

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

<https://sites.google.com/site/cedarrapidsbonsai/>

August 2018

Volume 61, Issue 8



IBA August Activities

Open Study Group 9:00 am to Noon

Topics: *Come when you want and bring a tree to work on to work on.*

IBA Meetings at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden.
909 Robert D. Ray Drive

Everybody is welcome.

EIBA August Activities

August 9, 6:30 pm. Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road

Topics: *Andy Smith Workshop, NewBo Show, Club Soil Prep, New Officers.*

August 19, NewBo Bonsai Show, 10 am – 4 pm
(set up at 9 am) outside of NewBo Market, CR
Come show your support and see some great trees!

August 21, 4 pm – 8 pm Andy Smith Workshop, Jones Park Pavillion.

Sept. 13, 6:00 pm. Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road

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Inside This Issue

IBA Activites	1
EIBA Activites	1
Bald Cypress No. 1 Evolution	1-3
Are Lichens Bad for Bonsai?	3-4
New Book: 'Bonsai Heresy'	4
Choosing the Front	5
Bjorn Bjorholm Juniper	5
Timely Tips	6-7

Bald Cypress No. 1 Evolution

By Ryan Neil, Renowned American Bonsai Artist, Portland, Oregon

The essence of American bonsai

Bald Cypress #1 embodies the diversity of landscape and form Mirai strives to explore through our trees. Its rapid taper, flat-topped foliage, and overall Dr. Seuss-esque form demands consideration. However, its influential presence is not isolated to Mirai. This tree extends beyond the garden as a representative piece of the American Bonsai Movement, capturing the essence of the Southeastern American landscape on the internet (Amazon has them). For fertilizer Dr. Earth 5-5-5 from Menards works great.

The story behind the design of Bald Cypress #1 began with a cross-country road trip from Oregon to New York on the way to the National Show in 2012. Having returned from Japan in 2010, I was still deeply questioning what it meant to do bonsai as an American. As I drove from West to East, I noticed the nuanced beauty in the people and their surrounding environments, each with unique identities tied to the land.

Bald Cypress - continued

Once the trees were on display at the National Show, I was immediately drawn to a wonderfully executed bald cypress, with a lanky, flat-topped form—I thought it was amazing. So much style and authenticity, no shame in deviation from tradition, and glowing in its organic form.

I followed the judges through a portion of their judging and paid particular attention to the discussion surrounding the bald cypress. To my disappointment, the Japanese judge graded the tree poorly, he said it wasn't how a formal upright tree should be styled. From the Japanese perspective of the common pine form he was correct in his assessment, but this wasn't a pine.

I wondered if he'd ever been to Florida, if he knew bald cypress—how and why they grow—if he'd ever stood in their presence. With 48 hours driving across the United States, I had ample time to soak in all its landscapes and taste its cultures. In this truly unique bald cypress form, I felt that I had encountered a tree that was an authentic representation of a uniquely American environment. To see the negative judgement on such a design—my perspective shifted.

I recognized if I was truly going to make bonsai reflective of culture, nature, and the individual,



SUMMER

2012

I couldn't necessarily consider the traditional Japanese design canon any longer. I had to expand beyond it. I needed to learn how to interpret trees and identify the components that make them different. My education really started at that moment of realization.

After that show, I immediately wanted to work with bald cypress. So I called Mary Madison, the preeminent collector and she said she had just the tree for me—totally natural, uncut, with rapid taper—an incredible piece of material.

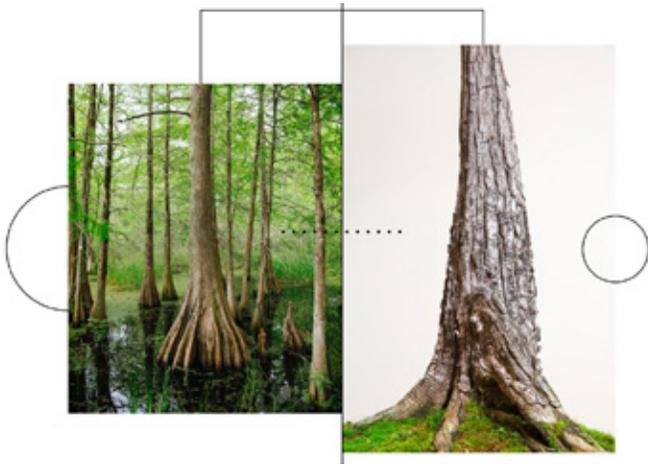
When the tree came to Mirai, it was love at first sight. At that point, I had never visited the Florida Everglades, so I had to design the tree with an intuition of what that landscape feels like. It took me no longer than an hour to first style Bald Cypress #1, but I was consumed with this new exploration, conjuring a connection to an iconic environment.

The design carries forward this feeling, the spirit of the Southeastern United States. Bald Cypress #1 has been utilized more than any other tree at Mirai to offer the public a glimpse into bonsai's capacity to capture an entire landscape in one composition.



FALL

2012



“There is immense power in its simplicity—this slender, upright tree with a flat tuft of foliage.”

There is immense power in its simplicity—this slender, upright tree with a flat tuft of foliage, minimal branching and an impressive, buttressing base. It holds the spirit of what it means to practice American Bonsai, and beyond that bonsai that represents region and the environment because it falls so far outside of the traditional Japanese aesthetic.



“Bald Cypress #1 helped me find that direction outside of the traditional Japanese form.”

After having visited this tree’s native landscape, I recognized the feeling of the original design remained true—a snapshot of nature, culture, and the individual. This tree catalyzed my journey as a bonsai professional working with native trees that represent North American landscapes. Bald Cypress #1 helped me find that direction outside of the traditional Japanese form and to undertake



the exploration of a new approach, something unique, and find the forms I see closer to home and truer to the culture that created me.

Are Lichens Bad for Bonsai? *Ross Clark from ABS e-newsletter*

Recently, I was with a group of people who were working with a well-known bonsai artist, and I heard him tell someone to remove lichens from a tree because “they aren’t good for bonsai.” This is the same basic comment I’ve heard occasionally from various bonsai people for many years, and I keep wondering where this attitude comes from. Actually, it doesn’t really matter where this attitude comes from. And now is as good a time as any to air this one out. Here goes; probably more than you bargained for here . . .

What are lichens, anyway? Every lichen is a dual partnership between a fungus and an alga. The fungus dominates the obvious structure. The algal cells embedded in the fungus body are photosynthetic. Lichens colonize habitats which no other advanced organisms can colonize and grow in, including bare rock and even inside rocks. In fact, lichens grow in conditions where neither the fungus nor the algal partner could survive. When growing on rocks, lichens help to break down the rock surface and produce soil. The algae in many lichens convert nitrogen gas from the atmosphere into organic chemicals containing nitrogen.

This critical process for life is called nitrogen fixation. Nitrogen fixation is essential for making proteins, chlorophyll, RNA, DNA and molecules that transfer energy inside cells. When lichens fall from trees they decay, releasing soluble nitrogen compounds into soil, where plants' roots can recycle them into food webs.

In some ecosystems, such as tundra and boreal forest or taiga, lichens are the main nitrogen fixers. They also are basic to the diet of some animals such as caribou. Even people have survived at times by eating lichens. In some ecosystems lichens are so numerous that they almost carpet the ground and form long drapes from tree branches (Pacific Northwest and high mountain folks take note). Fragments of lichens continually break off. Tiny lichen fragments (consisting of a few algal cells entangled in fungal threads) are blown in the wind or are carried by birds' feet to other suitable habitats, where they grow into large lichens.

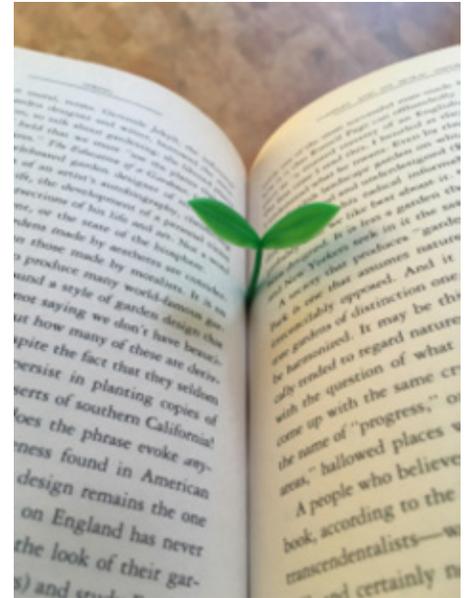
Lichens are excellent indicators of air pollution, because air pollutants accumulate in them and kill them. So, if you live in an area where lichens are abundant, it means that the air you're breathing is relatively clean. So, are lichens bad for bonsai? Certainly not in any biological way. Only perhaps for esthetic reasons. (The same goes for mosses, by the way. I challenge you to find a tree trunk in a non-desert environment that does not have any moss on it.) In every way, lichens are a sign of healthy conditions for plants and ecosystems. The only possible reason not to want them on bonsai is esthetic. So, the next time someone tells you that lichens are bad for bonsai, you might be tempted to tell them that rumors, no matter how often they are repeated, may not be true.

A New Book: 'Bonsai Heresy' *Michael Hagedorn (Crataegus)*

This book has been in the works for some years now. To those who were aware of this and have been asking ad nauseam when it will be done, I now have an answer. Soon.

Bonsai Heresy is about the myths of common bonsai technique and thought. The book recounts some of my past misdeeds, looks into our group fallacies, and works to correct the most ill-advised of these techniques

and ideas using the tools of tradition, science, common sense, and embarrassing stories.



The book has over 50 chapters of technical and aesthetic myths, including some half-correct ones like 'Choose the front first' and 'Pigeon breasts are naughty', lays out the debunking science behind B1 and other chemical additives, offers new thoughts in such debates as 'Any soil the nursery industry uses will work fine for bonsai', 'Copper wire is for boneheads / Aluminum wire is for sissies', 'Bonsai is an art / Bonsai is not an art', and dives into the myth-laden morasses around using / not using wound sealant, the inner core at repotting time, moss, plant hardiness, sacrifice branches, age in bonsai...and on and on.

The choice of chapters was based on topics I'd overheard multiple times and felt were in need correction or clarification.

Look for Bonsai Heresy in 2019. No cover for it yet so I can't offer an image, but imagine something an inquisition wouldn't like.

EDITOR'S NOTE: I first heard Michael talk about this book a good ten years ago. Back then, he referred to wanting to write a book on "Bonsai Myths". In his planned book, he would challenge common myths in the bonsai world and proceed to educate bonsai hobbyists properly. One of the reasons I admire Michael is, although he is an artist par excellence, he is very strong in science, knowledge, logic, and truth. And he loves to teach. So, I have been eagerly awaiting this book. Over the years Michael has dropped myths he wanted to write about into a folder. That folder was finally full enough to fill a book.

Choosing the Front: Old Collected Trees

Michael Hagedorn (*Crataegus*)

How do we choose a front on an older, collected tree?
A few tips:

- Keep an eye out for fronts that show a trunk line that is not an S curve
 - Use the special features of the tree; this might be unusual movement, shari, live vein, jin, old branch, cavity, or even bark
 - Be willing to have a pigeon breast if other, greater features may be featured
 - Clean the dead areas of the tree of bark, exposing shari that might influence front choice
 - Remember that inclination is as important as front, and is chosen at the same time
 - Be aware that large roots on collected trees can pose an angle limit to some inclinations, yet root mounds are more acceptable as well
-

Bjorn Bjorholm Juniper

Bjorn is a Japanese trained bonsai artist who travels the world. His reputation is top notch and international in scope. Recently, he moved back to the US, in Tennessee and opened his own nursery. He visits Iowa from time to time. Bjorn has worked on many, many fabulous trees while in Japan and around the world. Here is one.



Timely Tips

John Denny

Lately, we have had a week of hot weather, followed by a week of cooler weather, then heat again, then finally rain. If I was a bonsai tree, I would be frustrated and confused as all get out. Trees can deal with a variety of conditions, but they do better when the extremes are eliminated. So, what can we do as growers of bonsai, to help moderate those extreme conditions?

Let's go through some of the extremes our beloved little trees have to manage. We have high heat in summer (or cold in winter), blazing sun or constant shade, over watering or drought conditions, high wind, not enough nutrients or sometimes too much of a nutrient, overwhelming pests or disease beyond what a plant can tolerate. Sounds like a lot for a plant to manage! Or a grower to manage!

It is not so hard to do really, but we need to work at it and to think ahead. Most of these extreme conditions do their damage quickly, so the best plan by far is to AVOID them in the first place! Or, if we can't avoid sun for example, then perhaps we need to simply not buy or grow sun sensitive plants. Stick with what can be hardy in our conditions, including the extremes of our Iowa conditions.

Let's start with heat, sun, wind. In Iowa, heat can hurt trees from April through September. In fact, 60F in your garage in February can be a problem, too. I lost a very nice shohin olive years back after repotting in early March. First week in April, I put it outside. I left town on a Sunday, just for the day, and did not realize it would hit 80F with a 25 mph spring wind. Very atypical for early April. But, it happens. So, first off, follow the weather predictions for temps. Next, think about how much exposure to heat that your location has. Is your location totally open? Any partial shade? I put a shade cloth above one of my tables four years ago. It helped so much I added one over a second table. I keep pines and junipers in the sun and everything else under light shade cloth. Now, even on hot days, I don't worry. The temps under the shade cloth is always a few degrees lower than open sun. Soil and pots and tree roots do not get as hot. If the temps get above 90F, I often spray a strong mist over the trees, perhaps wetting the top half inch of soil and dampening the foliage. Do this late afternoon, so the foliage can dry out prior to night time. These practices help minimize heat extremes. Because I have shade cloth over some of my tables, I have the ability to move a tree from a higher heat or sun area where the tree might not be doing so well, over to the shaded area. The tree can

recover there. It gives me flexibility.

Wind extremes in Iowa can hurt trees in a couple of ways. One, a harsh wind can really dry soil in a hurry. It does this both by speeding up transpiration of water in the soil being released by the foliage to the air. It also reduces water levels in soil by simply speeding the surface drying of the soil. I really try to keep an eye on wind forecasts in spring and summer. 88F with 5 mph is nothing to worry about. 88F with a 25 mph is a concern we have to react to. Another reason to watch the wind is wind can flip trees over or even off a table or stand, causing great damage to pot or tree. A \$200 tree that flips and breaks off the top, is now a \$40 tree. How to manage wind gusts? Place your trees away from the main direction that wind hits your yard. If it generally comes from the SW, then protect it from that direction. Most of the really damaging winds I have experienced come from the NW. You may have to protect in two directions. Fences work well. Also, I have placed a shade cloth vertically to keep wind from hitting my table tops. You can also use bungee cords to hold your trees down. You have to be prepared ahead for wind. Wind can blow up big time in only a few moments as a storm front comes in. Be ready.

Let's talk water. Watering is one of the toughest challenges we face. This is because there are so many variables – each species has different needs, each soil mix hold water differently, variations in rain, humidity, wind, sun, shade, etc. Over watering can kill trees, but only slowly. Often we have time to figure this issue out. Lack of water can kill a tree in a day. So, this is the extreme we have to prepare for. Use a more water retentive soil to help reduce the impact of hot days. Use somewhat deeper pots to hold more water. Place trees in partial shade or under a shade cloth, Water a second time on each hot day. Cover your soil with sifted sphagnum moss, which will really help hold water near the surface. Use lighter colored pots. I have even heard of covering your pots with aluminum foil to reflect sun light and heat from the pots. Avoid heat sensitive species of trees. Find a cooler location for your bonsai collection, either long term or at least move them on hot days. Placing your trees on the ground is very effective at cooling your trees. Keep your foliage longer to help shade your soil. This summer I pruned several deciduous trees hard. We then had a week of temps above 90F and I was surprised at how much more quickly the soil dried out. The missing foliage would have helped cool the tree. In short, use as many of these strategies to help keep your trees under less stress. We all are healthier when less stressed!

Other stressors for our trees can be pests and diseases that come along, often, seemingly out of nowhere. Every

year I am disappointed to see the first leaves chewed to lacework by Japanese beetles. I also hate to see damage from black spot, mites, needle cast, etc. Most of these pests and diseases can be prevented. I don't like spraying, but I have learned if I don't spray prophylactically for spider mites, my junipers will suffer. When I keep up the spray regimen, my junipers do well. When I get lazy, bang! They have mites and suffer damage. So, either spray on a schedule to avoid issues or keep a daily eye on all your tree's foliage to spot the problems early. Then spray them hard. That means using the best most effective spray for the particular problem you have. It means, spray enough, until the spray just begins to drip. Spray the underside of foliage and from at least two or three directions. And spray a week later and maybe even a third week in a row, so you kill any newly hatched pests that were still in the egg form, or diseases still in the spore form. Hit 'em hard. Then Hit 'em again!

Another tip to help avoid high stress situations with your trees, is to make sure you are feeding your trees well. Just as poor nutrition can make a human more susceptible to diseases, so can weak nutrition for your trees cause them to poorly handle stress from heat, sun, wind, drought, pests. So, feed your trees some good fertilizer. Depending on whether your trees are in the growing, the developing, or the finished bonsai stage – you will feed them differently. But, make sure to give them at least some fertilizer. Fish emulsion offers micro nutrients. 5-5-5 like Bonsai Pro is good for fertilizing when you don't want to feed heavily. Using organic cakes or tea bags is a good way to go, giving a small amount of nutrition each time you water rather than giving a big slug once a month. Skipping fertilizer will cause you issues. Your tree will just seem to slowly lose vigor. A moderate fertilization will keep them much stronger and help them resist extreme stress.

If you want to be successful at bonsai, it is worth your time to sit down and think through each of the stressors to your trees we have talked about. You may be doing some things already to help. What more can you do? The extra idea or two that you decide to implement to help reduce stress on your trees, just might be the key thing that saves one of your prized trees from dying next year! You never know!
July.

Pests and diseases raise their head just a little higher, so look hard for them. I have seen spider mites in junipers recently and the annual appearance of Japanese beetles came early this year. You can use a spray for mites. Hit them a second or third time about a week apart in order

to pick off mites that hatched from the eggs after your first spray. Japanese beetles are a challenge. You can look hard for them and pick them off by hand. Use a heavy water spray to knock them off temporarily. Or use a pesticide to kill them, though they will chew up your leaves prior to dying. Also, be on the look on the lookout for fungus. I have seen just a bit of fungus in my trees, though not much. Daconil works well, but do not use it on spruce as it can damage the cuticle.

The first half of July is a good time to defoliate some of your very strong deciduous trees. Maples can be defoliated. Leaves will come back smaller and you will get some ramification, too. It takes about three weeks for the leaves to return. Only do this on the strongest, healthiest trees. I have done it also on my Tropicals, defoliating Narrow Leaf Ficus, Schefflera, and Golden Gate Ficus. I am seeing new leaves already popping back out. Speaking of Tropical trees, July is a good time to repot Tropicals. Repot them while they are growing hard. I am letting some of mine go a second year rather than repot them annually as I have in the past. Those trees are getting older, more mature and slowing down a bit in their youthful exuberance. By repotting now, your trees will still have plenty of days left to recover prior to early fall night time temps dropping and forcing you to bring them inside.

We have already seen some temps in the mid 90s and will see more of the same. It is important to keep our trees happy as can be during such hot stressful weather. I added a second shade cloth which keeps more of my trees shaded in the mid afternoon heat. Also, consider placing a layer of shredded sphagnum moss to the surface of your trees. It holds water and keeps the surface cooler. It helps increase the root zone just a bit higher in the soil of your pot. Every little bit of added root zone helps your tree, especially on stressful days. Take regular sphagnum moss and rub it over the top of a half inch square soil sieve. Gently spread a thin layer over the surface, especially around the trunk and in a circle. Wet the fine moss with a fine sprayer until thoroughly wet. The moss will settle into a mat that will stay on your soil very nicely.

Beginning about now the nice foliage you have will begin to suffer from insects chewing the leaves, fungus blighting leaves, wind burn, sun burn, etc. Your trees have worked hard to turn green, grow hard, and look nice for you. Do your best to keep their foliage in great shape as long as you can. If you have a nice tree and can keep the foliage nice, think about showing it. You don't have to have the best tree in the show. Just share something nice and have a good time doing it! Your club and those attending the show will thank you for it.