

# Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

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



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## IBA January Activities

**January 18 - IBA Meetings at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden.  
909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

*We'll be having the fundraising auction so members are encouraged to bring anything they don't need anymore and would like to donate to the club. We'll be auctioning Them off.*

**All Are Welcome.**

## February EIBA Activities

**February 12, 6:00 - 8:00 PM, EIBA Club Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road. Topics: Prep for first Club mtg on Feb 19.**

**February 15, 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM. Winter Gardening Fair, Kirkwood Regional Center on Boysen Rd, Hiawatha. \$45 (Lunch included). EIBA will give a presentation at this event and have tables in the hallway.**

**February 19, 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM. Club Meeting. Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd. Topics: Collect dues. Hand out soil (bring empty bucket if you can), Discussion on Bringing Trees Out of Winter Dormancy.**

## Bonsai Soil Components for Sale

**Pumice \$20 for five gallons  
\$15 if you bring your own Bucket.**

**Akadama \$32 per bag, \$30 for members**

**Contact Scott Allen or Tim Peterson**

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## Deciduous Early Development Part I: Japanese Maple

*Michael Hagedorn (from his blog)*

The first part of this development series covers a few gangly specimens of Japanese Maple.

Japanese Maple is one of the most challenging early development deciduous trees because of its propensity to make long internodes. It's also one of the best examples of a theme that runs throughout the next few posts on early development, and that is:

Leave some unwanted shoots and branches to shorten the internodes of everything else

This is really counterintuitive. But it also really works.

And, naturally, to thwart us from easy riches, the concept is not the easiest to apply. For if we leave everything, then we get big problems down the road.

The idea is, thin selectively. Take out some of the overly thick branches or those in danger of becoming so, and some of the long internode ones.

*Deciduous Early Development - continued*

For example, if there are four shoots arising from one place, two of them strong, perhaps cut one off. Leave the rest. Later the other strong one can be removed.

The reason we do this piecemeal is that if you do it all at once—make our early development trees ‘pretty’ by cutting off all the ugly stuff, or to perfect structure—we make them grow too strong the next year. Which translates to long internodes.

Cutting off everything we don’t like might end with a big pile of branches, maybe 50% or more of the plant. We’ve just made a huge imbalance in roots to shoots, too, and that will force the tree to replace what it has lost in stronger regrowth.

In early tree development, though, we want to shorten up the internodes. No amount of fancy wiring will shorten an internode...but managing our trees better will. We want to grow the young tree, but not hard enough that there’s long internodes, and the way to do that is to leave more than we might think. Also, leaving more than we ultimately want helps bulk up the tree faster



A group of Japanese Maple rooted cuttings for a future clump style. The plant was defoliated last week (end of September) for the purposes of a

student who wanted to study this technique. And it makes for a good photo essay, too.



After selective cutback, wiring, and marking areas with red pipe cleaners to cut back to in the growing season. The trunk on the right will also be cut back next year. We wired some top branches of the main trunk that might be options for a larger tree, or we might cut the trunk short. Looks like a mess, doesn’t it? But we’ll leave it for now.



Photo from midway-through work on another Japanese Maple clump, before cutting back extensions. One thing to keep in mind is that a

*Deciduous Early Development - continued*

3-year old clump like this is at the beginning of a 10 year period to develop basic structure. The tree will give us a ton of choices in that span of time, and from those we'll likely manage a beautiful structure. But we don't have to do it all in a day



And after shortening some extensions. Overall, this is a good example of the main lesson for this series, to leave more than you actually want to shorten the internodes of everything else. There isn't much there yet, the tree has few branches. If you cut everything off you don't like, the tree panics and will just grow



long internodes again. There are many long, straight internodes here that were simply left because they are not yet a scar danger and as they will be cut off later there's no point in wiring them. Extension is left off the top of the trunk selected to be the main tree, the shugi, to thicken it up. And this one also looks like a mess at the finish.

A different feeling, a thick-trunked Japanese Maple with a quirky appearance. And brandishing a snout. If a tree seems odd to you, don't necessarily give up on it, try growing it into the next larger size. Though this tree is about 14", it may be twice that big before we're finished, and the big scars, the bumps, the weird movements will likely all recede. They might even become beautiful. Scaling up the tree in trunk diameter and overall size changes many things. (Potters know this one too, that your ugliest pot off the wheel is often the most beautiful of all when it's fired.)



The elephantine branch on the right was shortened and an extension off the top was removed, along with selective removal of some strong shoots. Like all of these, the pot is a grow pot and we don't pay attention to aesthetics.

With early deciduous trees, limit wiring to trunk and main branch lines, and as much as possible use the natural movements of the species to create form.

The most effective way of developing bulk and ramification is to leave more than you think when doing seasonal pruning.

All of these still look messy, we haven't improved the look of the trees much. But that isn't the point of this phase of work. And to leave them in this disheveled, uninspiring state we'll really need to believe in our ugly duckling to swan storyline... as we'll need to relate the story with conviction to bonsai friends who will be wondering what the heck we were thinking.

## **Part 2 Deciduous Early Development: Styrax**

Styrax is, like the magnolia featured in Part II of this series, a rarely seen deciduous bonsai. Mr. Takeyama in Japan has some remarkable styrax specimens, and seeing his was the reason I started trying them for bonsai.

This specimen is *Styrax japonicus*, also known as Japanese snowbell-

Continuing the theme of this series, you will notice some branches that seem overlong, or too thick, or out of place and yet left on the tree and not pruned off. In this early stage of development this 'leaving what you don't want' helps build the tree faster, and also, counterintuitively, slows down some areas so that we get greater twiggyness. This is more fully explained in Part I.

Our young specimen, about eight years old. *Styrax* is a strikingly vigorous plant, almost stronger than trident maple. This photo is from the fall, in October, during our final pruning of the year.



And where we ended the session of fall pruning, concentrating on the top of the tree so that taper would be retained. Many extensions were left on to keep growing into next growing season and to continue building caliper. *Styrax* are meaty trees, not delicate, and while not quite so heavy as trident or Chinese quince they are similar in build. The extensions left on the bottom half are to enhance that chunky quality that is natural to these trees. Also, the lower limbs are being considered for multiple trunk possibilities. Here we are not trying to over-

style a tree when it's young but let it help us decide its eventual structure. We're leaving more possibilities than ultimately will be retained. Some will convince us and some will not, so not just to help build a tree do we leave more than we want, but also because with time some areas might become far more interesting than they are today, and may shift what we



do with the design. Options are gold in bonsai early development.

## What 30 Years of Progress Will Do for a Bonsai

John Denny

(Photos from Bill Valvanis)

Keibun Tanaka had a large bonsai garden in Tokyo with 5,000 bonsai, many which are now masterpiece bonsai specimens. The Sargent juniper bonsai named “Fudo” and another unnamed bonsai pine illustrated here passed through his hands. He was featured in the October 7, 1946 issue of Life magazine.



*Pine in the 1940s. Black and white photo taken from a pamphlet published in the 1940s.)*



*Same Pine in the 1970s. Note more modern styling and different pot. Bonsai styling came a long ways between the 40s and the 70s.)*

## Timely Tips

John Denny

It has been a rather warm winter thus far. But, we are likely in for some good Iowa January weather soon. Remember, our trees generally require 40 days below 40 degrees F. I have had to crack the garage door a bit to get some lower temps as my garage is newer and stays on the warm side. It has been so warm this winter, that I wish I had left my hardier trees, like Ponderosa, outside to fend for themselves.

Not having much for Timely Tips to offer in January, let's reach down a bit to figure out what we can do to help our trees this time of year.

I still have some small junipers to prune and wire. If your trees are in a garage winter storage setting, you can still work on them in winter. Catching up is always good. If you keep your trees outside, mulched in, you likely won't be able to work on them.

Planning for repotting season is important. Each year in December I make a spreadsheet (yeah, I know, I have too many trees), that lists the trees I intend to repot. Then I make a list of any new pot or special soil I may need at repotting time. Since many trees only get repotted every few years, it is important to have the right pot. Also, think about any special tools or wire that you need for repotting. Look on websites like Stone Lantern and simply peruse what is available. Something will likely jump out at you that would make your repotting go more easily.

In winter, I always encourage people to learn new things about bonsai. Study up on a specific species,

read about fertilizers, or pests/disease, etc. This list is endless. You can find lots of good information and articles at websites belonging to Hagedorn, Ryan Neil, Bjorn Bjorholm or sites like Bonsai Empire, Bonsai Tonight. Bonsai Empire offers some excellent videos to purchase, put together by Hagedorn, Bjorholm and others. Bjorn has recently begun a series of free YouTube videos. He plans to release a new one every other Thursday. Ryan Neil offers a series of well done, in depth videos, too. He has a huge library built up of past videos. It costs some money to join, but you will have access to a treasure trove of bonsai information.

Bonsai books and magazines offer good information and photo essays. Talk to someone in your club who has a good bonsai library. I am sure they will loan you a book or a few magazines. I am always willing to share mine with anyone serious about learning bonsai.

Another thing I do in winter is plan changes to my bonsai collection. Do I want to buy any new trees? What kind? From where? Do I want to sell or give away any trees? Should I buy a bunch of seedlings and have fun with them? Someone once said, “If you want to have a better bonsai collection, get rid of half of your trees.” Makes sense. Why spend time on lower quality trees? Move them out and spend more time on your best trees. I do this to a degree, but I hope to do better focusing on my best trees in the future. It is hard for me, as I like “under dogs” in life. I enjoy working on a lesser tree, even if I can only improve it from a loser to a mediocre level. Hey, that's a win, right?

I hope 2020 becomes your best bonsai year yet! Enjoy the heck out of our great hobby!