

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

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

October 2020

Volume 74, Issue 10



IBA Response to Coronavirus

Scott Allen

As always, the safety of members, volunteers, and general public is our top priority.

The Iowa Bonsai Associations (IBA) response to the coronavirus pandemic continues to be informed by the guidance of official bodies, including Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>) whose framework for mitigation for community groups is based on the level of community transmission of COVID-19.

As the national response to the coronavirus pandemic shifts to a state-focused and phased approach the IBA has canceled all club meetings and implemented the appropriate protocols to help keep our members, volunteers, and the general public safe. We'll continue to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>) guidelines and will advise our membership when plans to start in-person meetings and activities is more clear.

If you should have any questions or concerns, please contact me directly.

Scott Allen – IBA President
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EIBA October Activities

Voting for 2021 Officers will occur by email sometime in October.

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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Bonsai Fall Color Photos

From *Bonsai Empire* website



Acer Palmatum “deshojo” Japanese maple Country of origin: Japan. Hiroshi Takeyama. It belongs to Luis Vallejo Bonsai Collection since 1991.



Zelkova serrata (Thunb) Japanese zelkova
It belong to Luis Vallejo Bonsai collection since 1996.



Acer Buergerianum (Miq) Trident maple



Zelkova serrata (Thunb) Japanese zelkova
It belong to Luis Vallejo Bonsai collection since 1996.

If Trees Could Talk

by Andrew Smith

Happy New Year! It's 2021 and the pandemic, recession, riots, brutality, coin shortages, hurricanes, wildfires and election are all over, the world is back to normal, and things are looking good again! And we are seriously tackling the environmental crisis. You can take your mask off and make a slingshot out of it, if you want.

Kidding! But I wish that were the case. I'm kind of slow to catch on sometimes, but today I realized that 2020 is really starting to wear on my nerves. I like to have a little good news from time to time, just as seasoning for the big bowl of bad news that seems to be the standard ration these days. But good news is in short supply. Still, my parents didn't raise me to be a picky eater. Just clean your plate.

Well, at least we have bonsai! Even in the midst of chaos there is something undeniably calming and uplifting about helping trees grow.

They are so slow. They don't panic. They don't complain and they don't resist. When it's hot they get hot and when it's cold they get cold. They show no preferences and abide everything. Yet they keep growing through it all. Resolute and steadfast, they offer themselves, their fruits, their beauty, and breathable air to the world without intention, or demand for anything in return.

It's a commonplace truism, but I've actually seen people go up to some hoary, old, lichen-encrusted tree, put their hand on the trunk and say, "Why, if this old tree could talk, imagine the stories it could tell!"

And that always makes me glad that trees can't talk, because, I mean, look how many of them there are! Imagine going for a walk in the woods if the whole forest were chattering and gossiping back and forth and spreading insane conspiracy theories about various other prominent trees in the forest, calling each other names, and arguing about how much rain they got last week and whether it was enough or whether maybe they needed some more, and whose roots are in all the good soil, and who looks like she could use a little sun, and whose needles are dull as mud.

People tend to think that if trees could talk they'd say something profound, but I've no reason to believe that. And while I've known people to complain about the neighbor's tree dropping its leaves in their yard, that would be nothing compared to every grouchy tree in the forest whining about the other trees taking all the sunlight and crimping their roots and poking them with sticks when the wind blew.

And all the tree kids, the seedlings and saplings, would be constantly fighting with each other over nothing, just like we used to do in the back seat, and driving their parents so crazy that they'd have to stop everything and yell at them.

And all that mindless ruckus would make taking a walk in the woods more annoying than Gas Station TV. And there's almost nothing more annoying than Gas Station TV. But if trees could talk there wouldn't be any quiet place left anywhere and everything would want to tell you its opinion and sell you something. Possibly Drawing by Frits Ahlefeldt, courtesy of Hiking.org, the only thing that might be worse than that would be if grass could talk too. "Hey! Oaf! Ouch! Get off me. Get off me!"

So I'm glad that trees can't, or at least usually don't, talk. Their silence is like a balm, like a still lake mirroring the world and holding the heavens. It's a place where you can rest a bit and catch your breath.

I spend a lot of time with my bonsai. I'm not usually working on them per se, but I'm just caring for them. I'm watering them, moving one into more sun, another into more shade, pruning off a weak branch, looking for insects and generally just observing them and being with them. If nothing else is going on, I frequently just go

down and wander around them for a while. You could say I'm looking for problems, or you could say I'm not really doing much of anything; loafing, as it were.

I enjoy it. But all that time spent with bonsai comes at a cost. And for me, the cost is not having much of a social life, or at least not spending as much time as I could with other people. And sometimes I wonder why I love bonsai so much and if it's even a good thing. I mean, they don't love me back. They abide me, and my mistakes, like they do the weather. And they don't talk.

I've got trees I've had for over 20 years. I look at them like old friends. We've been through a lot together. They've survived my mistakes and I've somehow managed to keep them watered. Seeing them grow year by year gives me joy.

I feel like we communicate on some level, or at least we respond to each other. But I'm glad we don't talk. To be honest, I can't say that I never talk to my trees. I'm just glad that they don't answer, or talk back.

"Hey! Hey! Put those scissors down! What are you doing, you clod? I know that look in your eye. Leave that branch alone. Don't touch it! Ouch! It took me 10 years to grow that, you know! Now what? You call that watering? Let me tell you something, Buddy; you couldn't pour water into a pond correctly! Be careful, I'm growing in that! Don't pull on those! You ox!"

"Hey you! Why does he get all the attention? He doesn't really have a future. He's past his prime and everyone knows it. But look at me! I'm right here. I need water too. You just about missed me yesterday. And the day before. When are you going to repot me anyway? I thought it was going to be last spring, but no; then I thought it was going to be this spring, but no again. Then, wait; you know you smell like sap? Oh my God, what have you been doing with that saw? Ahh! The horror!!"

If my bonsai could talk I think it would annoy me. I don't go to them to learn anything you can say out loud and forget later on.

I go because they are quiet. They abide and they endure. One of the gifts they have to offer is silence. And sometimes that's just what I need.

The world's a mess, now and forever. Sometimes it's a spectacular hilarious mess and other times it's a horrifying one. We do the best we can with it, which sometimes does not seem good enough. But, at least we have bonsai.

Ponderosa Pine—With Same Wire for 10 Years *Michael Hagedorn*

It's true. I've a pine with the same wire on it for 10 years.

We often hear talk of removing the wire on our trees in the fall. The question is, when they are not in danger of biting in, why take the wires off?

Sometimes, the thinking is, it's to protect from damage from cold---which, as Chapter 31 of *Bonsai Heresy* explains, is a myth.

Most bonsai, particularly conifers, need wire to dent into the branch slightly before removal, otherwise they spring back nearly to where they were before. The question of course is what a 'dent' is. This I'd define as a mark or indentation when the wire is taken off, but not so much that the top of the wire is level with the bark of the branch. That would be fairly well into the damage zone, particularly with deciduous trees.

If wire hasn't made a dent in the branch, you're safe to leave it on a while longer. There's no reason to check wires in the winter (in temperate climates), but spring through fall wires can bite in fast. A good practice is to routinely and systematically go through your bonsai garden and see which are getting too tight.



Copper wire on a Ponderosa Pine, left on for 10 years. This wire is very dark, which will happen over time with copper. These wires are getting pretty snug, but are not in danger of damaging the branches yet. Given how slowly this tree has put on wood, they may be left on a while longer yet.



Other branches on the same tree. It's best to take wire off only when some indenting is seen---if you take it off before then, branches will spring back nearly to where they were before, and your work (and wire) will be wasted.

Bonsai Podcast called “Bonsai Wire” *Michael Hagedorn*

We're getting close to 10,000 downloads on our new *Bonsai Wire* podcast! Our team of four---Jonas Dupuich, Andrew Robson, John Eads and myself---have uploaded, to date, 9 episodes. If you're new to podcasts and haven't the faintest idea what this is about, all you need are earbuds and a taste for bonsai. Perhaps start with the 'Introductions' episode where we introduce ourselves, and then you're off and running: *Bonsai Wire*.

Timely Tips *John Denny*

Welcome to October! We are nearing the end of the bonsai year.

Tropical trees should be indoors by now. I brought mine back out for a few days of warm sunny temps, but they are back inside for good now. I cleaned the pots and top soil, adding a bit of fresh soil. I sprayed them. Today

I added a powdered systemic pesticide which helps keep them pest free for a month. I keep this up all winter. Tropicals like sun. I add artificial light to them even though they face an east window and get good morning sun.

Let's talk deciduous trees. They should be showing color. My Tridents have looked good this past week, but the wind has taken a toll, especially on my large Trident forest. Color this year has been uneven. Part of a tree colors up and the rest stays green. Soon, most of the leaves will be gone. Leave the deciduous trees outside to enjoy some good cool nights, even light frosts. Protect them or bring them in if the frost is a hard one. When it is time to bring them in for good, make sure your storage area is clean and organized. Hopefully, you have a couple of thermometers there to track the temps. Bring the trees in and strip the leaves. With maples you can grasp a branch lightly and pull towards the tip. The leaves should come off easily. Hornbeams are different. Gently pull each leaf backwards towards the trunk. Try not to damage the axillary bud. Hornbeam leaves want to stay attached all winter. I remove them so I can prune more easily, plus there is less harborage area for insects or fungus to hang out over winter. Prune your deciduous back to keep the silhouette you want. Look at the buds as you prune. Maples are opposite leafed. Hornbeams, elms are alternate bud species. On alternate bud species the branch will grow next spring in the direction of the last bud at the end where you pruned. If you do not pay attention to this, you can create branches that turn in circles! Clean up the pots and top soil. Clean the bottoms of the pots, too. Add fresh soil if you need it. Store your trees so they are not packed together. Do not hide small trees behind larger ones. I guarantee you will miss watering them at least once over the winter. Give your trees a spray prophylactically, if you are okay with spraying. Keep both pests and fungus at bay over winter.

For junipers, let them have a few good frosts. When you bring them in, clean the pot and topsoil. Clean out yellow or weak foliage. Remove unwanted growth in crotches. Don't pinch tips, but use scissors to prune back into the silhouette. Remove loose bark from the

trunk. You can even brush the trunk with a soft brush or toothbrush. Spray your junipers prior to putting them into storage. Mites and other pests can survive winter and attack in late winter as things warm up.

Pines need a lot of work this time of year. The old needles will yellow and drop off. If you want to remove them make sure you brush your hand from the inner branch and sweep out to the tip. This causes less damage to needles. Needle tips that crack or break will brown, so be gentle. Do not touch the bark! It takes a pine 8-10 to bark up. On older trees, like Ponderosas can be, big plates of bark can be knocked off more easily than you think. You can glue them back on. But be careful in the first place. I have had both Gary Wood and Michael Hagedorn call me out on touching pine bark.

November is the time for pine work. I remove any extra length on branches, cutting back to a good young inner shoot, to create a nice overall shape. White pines do not require too much work. I clean up any old needles. Look at buds, You want a pair of buds that are fairly equal in size. They should oriented horizontally, so you may need to wire them into that orientation. Red and Black pines can be cut back where there is extra length and good shoots to cut back to. Old needles can be removed. On strong shoots, pluck needles to reduce the strength of that shoot. Leave weak shoots alone. The idea is to balance out strong shoots with moderately strong shoots. Remove extra newly pushed buds, saving a good pair at the end of each branch. Orient them to be parallel. Ponderosa pines, I leave alone. Some people will pluck needles, from strong shoots but I heard Ryan Neil say that is a n no. His strategy for balance is to create a strong tree that buds like crazy. Lots of buds leads to balance and smaller needles, too.

That is about it for now. Watch your watering. Keep your trees this time of year moderately damp, but be careful not to let things dry out in windy Fall weather. Good luck to all in hardening off your trees. Do your Fall work. As Gary Wood says, "Work done in late fall sets up the proper growth in spring. Late Fall is really the beginning of the bonsai year!" I have bought into that strategy and it has worked very well for me. It will for you, too!