

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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IBA August Activities

August 20

No meeting, consider August 10th as our meeting. Midwest show in Chicago runs concurrently. Prior to this date, we will discuss organizing a group trip to Chicago.

UPCOMING EVENTS

SUNDAY - OCT 19 and 20, 2019
TODD SCHLAFER WORKSHOP
Workshop (9:00-5:00) with Todd Schlafer.
Location to be decided. (contact Scott Allen
515-480-4437 if interested)

EIBA August Activities

No Board Meeting in August.
Next Board Mtg is Sept 12.

No EIBA Club Meeting in August.
See you Sept 19 Topic TBD.

Bonsai 101 Course

Ron Heinen

Thanks to the Botanical Gardens and the Iowa Bonsai Association, a mutually beneficial partnership has developed into a win-win for both. The Gardens provide our association with a magnificent platform for spreading the art of bonsai and growing our membership, while the IBA broadens the Garden's mission to bring botanical beauty to the public.

After Alan Magruder, Scott Allen stepped up to assist

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Why Do YOU Do Bonsai?

John Deny

There are so many reasons people like to participate in the hobby of bonsai. Some like growing things. Others like the meditative aspect. Others like the connection to nature. Some love to show their trees. Many love the camaraderie with other bonsai hobbyists. Some are drawn to the pottery aspect. There are a thousand reasons to like bonsai. Have you thought about why YOU like bonsai? What is it that drives you to put in the time and dollars and effort to grow and care for these trees? It is a good exercise, thinking about the WHY. You may learn something about yourself. You may discover there is a certain aspect of bonsai that you really like once you know why you like it overall. And then you may focus more on the aspect of bonsai you love most. That can lead to more joy and a deeper appreciation of bonsai.

For me, I find I have fallen into the daily habits of bonsai. Watering, weeding, etc. It's the caring for something aspect. This brings a connection. I cared for my kids on a daily basis for twenty years, then a couple of dogs, now bonsai trees. You build a relationship with them over the many years of care. It's why I think it is so hard to sell any of them, even the lesser quality trees. You know that tree. You put in the time and repeated effort for each tree. You watched them soar some years. You nursed them through fungus, aphids, mites, wind, cold, heat, squirrels, and a thousand other calamities. That creates a bond, a relationship.

Years ago, I purchased a book called, "Chop Wood, Carry Water". The book spoke of the great value in doing the daily, repetitive, somewhat boring chores of everyday life. For centuries humans have had to chop wood, carry water, do laundry, cook, etc. simply to survive one day to the next. But, doing those things gives us routine, a connection to life, survival. They are important to our lives. And they give our lives meaning and satisfaction. So it is with my daily bonsai tasks. In their own small way, they connect me to the universe.

I had never really thought about why bonsai is



at first, then began to alternate teaching the class with me. Dave Lowman sources our classroom stock and club members help students with styling and wiring. We offer the course two times per year. The six hour course is given on two consecutive Saturdays (three hours per session) and each student leaves with a very nice starter bonsai.



Special thanks go to Sara Niemand, Tim Peterson, Dan Morten, and certainly Scott Allen for making this bonsai adventure a tremendous success!

Why DO YOU Do Bonsai? - continued

important to me until I read a paragraph from Andy Smith, Black Hills bonsai sage. I think he nailed it for me.

“Over the years one aspect of bonsai that has become more important and interesting to me is just the relationship between a person and a tree. I like the idea of a person caring for a tree, year after year after year, making it more beautiful and eventually handing it down to someone else to continue on with. Like the Yamaki pine, passed down through generations. In that aspect of bonsai it doesn't matter much whether your tree is a century old, or just a few weeks old, because it's the interaction that is the art. It's how I think we should care for our Earth too, like a cherished bonsai made more beautiful as time goes on. Not as something we push as hard as we can to see what we can get out of it.”

Sometime soon, pour out a cup of tea, coffee, or better yet, a glass of good scotch, and then sit still for a good while, looking at your favorite bonsai tree. The one you really care about. Without much effort, I'll bet your thought pattern begins to deepen. An insight will come. And then another. And who knows, one day you, too, may become a wise bonsai sage, like Andy!



At the first Cryptomeria styling with Mr. Harunobu Tokita, behind the tree, and the original owner Morten Wellhaven to the left. Circa 1990.



Rough styling done, and in a bonsai container.



Further along in the development of the tree, the 'fingers' beginning to show in the branch work. And in another pot too. The tree is still in Boon's yard at this point.

There and Back Again with a Cryptomeria *Michael Hagedorn (Cratageus)*

Any visit to Japan where remote temples are on the menu will usually involve Cryptomeria. These stately forest trees remind one of miniature redwoods, standing bolt upright as if on review.

The Cryptomeria featured here is a home-grown bonsai from nursery stock, not an import. It was first styled by Harunobu Tokita in California. The first photo starts the legacy of this tree that lived for a long time in Boon Manakitivipart's garden as a unique formal upright only rarely seen in the United States. I recall it well when I studied with Boon before moving to Japan.

Hope you enjoy the photo essay- (First three photos courtesy Morten Wellhaven.)



July 2012. Here the tree has relocated to southern California, and is in its third pot. Eventually we'll run out of pots but not quite yet.

First a reversal.

We had a setback.

Fungus took over the tree and killed foliage and small branches before it was reined in.

Grafting American Species

John Deny

The Japanese have long used grafting techniques to improve the quality of their bonsai. One of the approaches they have used is to take advantage of the fact that not all junipers of the same species have the same quality of foliage.

Itoigawa Shimpaku (*Juniperus chinensis* var. 'Itoigawa') are the most sought after Junipers in Japan, both for their deadwood features and, more importantly, for their foliar characteristics.

The most famous examples of naturally occurring yamadori Itoigawa Shimpaku all came from one tiny area in the Niigata Prefecture of northern Japan, specifically from the high elevation peak of 'Kurohime' (a.k.a. the Black Princess Mountain). Today, Itoigawa can no longer legally be collected from this region and so the Japanese now simply graft cultivated Itoigawa foliage onto Junipers from other regions of Japan, such as Tohoku and Hokkaido Shimpaku from further north. For example, the tree featured below is a famous Tohoku Shimpaku grafted with Itoigawa Shimpaku foliage and aptly dubbed 'Fujin' or Wind God.



The foliage is tight, grows quickly so pads fill out earlier, has a good color that contrasts well with deadwood, and the foliage is firm so it holds its position after wire is removed.

So, how does this help us with US species? In the US we have certain junipers with some good traits like powerful trunks, great deadwood, wonderful character, but also have less than desirable foliage. For example, I have a nice Prostrata junioer. Excellent trunk, but it has loose, long foliage. Bjorn worked a

bit with me on it one day at a workshop. I mentioned I had thought about grafting Itoigawa foliage onto the tree. He said that would be an excellent idea and proceeded to tell me two ways to go about it. The first and fabled method would be a tunnel technique where all the grafts would be lined up in a groove cut into the branch. But, he favored the other idea, approach grafting. Though it would take longer and you would have to replace any grafts that did not "take", the final result would be better as the grafts could be more ideally placed. I have not, as yet, taken the grafting plunge on this tree.

The second way grafting American species can work is more similar to the Japanese experience. One of the American species people consider grafting is Rocky Mountain Junipers. RMJs have great character and deadwood. However, they can have some very loose, stringy foliage. If you have experience with RMJs, there is a wide range of foliage. Some trees have a tighter, nicer foliage than others. It would be possible to graft foliage from RMJs

with some of the very best foliage onto trees with less desirable foliage and replace the old foliage. So, an RMJ with great character and weak foliage could be significantly improved. And it would be possible even to grow "good" RMJ from cuttings off collected RMJs having the best foliage. As the Japanese have done with Itoigawa.

Bjorn has done this grafting at his nursery with at least one RMJ and we will be able to follow his results as the tree progresses.

As for my Prostrata... I will sharpen my grafting knife and have it ready for next spring!