture that were both full of eager pupils! We are very fortunate to have a resident bald cypress bonsai expert!

Congratulations to Dawn Koetting for winning 4 awards at the convention.

Congratulations to Evan Pardue for winning best Kusamono. If you haven't attended a show of national or international size I highly recommend doing so. It is worth it to see some beautiful Bonsai, find some unique material for bonsai, learn something new about bonsai and meet fellow enthusiasts.

Dennis Burke
GNOBS President



MEETINGS & Events

Meeting Location is:

American Legion Hall 1225 Hickory Ave, Harahan, LA 70123

Tuesday, May 14, 2024

Program: Tropical 3 Ring Circus 7:00pm

Evan Pardue, Robert Reed and Kathy Barbazon will simultaneously demo five different tropical trees (1 Desmodium, 1 Mistletoe Ficus, 1 Sea Hibiscus, 2 Dwarf Jades. **Bonus: One of the styled trees will be raffled off at the end of the night! THE RAFFLE WINNER GETS TO CHOOSE WHICH TREE THEY WANT! (The other four will be in the Auction)**

Also: Details and sign up sheets for the Pedro Morales workshop(s) in June will be available.

Friday, June 14, 2024

Program: Pedro Morales demo 7:00pm

Pedro Morales is an internationally renowned Bonsai Artist based in Puerto Rico with 35 years experience. Though adept at other species, he specializes in all species of tropical bonsai and conducts tropical bonsai schools around the world

Saturday, June 15, 2024

Program: Pedro Morales workshop(s)

Final Details are currently being worked out and will be available at the May meeting with sign-up sheets. We hope to have one workshop with supplied material and one bring your own tree workshop.

Tuesday, July 9, 2024

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

Meetings cont. pg 7

SPECIES Spotlight

Jaboticaba, or jabuticaba, or *Plinia cauliflora*, or maybe *Myrciaria cauliflora*

By Adam Lavigne adamaskwhy.com

Once got in trouble for questioning the name of this tree. But I'm a questioner. I hit hard sometimes with my "but why?" comments.

I mean, to elucidate the problem with the trees nomenclature, look it up. There are several genus' with the common name jaboticaba (the genus is the first word in the binomial name of an organisms. Like a house cat is "Felis catus", the genus is Felis, the species is catus. Binomial: 2 names). And of course, jaboticaba is the Spanish spelling. Jabuticaba is the Portuguese spelling, from whence the trees originate. To reference the title, both of the genus' *Plinia* and *Myrciaria* are in the myrtle family, just to confuse us all. And it seems all the trees commonly called jaboticaba have the flowers and fruit grow on the stem or trunk of the tree as opposed to from a bud or growing tip on the ends of the branches (it's weird to see the fruit. Looks like odd round bugs just hanging out on the trunk)

photo by Adamaniaf, free for use and in the public domain

So you get the confusion? A bunch of trees with the same common names but different binomial names and add in Bonsai people that just can't believe a scientist when they tell you that, no, it's not that, and just because your teacher called it that doesn't make it true, and

we have mass confusion and hurt feelings.

Btw, I won't get fruit for many years, if at all on my tree. In the ground it'll take almost 15 years, in Bonsai culture, maybe more.

But ... all that trouble I got into, just because I'm a curious guy (I have a text message threatening that we should "...settle this like men")

that's water under the bridge. A bridge I burned behind me long ago. The statute of limitations has even passed

And that's ok, cuz I'm feeling muuuuch better now ...

The idea with styling a jaboticaba is to make it look like a full sized, deciduous, but tropical tree. Meaning it'll be spreading wider than tall, and a place for cows and the odd gaucho to have a break from the intense Brazilian sun.

Which means my tree today is just a bit too tall.



Lemme here the children sing,

"Timber!"



Yup. I just chopped it. Chopped and let fall, discarded on the compost heap like rubbery cabbage leaves and the potato peels you throw away when making paupers' goulash at the end of the month when all your money is gone and

you have to go behind the farmer's market stand to scrounge for scraps to feed your three boys something, anything, to fill their bellies and stop the tears of hunger they shed as they try to sleep in the cold, bitter, winter nightssorry, got a little dramatic there for a moment.

And there's no amount of propagation I can do to any of the parts I cut off. No air layers, no stem cuttings. The only Successful propagations I've seen, heard, and read about is by seed (there's One study I found. Read it, 4-5 months to get one root on a toothpick sized cutting? And there are several airlayering mentions but I have not seen any actual results, so I'm not buying the claim. Show me!)

Yes, seed. So all the bonsai you've seen using this species is seed grown.

Imagine that? It's almost like the universe is being contrary to all those people on the beginners forums that haze and hassle the noobs whenever they ask about starting a bonsai from seed. (BTW, here's a secret: Japanese Black Pine are started from seed too).

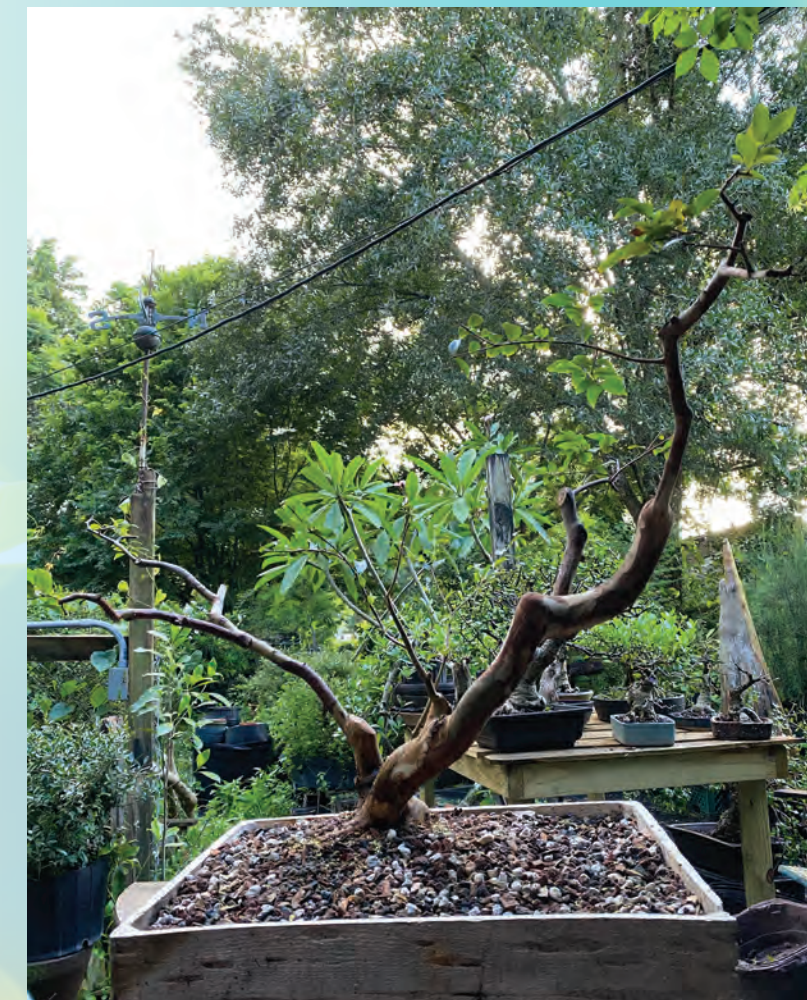
That doesn't mean you want to start from seed now. There's a lot of growing you do from seed that just isn't bonsai related. I don't do it myself, I take cuttings or buy bigger trees because the one thing you can't fake is time, though we can come close with some techniques. But it's time that gives a black pine it's bark, or deadwood that real checked, aged look. Or, on some trees, like a trident maple, believable ramification.

So, now that's I've given ammunition to both sides of that argument, the one bad thing with jaboticaba being seed grown is the root spread is usually crappy. One or two strong roots and an inward curving trunk is the norm.

I had to dig deep on this one. Three good roots, mostly radial, but not the best for the trunk line, meaning it looks good on one side with the roots but the trunk has no movement, or branching, or it's bending over backwards like a politician betraying his principles to secure the big money from that PAC funding his re-election campaign. Oh well. It'll get better as I report it over the years, hopefully.

Politicians just get worse, unfortunately.

And that's about all the damage I can do to this poor tree.





The base isn't that bad. And I'll probably pick a new front for the tree every time I repot it. But time will tell.

It's been said that it's best to use only organic fertilizer on this species. The reasoning is that it's not very salt tolerant at all and a synthetic fertilizer will cause brown tips on the leaves, because synthetics have salts in them. Well, that's a true statement. Nitrogen, in a soluble form which makes it available to a plant, is a salt. But it's not SALT, or sodium chloride. We call many things "salts" but that doesn't mean they are a bad thing. That's like saying "I don't eat anything with ingredients I can't pronounce because, like, chemicals are bad!" Sorry to say but everything is a chemical. EVERYTHING!

The nitrogen molecule in MiracleGro Shake N Feed is identical to the nitrogen molecule in BioGold bonsai fertilizer. At least the soluble kind (when we think in terms of fertilizer you have water soluble and water insoluble. Ammonia nitrate is water soluble, it's in synthetic ferts and organic ferts. Blood meal is a great source of nitrogen, usually with an NPK of 13-0-0, with more than half water soluble. It's organic. Water soluble means that the solid nitrogen, or other nutrient, melts in water, and is readily available to the plant, right now. Insoluble means you need some type of microbe to break down the solid to make it soluble, and available to the plant).

When nitrogen is soluble, it is in salt form, whether in synthetic or organic form. The difference between the two tends to be in how much is in the formula. It's easier to poison (too much dose) a plant with synthetic ferts because there's just more nitrogen in it than in organics. Unless your using blood meal. Be careful with blood meal. (Especially on the full moon on a Friday the 13th. Blood sacrifices can bring some serious demons into your living room).

What does all this mean for the jaboticaba and organic vs. synthetic ferts?

I have no idea.

If you get one, and you have leaf tip burn (which is the classic symptom for too much nitrogen btw) maybe don't fertilize as much, or use a time release, or lower nitrogen, or organic. But make sure your water is good, not too much chlorine, and, if you're close to the beach, there's your problem.

This is technically my first jaboticaba in training, so I'll report on my fertilizer success or failures. I put down the new American Bonsai Tools UltraFeed organic NPK of 4-3-2, let's see what happens.

Anyway, I can write a whole blog post on fertilizers (and I am) but this website and author knows his stuff, here's a link to an article on salts: <https://www.gardenmyths.com/salts-dont-kill-plants-or-microbes/> with two more links you can follow to fill in some holes you may have in your horticultural education.



Structurally, I really like this one crook in the trunk below. It's a characteristic of the tree, which has unexplained, weird and odd angle changes.

The one thing I can't show, except with some drawing or digital manipulation, is what will happen in time. Remember we talked about the passage of time, about four pics above? You can buy time, by getting a bigger trunk, or a well ramified specimen, but if you're interested in making and developing your own trees, the only thing you can do is wait. Sorry.

But I can try to show you some time flow.

The initial styling:



And the virtual styling :



That looks good. Maybe a little more green on the top right, but there you go.

You know what? I think, just so I don't hurt anyone else's feelings, I'll go back to the Native American spelling from Brazil and start calling the tree "iapoti'kaba".

It has a lyrical ring to it ...

BONSAI Techniques

Moss technique

by Jonas Dupuich bonsaitonight.com

It's common, when displaying bonsai at indoor exhibits, to cover the surface of the soil with moss. The alternative – dirt – doesn't really compare. Scott decorated his Ponderosa Pine with a great arrangement of mosses and lichens at this year's BIB exhibit.



Moss on ponderosa pine

Depending on where you live, you may have found that moss doesn't just show up the week before exhibit. Either that or

you find it difficult to keep it under control, a problem I do not have in Northern California. For years now, I've taken note of all of the patches of attractive moss I run across that grow on public property. Come January, I go moss-collecting. If all goes well, I end up with a few trays like the one below.

Collected moss



One other ingredient is necessary to make the process a success – moss. White sphagnum moss, to be specific, the kind usually available from orchid growers. It typically comes in clumps. Run it through the large screen you use when sifting bonsai soil to produce the fine particles shown below.



White sphagnum moss

With these two special ingredients close by, it's time to get started. The first step is soji – removing, or "cleaning" the top layer of soil. Depending on the quality of your soil, this step may not be

necessary. Because I use organic fertilizers like cottonseed meal, I find that in January the decomposed fertilizer becomes gunky and impedes drainage. Now's a good time to remove it. I do this with bent-nose tweezers – possibly the most used tool in my bag.

Removing the top layer of soil

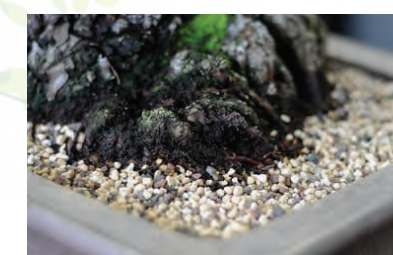


If any roots stick out, I clip them with root scissors.

Clipping an exposed root



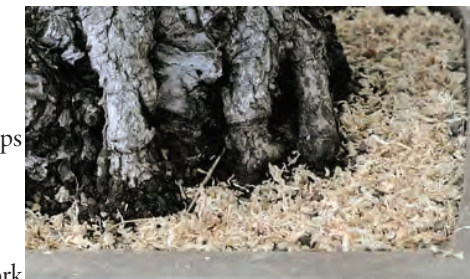
I then fill the pot with bonsai soil but stop a quarter-inch below the lip. This is to make room for the moss. If your moss is thicker, leave a bigger gap.



Fresh bonsai soil (akadama, lava, pumice and charcoal)

Here's where the sphagnum moss comes in. Sprinkle a thin layer over the soil.

White sphagnum moss



The sphagnum moss helps keep the dollups of fresh moss moist. Watering it down before placing the fresh moss makes the work easier – and keeps it from blowing away.



Sphagnum moss moistened – ready for fresh moss

This is where the moss work becomes technical. Clipping the base of a dollup of moss helps it fit into the pot.

Preparing a clump of moss





The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

ANNUAL

Bonsai Auction & Plant Sale

(FREE and Open to the Public)

August 10, 2024

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

Some folks start in corners – others begin around the base of the trunk. One down, more to go

It's possible that somewhere, someone has written a treatise about moss-laying. I like to think so anyway. Turns out it's much easier to do a bad job than it is to make the moss

smooth and attractive. I've seen many workshop students shrug their shoulders and breeze through a tree only to find themselves reapplying the moss under Boon's supervision. Half-way there – Jeff always does a good job

Where can moss-work go wrong? Some things to keep in mind. Like-sized clumps look good together. Placing large clumps on the left side of the pot and small clumps on the right side stands out something awful. The same rule applies to moss color, character, and direction. Yes, direction. Look closely and you'll notice that most moss leaves that grow together point the same way.

Some of the most attractive work blends together different kinds of moss. It's worth experimenting to see what effect you like. Bonus points for good use of lichen. We'll save antenna-theory for another day. Freshly applied moss

Tamping the moss with tweezers or trowel helps it stay put. As moss frequently grows in mucky soil, firmly pressing the moss into place really sets the clumps into the sphagnum and bonsai soil below.

Tamping the moss with tweezers

Tamping the moss with a trowel

For a final touch, feel free to sprinkle tiny soil particles over the moss and sweep away the excess. By filling in the gaps, the edges of the clumps don't dry out so quickly. A popular BIB top-dressing is black lava, or "pepper," as you'll hear folks refer to it in Boon's workshops. The purple lava works well because it stays fairly dark when dry – pumice and akadama are lighter-colored when dry. Sweeping away excess "pepper"

Moss-work complete

Once all's set, water in the moss-work. Bonsai with freshly applied moss can be placed in full-sun, but care must be taken so it doesn't dry out. The longer between the moss application and the exhibit, the more the clumps will fuse together and the taller the moss will sit in the pot. Some day I'll lay moss early and let it grow for a month before exhibit. It makes for a somewhat rangy look that complements rough-hewn bonsai well.

Here are a few more examples of moss-work from BIB's 11th annual exhibit.



Black pine with green moss



Ponderosa pine with moss and lichen



Root over rock procumbens juniper with green moss and a small fern



Gooseberry with green mosses



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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Meetings cont. from pg 1

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. (We encourage you to work on your trees now so they will be ready for display in July!)

Saturday, August 10, 2024

2024 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. If you are a beginner, make cuttings now for the bargain table or buy an inexpensive garden center plant and gain some practice by styling it for the auction. 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

Monthly study groups

1st Saturday - Randy Bennett

2nd Saturday - Kathy Barbazon

Specialty study groups

As announced - Dawn Koetting, Dennis Burke

Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

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