

# Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

[www.iabonsai.org](http://www.iabonsai.org)

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



November 2019

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## IBA November Activities

### November 16 - Iowa Bonsai Association Lunch and Auction

*Donations for auction items are accepted all year at IBA club meetings. Contact any Board of Director for more information.*

**Luch in the Trellis Café, 11:00 am**

**November 19 - IBA Meetings at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden.  
909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

## EIBA November Activities

### November 14, 6:00 pm, Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road.

*Topics: Holiday Party, Ideation session for 2020 Calendar.*

### November 21, 6:00 pm, EIBA Annual Holiday Party held at Leonardo's Restaurant.

*Topics: Come have a great time with the club. Good food, good beer, good friends. See you there!*

## Bonsai Soil Components for Sale

**Proceeds Benefit IBA**  
**Pumice \$15 for five gallons**  
**Akadama \$29.50 per bag**  
**Contact Scott Allen or Tim Peterson**

**DaSu Bonsai Studios**  
**Crushed Lava \$5 for five gallons**  
**Bring a bucket to DaSu Bonsai Studios**  
**Call First 515-769-2446**

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## Fall Color

*John Denny*

Color came to my bonsai collection this year. It came late, but it did arrive. Maples, zelkovas, hornbeams, elms. Yellows, oranges, reds, deep burgundy. A very nice hornbeam with near perfect green leaves came into my garage for winter storage. Within a week inside, it turned a beautiful orange. It is still looking lovely and orange with all the leaves still on their petioles.



*A beautiful maple in Bill Valvanis's tokonoma.  
Photo from Bill's blog.*

*Fall Color  
continued*



*A great photo of Bill Valvanis in bonsai yard. Great trees. So much color! Fall in New York is long and beautiful, especially at Bill's place.*

Non bonsai people are amazed that little bonsai trees actually turn color in fall. I think it is one of the many fascinations of the hobby. Each year is different. Some years, one species looks great, some years they all seem a dull, muddy brown. This year nearly all my trees popped with color. I hope you



*Acer palmatum*



*Trident maple.*

## Literati Style Bonsai

John Deny

Let's discuss Literati style (also known as bunjin style



First, the topic is more complex than most styles. It is not well defined. There are both Chinese versions and Japanese versions of Literati. Literati as a style has been impacted by both historical and philosophical considerations.

Second, I make no pretense to be any kind of authority on the topic. I will introduce the style. Even scratching the surface of literati can be fraught with misinterpretations or even errors of knowledge. There are authors of higher authority out there (Ivan Hanthorn) who could write a follow up article with much more depth. But, we shall forge onward and not go too deeply into the subject at hand.

The name for bunjin bonsai comes from the Japanese word bunjin-gi. However, the style is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and tradition. It is also known as the "literati" style. The names are used interchangeably.

In his book on Chinese "bonsai" *Penjing: Worlds of Wonderment: A Journey Exploring an Ancient Chinese Art and Its History, Cultural Background, and Aesthetics*

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/962520.Penjing>

- widely recognized expert Qingquan Zhao discusses the following 'four concepts.' He believes they best represent the quality and feel of literati trees:

*gugao* - aloofness

*jianjie* - sparseness

*ya* - refined elegance and

*pingdan* - plainness



In John Naka's *Bonsai Techniques I*, he expressed his thoughts on bunjin.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2900765-bonsai-techniques-i>

*"The Bunjin style of bonsai is so free that it seems to violate all the principles of bonsai form. The indefinite style has no specific form and is difficult to describe, however its confirmation is simple, yet very expressive. No doubt its most obvious characteristics are those shapes formed by old age and extreme weather conditions."*

*Literati Style Bonsai*  
*continued*

Bunjin bonsai has no precise rules, however, not just any weirdly shaped tree will work. There are guidelines.

The first thing you will notice is they are *tall*, with *little to no taper*, rarely straight.  
(Although it does happen.)

*Movement is desirable.*

Graceful (and sometimes radical) twists, turns and curves are valued.

*Surface roots (nebari)* <https://www.bonsaimary.com/nebari.html> are not as important in this style as they are in most other bonsai styles.

There are *few branches*, the first of which is at least two thirds of the way up the tree. Any of the branches should be relatively *sparse*.



Because of its elegant simplicity, this bonsai style is considered by many to be one of the most difficult to create. It is not as easy to create as it may look.

A literati may assume the style of a cascade, semi-cascade, formal upright, informal upright or indeed any of the five basic styles. Its approach can likewise be expanded to include variations on the basic styles such as twin trunk, forest planting, multiple trunk, etc.

Since a literati trunk usually features quite a bit of movement, Junipers (because of their elasticity) make excellent bonsai subjects. Pine also work well as do a large number of other evergreens. Deciduous species do not work as well because of their tendency to break and for foliage to always assume an upward growing path. This does not mean they won't work, just that they are more difficult. Don't be afraid to try. You may be the one to open a new frontier in bonsai design. Remember that the true excitement in a literati design is in the innovative way that it contradicts traditional values. Find the unusual or exotic in your tree and use it to good advantage.

Because of the movement, single trunk literati usually are planted in a shallow round or oval container. Trays are also acceptable and can be used in conjunction with rock or stone. In the case of ovals or trays, the trees are usually something other than uprights and should be planted somewhat off center. Remembering the rule that literati design should be simple... overly ornate or heavy glazed containers are generally avoided.

This is enough for now, but know we have just scratched the surface of this intriguing and difficult bonsai style.

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### **Timely Tips**

*John Deny*

All of my trees are inside now. I would love to keep my pines out longer, but it seems every three or four days, the night time temps drop well below 20F. I am getting older (and wiser??) and moving them back outside for a couple of days only to haul them all back inside just isn't going to happen. So, the trees are in the garage where the temps are a bit too warm for the hardening off process. I leave the garage door open as needed to cool the temps down.

I have removed leaves and pruned most of the deciduous. I have cleaned up the smaller pines. There is still work to do on the junipers – removing loose bark, cleaning away weak foliage or foliage hanging down below pads. There is wiring work to do. I have some spraying left as well. I will spray for both pests and fungus. The humidity in my winter storage area stays higher than you might think. I water weekly and that extra water that drains onto the floor keeps the humidity high. Therefore, I spray for fungus going

into the winter and again in early spring.

My tropical trees have been inside for a month. I have worked on a couple of them. It is not the optimum time of year to prune, but I did because they were overgrown. I have a fair amount of light on them. They have been treated with powder systemic to keep pests at bay. They have dropped only a few yellowed leaves.

I have spent a lot of time cleaning up pines. Tasks include plucking old needles, long needles, pruning some excess foliage. I still have to select buds on pines that were decandled.

I am observing how well my trees absorb the water I put on their soil surfaces, so I can determine which trees will require repotting. Once I have my list, I will look for any pots I need so I have them well ahead of time. I have done an inventory of my soil and soil components. I need to buy some components prior to next spring's repotting frenzy. Planning ahead avoids problems. Sometimes in the past I have not had the right pot or the soil of choice and I had to make weaker substitutions. That is not satisfying and not good for your tree. Since we only repot once every two to five years, we want the optimal choices for our trees. I certainly don't want my trees to live in the wrong size soil or wrong ratio of components or wrong pot for the next four years.

This time of year, once the trees go into winter storage, there is a tendency to say, "Whew. I am done with my bonsai for a good while. I need the break." But, get as much work done as you can before you put those trees away and forget them. As Gary Wood told me early on, "November is the beginning of the year for bonsai. It is when we do the pruning, wiring, bud selection, etc. to prepare the trees for their spring growth. Having a good year next year depends on doing the work in the previous November." In other words, "Get to work!" You and I will have to earn those Mojitos in Miami this winter by doing our November bonsai work first.

Mmmm... a hot Cuban sandwich and a strong Mojito served by a lovely young...JOHN! Wake up!! Go do some wiring!