

*IBA News & Muse*  
*Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter*  
*APRIL 2015*

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

[www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com](http://www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com)

## IBA APRIL Activities

**Tuesday – Apr 21, 7:00pm, IBA Meeting, The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, 909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

*Program: Repotting, with demonstrations by Ron Heinen, Zoe Nady and Larry Totten. Bring your project tree or any tree to repot. Help will be available.*

**Saturday–Sunday, April 25–26, 10:00am–4:00pm**

**2015 IBA Spring Show**

**The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, 909 Robert Ray Drive, Des Moines**

*The IBA Spring Bonsai Show will be open to the public in the Walsh Room at the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, on April 25 and 26, from 10:00am to 4:00pm each day.*

*IBA members will be styling trees throughout the show for public viewing. There will also be an interactive Earth Day display titled: Give Earth A LIKE!*

*Their ancient ginkgo bonsai will be front and center at this show. IBA members will also be showing, "Funsai," which is a child friendly style of tree that was specially developed for The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden.*

## EIBA APRIL Activities

**April 09, 2015 6 pm EIBA Board Mtg at Nothing But Noodles Restaurant.**

**April 17, 2015 7 pm Club Meeting at Pierson's Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd**

*Topics: Pruning Techniques. Basic Wiring Techniques. Bring your Foster Trees.*

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## James Venneman, EIBA Founder

It is with sadness we report that Jim Venneman of Cedar Rapids has passed away at age 77. Jim died as a result of a fall from a ladder while pruning a client's shrubbery. He owned and operated Green Lawn Irrigation for many years.

Jim had the idea of beginning a bonsai club in Cedar Rapids and he created the Eastern Iowa Bonsai Assn in 2000. Jim founded the club with a dozen members, some of whom are still active in the club. Jim was also a past president. He allowed the club to use his business location for storage and soil making operations. Without Jim there would be no EIBA.

Jim was a tireless worker, remaining very active late in life. He out worked many younger members at soil making day each year. Jim was creative and had many ideas for the club. His enthusiasm for the outdoors, landscaping, plants of all kinds, and for the many organizations he was a key part of, was never ending.

Jim was a member of Good Earth Garden Club, Eastern Iowa Bonsai Association, Linn County Rose Society, and 4RK9's Dog Training Club.

Jim was known for his truly amazing personal gardens he worked on with his wife, Helen.

Our club will always remember Jim. He will be missed.

## Timely Tips

What is going on in your bonsai garden this time of year? Or what *should* be? Trees have awakened from their slumbers of winter. Many have been repotted at this point. So, what do our trees need in April?

Leaves have opened for most species. They need sunlight. Pines should be outside by now soaking up rays which helps them create the energy they need. I also have junipers and spruce outside.

My deciduous trees are pushing leaves, but since I have so many, I do not want to take them outside for fear of a cold night when I would have to haul them all back inside. A major task. So, I keep them in a well lit garage. I keep the garage door open when I can to add more light. If I only had a few deciduous trees, I would put them out, then watch the night time temps closely. On those nights predicted to drop below freezing, I would bring the deciduous trees inside for protection.

For trees I have recently repotted, I am keeping them in the garage so their roots can recover prior to putting them out into wind and heat where the trees can transpire moisture faster than the new roots can replace it.

My tropicals, I keep indoors until night time lows remain above 55–60F. I do occasionally bring them out on a warm weekend day for sun. However, it is easy to get distracted and forget to bring them inside at the end of the day. The sun helps them, but don't leave them out.

This time of year I fertilize lightly with fish emulsion or Bonsai Pro which is 5–6–5. Just enough to get the trees started growing.

Keep your trees watered, especially when it is windy. Water helps in two ways. One, of course, is for the health of the tree. As mentioned, wind can remove a lot of moisture from both trees and the soil directly. Additionally, water makes your pots heavier, which keeps trees upright – a position trees prefer!

Lastly, enjoy the fresh new growth of your trees in spring. It is one of the prettiest times of the year!

## First Bonsai in Space

John Denny

A bonsai tree has been launched into space – really. Here are the details.



Azuma Makoto, a 38-year-old artist based in Tokyo, launched two botanical arrangements into orbit: "Shiki 1," a Japanese white pine bonsai tree suspended from a metal frame, and an untitled arrangement of orchids, lilies, hydrangeas, and irises.

The project, called Exobotanica, was a collaboration between Makoto, his 10-person crew, and Sacramento-based JP Aerospace, an organization that sends vessels into space. "I wanted to see the movement and beauty of plants and flowers suspended in space," Makoto [told T Magazine](#) at the [launching site](#), Black Rock Desert in Gerlach, Nevada, best known as the site of the annual Burning Man festival. "I am using brightly colored flowers from around the world so that they contrast against the darkness of space."

The team created two devices of Styrofoam and light [metal frames](#) on which to launch the floral arrangements. A Spot [GPS](#) tracker was included to help locate the astral bouquets once they returned to Earth, and another device recorded distance and altitude traveled. Six Go-Pro cameras tied in a ball captured surreal 360-degree images of the flying flowers.

## Still Repotting?

Ivan Hanthorn

Many of us are still repotting. Spring is still cool, the soil temperature in mid-Iowa is 47 degrees as of this morning, and it has still been chilly at night, so the door has not yet slammed shut on the repotting season, although it is getting closer. The following article by our favorite North American bonsai sage, Michael Hagedorn, was pointed out by Wayne Schoech in his most recent issue of Bonsai Bark. *Pot Depth* is everything, especially for conifers. Read and memorize.

### Crataegus Repotting Tip 'O the Month—March 2014

Many trees like their roots far away from anything saturated, which is the bottom of the pot. Two in particular, pines and azaleas. And in muddling about the Western bonsai world I've been haunted by the number of pines planted in very shallow containers.



The pine that Matt Reel is working on is in a deep pot, and this is typical for pines. This has as much to do with horticulture as aesthetics.

'Rules' are slippery things, as anything in bonsai has exceptions. So consider this a 'slippery-rule', a 'you might want to consider', and not necessarily a 'darn it you'd better do it or get swatted with a bamboo chopstick' sort of offering—but please, in general, get your conifers, particularly pines, in deeper pots, and your deciduous might go in shallower ones because you can get away with it horticulturally.



This maple in Shinji Suzuki's tokonoma is in a pot typical of this kind of tree. It works better aesthetically, in two ways. A shallow pot will make the nebari continue spreading, and the delicacy of the trunks is enhanced by a shallower pot. But a maple is also a tree that appreciates water. And a shallow pot will retain more moisture than a deeper one, in a soil-to-soil relative way. It's a wetter pot.

Now the disclaimers. Breathe in. (That's for me). You can certainly plant your pine in a shallow pot (loud thwack of a chopstick on my fingers), but consider mounding it. Mounding and getting live moss established will help greatly in drying out the root ball the way a pine wants it. Mounding helps drain excess water, and moss prevents excessive drying of the surface, which might sound like an oxymoron but it works.

The happy zone of any tree is fairly specific. The top often dries out a lot. The bottom might stay too wet. And the pine likes the middle zone. So most pots for pines should be deeper to broaden that happy zone. Or, if you mound a tree by 3" above the lip in a 3" pot, *then you've essentially given the tree 6" of growing space and a fairly broad happy zone*. Shallow pots for conifer bunjin, clumps, and forests are good examples where mounding is appropriate and often used.



Pine in a shallow pot, mounded. Without an **erosion free and water retentive surface**, however, like live moss, mounding is unlikely to be a happy equation. Happy potting!

## HISTORICAL BONSAI PHOTOGRAPH

Ivan Hanthorn



A Japanese antique bonsai post card. The caption reads "Bonsai House and Forcing Bed - Tokyo Gardening School". 9cm x 14cm. The Tokyo Gardening School opened in 1908 and changed its name to Tokyo Gardening Senior High School in 1948. This photo is presumably early 1920s. Look at the benches, the bonsai material, and the surrounding trees. Notice ginkgos of various ages in the trees at the garden border. Now just imagine a high school program centered on bonsai. Was that Heaven?

## How Are You Wired?

Ivan Hanthorn

Wiring has been a standard method in bonsai for training branches to assume and keep a desired position for well over a century. Before wire, there were string, sticks, rocks and other weights held by string for weighting and guying, and clip and grow pruning. And a lot more time and patience. Most practitioners today use anodized aluminum wire that is copper in color. This is in imitation of the copper wire that was first used for this function. With the advent of aluminum wire for this usage, copper wire usage declined for a number of market reasons, but it is still available and still a favorite of many for certain uses. Yet annealed aluminum is king. Every bonsai vendor has aluminum wire for sale. Not so with copper. Almost every beginner starts out with anodized aluminum and only slowly learns of annealed copper.

Some will dicker over cost and availability, but the basic distinction is nature, not cost. The handling differences are profound. Copper is more resistant to being shaped than aluminum, so there can be a long learning curve. Although both types of wire can be used for all bonsai, their differences have contributed to the current general standard of practice being that aluminum wire is appropriate for bonsai material in development, deciduous bonsai, and tropical bonsai. Copper is usually considered as the most appropriate for evergreen needle trees.

The arguments pro and con are found on the internet in great quantity and redundancy. The point of this piece is not to provide a tutorial on bonsai wiring, nor to summarize the extensive argumentation over the choice of wire. Rather, to point out that wire is a tool. As with any tool for fine work, pick and use the right tool. Know the characteristics of the tool, what can and cannot be achieved easily with it. Copper and aluminum each have useful characteristics. Learn them. Learn them by handling both materials for more than just a short while. Your fingers will tell you as much as your mind as you consider the differences between these two types of wire.

So, the basic question is: **Should I use copper or aluminum wire?** Copper and aluminum wire each have their advantages and disadvantages. Some of these are listed below.

### Advantages of Copper:

- More esthetically pleasing than aluminum as it weathers.
- More holding power (stronger) for a given diameter than aluminum.
- Cheaper to use than aluminum (considering size of wire vs. holding power).

### Disadvantages of Copper:

- More difficult to apply than aluminum.
- Must be annealed before use. Not a problem if purchased as annealed.
- Work-hardens rapidly.

### Advantages of Aluminum:

- Easier to apply than copper.
- Does not need to be annealed before use.

Disadvantages of Aluminum:

- Less holding power (weaker) for a given diameter than copper.
- More expensive to use than copper (considering size of wire vs. holding power).
- Anodizing tends to fade to bright aluminum color with exposure to sunlight.

Regardless of which type of wire is used for bonsai training, when removal is required the wire should be cut off with an appropriate bonsai wire cutter. Because copper wire work hardens it is usually nearly impossible to remove without wire cutters. Aluminum can sometimes be unwound from the branch or trunk. However, neither copper nor aluminum should be unwound because of the risk of damage to the branches so carefully arranged at the expense of time and material. Therefore, removal characteristics are not an advantage for either wire material.

Practitioners look at the same basic facts and draw different conclusions as to which wire is their basic preference. For example Jim Gremel of [Deer Meadow Bonsai](#) posts the following on his website.

Which type of wire to use becomes almost a religious issue for some bonsaiists. I have always used copper. I have just started to use aluminum for some deciduous trees, but it is much more difficult for me to use because I have nearly three decades of experience with copper. I am clearly biased, but here are what I feel are the important considerations:

Annealed Copper

- o More economical
- o Work hardens as it is applied, so it holds better than aluminum
- o Preferred for conifers
- o Cannot be reused unless reannealed

Anodized Aluminum

- o Softer than copper, it has to be 1/3 larger in diameter than copper for a given purpose. The larger diameter has a larger "foot print", or contact area, with the bark, so it will be slower to scar a delicate barked tree.
- o Many bonsaists prefer aluminum for deciduous trees.
- o Aluminum doesn't work harden very much, so it can be reused.

Gremel is a vendor of both copper and aluminum wire, so he will sell either. But he has a long history as a copper wire monger, so the implicit answer to which might be the best is elsewhere on his website, where he asks the question: Why Pay More? The answer he provides follows:

My annealed copper wire is very soft, it doesn't have hard spots, it is in conveniently sized coils and it is markedly cheaper than imported copper wire. It is even cheaper than aluminum wire!

Copper it is!

On another vendor's website we have the general conclusion that aluminum is the rather obvious choice.

Bonsai Boy of New York:

Types Of Wire? – There are two types or kinds of wire used in bonsai: copper and aluminum. Copper wire is stronger, but in my experience, is less forgiving. If it is not monitored very closely, it will invariably bite into your bonsai, scarring bark and branches alike. Aluminum wire, on the other hand, has one-quarter the strength of copper wire, but it is easier to apply and easier to remove. These two fundamental characteristics make aluminum wire an advantage for the beginner and a blessing for the experience.

So, regardless of what the masters tell you, in the end it is up to you. Just make your choice an informed decision.

For copper bonsai wire the easiest and usually cheapest source is Stone Lantern, which seems to have an eternal sale on bonsai tools, wire, books, and accessories. With regard to copper, although many bonsai vendors carry it, it seems to me that there are two major dealers in copper used by many serious bonsaiists and professionals. West of the Mississippi many turn to Jim Gremel, noted above. East of the Mississippi, a common source is Julian Adams of Adams Bonsai, Lynchburg, VA. Adams sells copper wire coils by length, Gremel sells by diameter of coil. They both sell gauges 6 to 22, and Gremel sells gauge 4. In copper you have to take it in the sizes they sell it in. Aluminum seems a little more understandable, but it is by coil weight. Get used to buying aluminum in kilo rolls with one exception. Never, never buy a full kilo of no. 1 wire! You will spend far too many hours of your remaining life trying to untangle it. Buy several much smaller rolls and still try very hard to keep it neatly rolled up.

## “Introduction to Bonsai Pots” authored by Cat Nelson

John Denny

American Bonsai Society (ABS) offers several pocket sized books on bonsai topics. One of its latest is “Introduction to Bonsai Pots” which was written for ABS by Cat Nelson of Keota, Iowa. Cat moved to Iowa last year from Indiana. She has been involved with various aspects of bonsai including running the Midwest Bonsai Show in Chicago for several years, as well as being past president of the Midwest Bonsai Society.

Cat's 80 page book covers the basics of how pots are made, what regions produce bonsai pots, artists, styles, size and shape, and opens the door on the details of “chop marks” found on the bottoms of most good pots. If you want to improve your knowledge of bonsai pottery, you can order her book from [absbonsai.org](http://absbonsai.org).

## Kokufu ten Winning Trees

John Denny

Below are photographs from the 89<sup>th</sup> annual Kokufu ten show held in Japan this past February. Photos are courtesy of Bill Valvanis. Check out his website for more excellent trees from Kokufu.



*Above is a beefy Black Pine with dense foliage. Below is a Sargeants's Juniper Itoigawa.*





A fabulous display of shohin trees. Below is a Japanese maple, De Shojo.

