

# Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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

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

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## IBA June Activities

**June 14 - IBA Meetings at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden.  
909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

*Topics: Open Study Group - Bring a tree to work on whatever you want.  
(on the Terrace weather permitting)*

*10:30 Presentations: roundtable discussion on fertilizer. Bring recipes, notes, and ideas on your fertilizer practices.*

*Everybody is welcome.*

## EIBA March Activities

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

*Topics: Club shows this summer at NewBo.*

**May 12, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Mother's Day Show at Noelridge Greenhouse.**

**May 12, 7:00 pm. EIBA Club Meeting at Bill Englert's home in Swisher**

*Topics: Wiring, Shohin, Companion Plants*

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

*Topics: TBD*

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[www.bonsaitrees.com/](http://www.bonsaitrees.com/)

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## 93rd Kokufu Exhibition

*Photographs by Bill Valvanis*



*Silverberry. Beautiful bark and ramification*



*Kokufu award winning Apricot. My Apricot flowered this year. But, it didn't look like this!*



*Tsuyama Hinoki Cypress. I can't seem to get one Hinoki to look great, let alone an entire forest! Impressive!*



*Trident maple. Ramification, anyone!?*

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## **What is the Future of My Bonsai Tree??**

*John Deny*

Man has always had an insatiable desire to know the future. How powerful that knowledge could be to us in our personal lives and collectively to mankind. Imagine the things we could do with that knowledge?

But, for the moment, let's just apply knowledge of the future to our bonsai trees. In bonsai we love control. We wish to control growth, insects and disease, shape, size, etc. As Gary Wood says, "That's why we buy scissors and wire!" While trying to create and maintain the look of a bonsai, one must

exercise considerable control over many factors. Bonsai training techniques are the way in which we express control over the tree. The key to these techniques is the ability to visualize what the tree will look like after applying these techniques. In other words, we have to be able to “see the future”.

On bonsai trees, there are indicators which will give us strong clues as to how our tree will look next year and beyond. A good artist will use these clues to plan and then create the future he wishes for his tree. The main indicator of the future is bud structure. In late summer and fall, these buds are visible on our trees and can be used to “read the tea leaves”. With understanding of buds and their behavior we can know what the plant intends to do next growing season – and how we might alter its plans if we wish. This is especially true of more finished bonsai, where we want to control how the bonsai looks, but do not want to do heavy handed manipulations.

Buds contain the potential for new growth the following spring. The presence of many strong buds indicates a healthy strong tree and the potential for major growth. While the presence of fewer, smaller buds will result in less overall growth with smaller leaves, shorter internodes, and finer stems. New growth will be oriented in the direction of the bud’s direction. Think of alternate budding species like elm or hornbeam vs opposite budding like a maple. On alternate budding branches, you can control the future direction of that branch by where you cut. If the last bud you leave points towards the left, that is the direction that branch will extend in spring and summer. Cut one bud shorter, leaving the last bud pointing to the right and your branch will now grow to the right. If you cut two or three times in a row over time each time leaving the last bud pointing in the same direction, your branch will curl around and grow back in towards the trunk. Not what you want! So, you control the future by knowing how buds work. You can also use this knowledge to avoid future growth pointing up or downward where you do not want it.

Another bud issue that controls the future comes

from the fact that the apical bud on a branch sends auxin hormones back towards the roots. Among other things, auxin tells the secondary buds on its branch not to grow out. The result is a long and strong growing branch tip. However, if you prune away the apical buds, now there is less auxin telling the secondary buds to chill out. In this case the secondary buds spring into action and you get active budding further back inside on your branch(es). Cool, huh? You know the future of your tree and you can determine if you want branch extension or active secondaries and ramification.

Buds can be determinate or indeterminate. Determinate buds (think pines) are capable of producing only a certain amount of growth in the spring and summer, regardless of how good conditions might be for growing. Indeterminate buds, if growing conditions are good, will continue to grow longer and stronger if resources are available. Pines, if left alone, will generally only push growth once in spring and early summer. On some pines, we can jump in and cause a second flush of needles if we wish, resulting in smaller needle size and shorter internodes via pine techniques. Again we see and control the future growth and shape of the pine tree bonsai.

Understanding buds and how they work will lead us to being able to see what the tree shape will be next spring and into the future. We can accept this future, if we like it, or we can use appropriate bonsai technique to alter the future of our tree so it grows into a shape more in tune with our vision for the tree. Pay attention to the buds and you will be able to read the future!

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## **Watering Bonsai**

*From **Bonsai Empire** web site*

The most important part of taking care of your Bonsai trees is watering. How often a tree needs to be watered depends on several factors (like species of tree, size of tree, size of pot, time of year, soil-mixture and climate), indicating that it



is impossible to say how often you should water Bonsai. However, understanding a few basic guidelines will help you to observe when a tree needs to be watered.

### How often should I water my Bonsai?

As mentioned previously, how often a Bonsai tree needs to be watered depends on too many factors to provide an exact guideline. <https://www.bonsaiempire.com> Instead, you need to observe your trees individually. The following general guidelines will help you to get Bonsai watering right:

### Water your trees when the soil gets slightly dry

This means you should not water your tree when the soil is still wet but only when it feels slightly dry; use your fingers to check the soil at around 0.4” (one centimeter) deep. But never let a tree dry out completely! Once you get more experienced you will be able to see (instead of feel) when a tree needs watering.

### Never water on a routine

Keep observing your trees individually, instead of watering them on a daily routine, until you know exactly what you are doing.

Use a mixture that retains more water (by using more akadama, or even potting compost) when you cannot water your trees that regularly. Read the Bonsai soil mixtures article for more information.

<https://www.bonsaiempire.com/basics/bonsai-care/bonsai-soil>

### Use the right soil-mixture

The soil-mixture greatly influences how often trees need to be watered, for most Bonsai trees a mixture of akadama, pumice and lava rock mixed together in a ratio of ½ to ¼ to ¼ should be fine. However,

use a mixture that retains more water (by using more akadama, or even potting compost) when you cannot water your trees that regularly. Read the Bonsai soil mixtures article for more information.

<https://www.bonsaiempire.com/basics/bonsai-care/bonsai-soil>

### When?

It doesn't really matter at what time you water a Bonsai. Some advice to avoid watering (with very cold water) during the afternoon, when the soil has



*When watering this tree, most water will flow right out of the pot; the roots are so compact that the soil-mass won't absorb water easily. This tree needs to be repotted!*

## *Watering Bonsai - continued*

been warmed up by the sun and will cool down rapidly when using cold water. Though this can be taken into consideration, it should always be clear that you should water your tree no matter what time it is, as soon as the soil gets slightly dry!

### **How to water Bonsai trees?**

As explained previously, water when the soil gets slightly dry. When the tree does require water though, it needs thorough soaking so the entire root system is wetted. To do so, keep watering until water runs out of the drainage holes, and possibly repeat the process a few minutes later.

Water a tree from above using a watering can with a fine nozzle; this will prevent the soil from being washed away. Using collected rain water is better (as it doesn't contain added chemicals), but when this is not readily available there is no problem in using normal tap water. There are also automated watering systems, <https://www.bonsaiempire.com/blog/automated-bonsai-watering>

but these are often quite costly. Watering Bonsai trees is one of the topics in our online Bonsai course, made specifically for beginners. For more information and a free lesson, see the Bonsai Beginners Course.

<https://www.bonsaiempire.com/courses/beginners-course>

### **Watering a Bonsai tree (movie)**

Copy URL below into your browser and you will see a watering video by Bjorn Bjorholm produced while he apprenticed in Japan.

<https://youtu.be/Ljc3WDWsVRY>

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### **Timely Tips**

*John Deny*

We are into the watering season. Watering is one of the harder things to learn about bonsai. As the accompanying article in this issue stated, there are many variables that impact how you water your trees. Having a lot of trees, different species, various soils, etc., really makes things challenging. Wind, temperature highs and lows, depth of pots can add more complexity. The article and video should have

helped bonsai hobbyists understand a lot about watering. I would add a couple more tips. One, water from both sides. I water down one side of my tables and I will spray a bit of water onto the backside of the trees on the opposite side of the table. This is the rain shadow that exists for trees on the far side. Once I am on that side I water normally down the row, but I give a short spray onto the rain shadow of the trees on the first side of the table. Two, I water my trees twice through at least three days a week. It takes a bit more time, but I know that I am getting a true deep watering. Make sure water is running out of the drain holes in your pot. Three, on days that are 90F plus and/or are very windy (15mph plus), I will water twice in one day. Ideally water in the morning, then water late afternoon a second time. The second watering can be just enough to wet the soil to a half inch depth.

Recently, I attended a talk at a garden group that was given by an indoor plant guru on lighting. Since I keep several tropical trees inside all winter, I listened. Here are some tips I came away with. Wash your windows! Dirty windows cut down light and light is key to your light starved trees in the winter. Second, consider removing the screens on the windows your tropical trees get their light from. Screens cut down light by 30%! If you want to increase your light by 50%, simply wash windows and remove screens. Your trees will love you for it.

Another thought on tropical trees regards "hardening off in spring". Sounds strange. But, I put my trees out for a couple of lovely afternoons recently. I had to bring them in before night as the low temps were going to be 49 to 51F. My trees were used to a winter and spring low temps in the house of 65F. They have not been hardened off, so to speak. Once they sit out on some nights with lows around 55-60F, then they can survive 50F.

Not many folks grow pines for bonsai in Iowa. But we should be fertilizing those in developmental or seedling stage. For those in "adult bonsai" stage with some refinement, we can be fertilizing double flush pines like red and black pines before we decandle in June. Stop fertilizing red and black pines just before decandling and only resume in mid-August and fertilize hard until late Fall. Single flush pines like white or Ponderosa don't require fertilization now or the needles will grow too much. Wait until the new needles harden off then fertilize them hard, roughly mid-August onward.