

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

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



January 2019

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IBA January Activities

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

Everybody is welcome.

EIBA November Activities

**January 10, 6:30 pm. Board Meeting at
Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road**
*Topics: Program for 2019, Winter Garden Fair,
Seedlings for 2019*

**February 14, 6:00 pm. Board Meeting at
Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road**

**February 16, 10:00 am. Winter Garden Fair,
Kirkwood Community College.**
*EIBA will be presenting a class and will also have a
display table.*

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www.bonsaitrees.com/

**James J Smith Tropical Bonsai Collection,
Fort Pierce, FL**
John Deny

Earlier this month I visited the east coast of Florida. The person we stayed with suggested we visit a local botanical garden, Heathcoate Gardens. We paid our fee and began walking the

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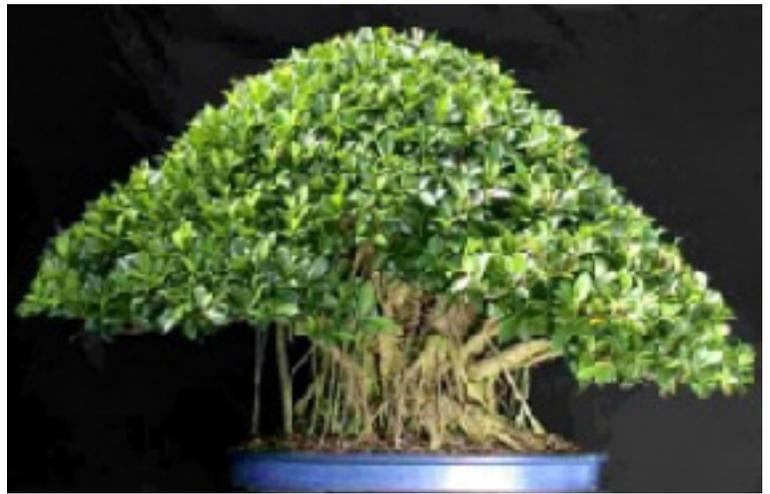
Entrance to the James J Smith Tropical Bonsai Gallery. Japanese Garden meets Florida landscape.

path away from the entrance building. Almost immediately, we came to a Japanese looking entrance gate. Beyond was a surprise treasure I did not expect. A bonsai garden. The James J Smith Tropical Bonsai Garden. Past the gate were ten or so very nice tropical bonsai arranged in a circular manner. The trees were large and placed on very nice stone tables. I took some photos. Nerifolia, bougainvillea, Ficus and figs of all kinds. Brazilian raintrees, olives, and many trees I had not heard of. They all looked healthy and all were large and impressive.

As we left the circle, I looked ahead to see more trees in the next circle. And more beyond that. Altogether, there are well over one hundred of these tropical beauties. Wow. What a find. All happenstance.

So, what is the background of this collection? In 2009, Jim Smith gave a hundred of his tropical bonsai to the Heathcote Gardens, making this the largest tropical bonsai collection in the U.S. James Comer designed the display layout and received awards for his landscape design work. There are fountains offering luscious meditative sounds as you wander about. The Florida capstone pedestals give a natural and timeless strength to the display area. There is an interesting interplay of Japanese garden meets Florida native landscape. And the beautiful bonsai are the offspring of this merger.

Although tropical bonsai tend to have large bases, very wide foliage pads, and soft rounded tops – there was good variety here. Many species. Many styles – informal uprights, raft, forest, grove, cascade, semi cascade, slanted. There were a couple of flowering trees including an enormous bougainvillea that was just beginning to flower. I cannot imagine what that tree would look like in full, brilliant bloom.



Ficus retusa by Jim Smith

Jim Smith lived in Vero Beach and ran a nursery where he raised pre bonsai for workshops and hobbyists. He experimented for years trying out all kinds of tropical species to see what worked for Florida and for bonsai. One of the trees at Heathcote has been in a pot since 1957. Bonsai must have been good for Jim as he lived to be 91. In addition to his Gallery at Heathcote Gardens, you can find his trees in other collections including the National Bonsai Arboretum. Ask anyone who knew Jim and they would mention his kind and gentle demeanor. Jim was a true gentleman who pioneered tropical bonsai in the US.



A Bougainvillea just beginning to color up. Imagine what this will look like in a few days? Note the display tables made of Florida Capstone, mined locally.





A narrow leaf ficus. Notice the aerial roots. Can you spot the bromeliads in some of the crotches?

This bougainvillea was donated by Jim to the National Arboretum.



Displays from 2018 38th Nippon Bonsai Taikan Exhibition Exhibition, Photos by Wm Valvanis



High quality shohin trees combined to make a wonderful display. Every single tree is a winner on its own.



An interesting display using a horizontal scroll/photo. Creative.



A simple display with lovely use of colors.

Timely Tips
John Deny

Usually each species has a common autumn It is the beginning of another year. Excitement and hope spring forth. Will we have a good bonsai year? Will our trees do well? Most bonsai people are glass half full types anyway, so this is a good time of year. Not much work, but lots of hope for good things!

As I look out my window, there is no snow and plenty of sunshine. The temperature is in the fifties. Yes, as in 50's. Not normal. My trees have been stored in the garage since Thanksgiving after they had been hardened off with mild frosts. However, night time temps in the garage have stayed uniformly above 40F. They have not achieved full dormancy. This is not normal for Iowa.

Fast forward two weeks. Wham! A snowstorm. I shoveled and left for a week in Florida. Upon return, I could not get in my drive and had to shovel again. It was zero degrees. Cold, but at least my bonsai trees were seeing more normal winter temps and might actually achieve 40 days below 40F and full dormancy. I am actually glad winter is finally here.

January is a time of reflection on the past year and resolutions for an improved 2019. It helps to think about how one might improve a person's bonsai hobby. First, I asked myself – how can I improve my knowledge and my ability? Second, I asked how I might improve the quality, health and beauty of my trees?

Let's start with ourselves. We can improve our knowledge through web sites, blogs, YouTube videos, books, magazines, workshops, club activities, visiting a good bonsai show. One has to be careful with sources of knowledge, especially with internet sources, but there are some good, reliable sources out there. Make it a resolution to improve your knowledge by picking one or two good new sources to read or watch. A great way to gain knowledge and especially to improve one's actual bonsai skills and techniques like wiring, pruning, repotting, grafting is to attend a workshop or study group where a very good teacher can help you improve. They will reduce your misinformation and replace it with good information. They will see your weaknesses in wiring and show you better technique. Same goes for nearly every bonsai technique. I suggest, if you have never worked with a good teacher, to give it a try. It will be worth your money and your trees will improve. Not just the one you worked on with the teacher, but ALL of your trees will benefit from your improved skills. Make it a resolution this year to work with a teacher in a workshop or study group.

Second, think about other ways to improve your trees. Can you improve your watering system? Protect your trees from too much wind or sun? Can you repot with better soil or improved quality pots? Can you purchase better quality material,

whether it be pre bonsai, seedlings, developing bonsai, or finished bonsai? Generally, you get what you pay for. My very best trees were not found on the bargain table in the very back of the nursery. (Having said that, bonsai can be just as fun if you DO enjoy hunting for those bargain trees.) But, if you want good sized trunks and nice nebari with a good start on branch structure, it will cost some money. If you have time, seedlings are a great bargain and you can control the size and shape of your future trees. Okay, so make a resolution to attend one workshop where you can buy a good tree, or visit a show where you can find good material, or head to a place like Brussels Nursery where you can choose from thousands of trees in all price ranges and states of development. If you buy one nice tree a year, you will have a very nice collection in five or ten years' time.

I find a resolution is no better than a fleeting thought, unless I write it down. Even better if I type it, print it, and put it where I will see it. Pick four bonsai resolutions and type them up. Make a resolution in each of four areas. 1) Improve your knowledge. 2) Improve your skills. 3) Improve your site or winter storage. 4) Improve the level of your material.

An example of someone's resolutions might be the following:

- 1) I will follow and read Michael Hagedorn's blog to improve my knowledge.
- 2) I will sign up for a club workshop in June with teacher X to improve my skills.
- 3) I will add a shade cloth over part of my display table to improve my site. (Or, I will repot two trees using Boon mix instead of my club soil mix.)
- 4) I will purchase one collected tree from Andy Smith, Todd Schlafer, Ron Heinen or Scott Allen to improve the quality of material in my collection.

Pick a resolution for each area and 2019 will be the year you and your bonsai collection make a huge jump forward!