

*IBA News & Muse*  
*Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter*  
*2016 FEBRUARY*

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

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

## IBA FEBRUARY Activities

**Tuesday, February 16, 7:00pm, IBA Meeting**  
**Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, 909 Robert D. Ray Drive, Botany Lab**

*The program involves the dirty side of bonsai: we will discuss Soils and Potting. Soil components for all varieties of trees will be addressed as well as sources for them. Pot depth variations for particular species will be covered as well as best tree positioning in a pot or tray. A video on repotting will be show during the program.*

## EIBA FEBRUARY Activities

**February 11, 6 pm. Board Mtg at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Rd. Topics:** *February meeting preparation, coe Gardening Fair, update web sites and vendor lists, 2016 review and prep.*

**February 18, 7 pm. Club Meeting at Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd. Topics:** *Dues collection, club soil handout, review of 2016 Calendar and review of bringing trees out of hibernation.*

*A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone.*

*Henry David Thoreau*

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*This Formosan juniper (Juniperus formosana) by Mr. Kuo An Lee is from Taiwan. Amy Liang Chang donated it to the Pacific Bonsai Museum.*

*Dave DeGroot wrote: "This Chinese juniper was nursery grown and trained in Taipei, Taiwan. The basic shape was created by bending the juvenile tree around a bamboo stake. Field growing enlarged the trunk, which was then topped to obtain the correct height.*

## Timely Tips

It may still be quite cold outside, as it is today, but I sense many bonsai conversations warming up lately. More people are emailing me about bonsai. Club activities are beginning. Hobbyists are beginning to prepare for repotting season, which really is not all that far away.

Helene Magruder contacted me with a couple of points I will pass on. First, as a board member of the American Bonsai Association, she would like to see more people attend ABS functions like the upcoming ABS Learning Seminars to be held in Michigan next May. Helene says these are great opportunities to learn as they offer seminars, workshops, vendors, many guest artists, and various activities any bonsai lover would enjoy. There is a page in the newsletter devoted to further information. Think about finding a friend and making the trip. Or meet a friend there.

Helene also told me she finally turned in the clippings of copper wiring that she removes from her trees and collected \$58 for it. Save your copper. Do this as a club. Recycling copper can help you buy your next new wire order!

Next topic: where are good places to buy tools, wire, pots, soils, etc.? I say start locally with Dave Lowman or Pierson's Flower Shop (in CR). If they do not have what you want, check Cass Bonsai in St. Louis. Online sites I use for pots are Bonsai Vision, Stone Lantern, Dallas Bonsai. Seedlings you can buy from Bill Valvanis at International Bonsai or Matt Ouwinga of Kaede-en. Both are excellent vendors. If you have a favorite site you buy from, let me know, as I would like to make a more complete listing of bonsai shopping sites. I would also like to make a thorough listing of bonsai educational sites and blogs, so send me your favorites.

Do you remember the old Heinze ketchup tv ads about "Anticipation". Anticipation is about looking forward to something good, really good. Now is the time we all await nature's waking, whether it is seed catalogues or bonsai web sites. Anticipation should be savored. So, enjoy this season of looking forward to freshly sprouting delicate bonsai leaves!

## Companions

Ivan Hanthorn

The grueling annual scheduling exercise of the IBA is now completed. We now know some of the things we can enjoy this year. One of our programs will be devoted to companion plants, or accent plants as they are also known. To be correct we should call them *Shitakusa* and *Kusamono*, but as a society we tend to avoid being technically accurate. Whatever you think of them they are a necessary part of the composition for a formal display of a Japanese bonsai. American bonsai usually closely follow the Japanese rules for exhibit. Chinese bonsai, *Penjing*, rarely use a companion.

During a cold winter there is little that can compete with companion plant images to take one's mind forward to the spring that will surely come. Currently on the internet there are hundreds of relevant images to be found, most of them informative, some of them inspiring, and a very few profoundly beautiful. So, with the future making of companion pieces of your very own for your own bonsai collection, take a gander at the following suggested internet sites for inspiration.

Begin with Google images and key in bonsai companion plants. Lots of photos, including a nice one of Dave Lowman's red dock plants. Then key in bonsai accent plant images. A different set of images pops up. After a casual stroll through these photos it is time to move on to good stuff. Key in German bonsai companion plants. Nice stuff. And then finally go back to all from images in Google and key in Wolfgang Putz bonsai. His website is: [www.yamadori-bonsai.info/](http://www.yamadori-bonsai.info/). **Bonsai, Yamadori & Akzentpflanzen—versteinerte Hölzer aus aller Welt** will pop up. Don't worry. Although most of his website is in German, there are two sections in English: yamadori and accent plants. The photos on the rest of the website are amazing regardless of language of text.

His accent plants section is very professional, laid out like a good art gallery presentation. Not too much text to overwhelm, but just enough to make the topic

sensible. No ocean of images either. Just enough to clearly illustrate the concept and wonderful execution. Notice the photographic standards. Bonsai images do not get any better than this.

One can wonder much deeper into the ozone in search of images of companion plants for bonsai, but this is a great beginning. You will have seen enough to begin to think of your own bonsai, and which plants will bring out the mood and season you want to project as a facet of the character of each unique bonsai tree.



*Images from the website of Wolfgang Putz.*

## A Walk in the Woods

Heather Blum (This article is taken from Sukiya Living aka Journal of Japanese Gardening)

*"It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men's hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of air that emanates from old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit."*

–Robert Louis Stevenson

### Shinrin-Yoku; Forest Bathing

Spending time among the beauty of the natural world has been a popular form of rest and relaxation for centuries. Researchers have discovered views of greenspace or being in nature activate alpha waves in the brain, making us feel calmer and more peaceful.

In 1982 the Japanese government established a plan to incorporate these studies into recommendations for their citizens. It is called *Shinrun-Yoku*, a Japanese term that means "forest bathing" or "luxuriating in the woods". It is the practice of visiting woodland areas with the pure and unadulterated intention of relaxation.

Individuals who embark on these explorations seek to find a connection between themselves and the natural environment, letting go of tension, stress, and anxiety. They learn things about themselves and the world around them as they walk, hike, or stroll. There are currently 44 such places designated in Japan as "forest therapy bases" and visiting them has been a highly recommended form of stress reduction and a recognized practice of de-stressing.

### Breathing in Nature

Traditional Japanese forest bathers set out to absorb (via the respiratory system) the phytoncides floating in the fresh woodland air. These substances are organic compounds that occur naturally in plants, and are thought to encourage a healthy body and soul while reducing anxiety through reduced levels of stress hormones. Some phytoncide chemicals increase the white blood cells that demonstrate cancer fighting properties. Phytoncides are notably secreted by trees such as oak, cedar, tea tree, and pine, and by plants like onions, garlic, and spices. Scientists believe that phytoncides are given off by plants in an attempt to ward away any potential predators such as insects and fungi, and to preserve the plant itself from rotting. This airborne healing agent is magnified with moisture in the air when it becomes trapped in water vapor.

Studies have shown that shinrin-yoku can encourage the production of adiponectin, a hormone which regulates fatty acid breakdown and glucose levels. Low levels of this hormone is a condition linked to diabetes, heart problems, and obesity.

Forest therapy is also thought to reduce the level of cortisol in the body. This is a steroid hormone produced when the body faces low blood glucose or stressful situations. Cortisol can suppress the immune system, decrease bone formation, and increase blood sugar.

## Promoting Physical Health

Regular forest bathers have reported that they have experienced significant drops in blood pressure, an increase in energy, healthier immune systems, improved sleeping ability and better overall moods – all due to a simple walk through the woods. Studies which measured the effects on the brain after spending time in woodland areas versus time in urban populated area showed “improved mood, increased vigor, and feelings of liveliness” as well as lowered blood pressure and heart rate. These studies documented statistics that spending time in the forest decreased psychological stress, depression, and hostility.

## Forest Therapy

While forest bathing works to melt away current and damaging tensions within ourselves, it can also be used as a preventative medicine, attacking stresses before they can occur and have a harmful effect on the body and mind. Joining the ranks of other alternative healing concepts such as meditation, tai chi, and aromatherapy, shinrin-yoku is cementing its place as a natural relaxation method.

Utilizing the power of the outdoors for healing purposes is by no means a new trend, as historically many different religions and cultural groups have done the same for centuries. Some believe that, like humans, the natural environment has a spirit and a soul that must be respected.

Whether you believe the bushes on the trail have a personality or not, there’s no denying the natural world has a heavy influence on how we feel and on our overall quality of life. In the age of technology, when more people are likely to experience a forest through a TV screen or a computer rather than their own eyes, it’s more important than ever that we promote natural exploration through our own adventures and those of others.

With the positive neurological reactions seen in so many forest bathing practitioners, shinrin-yoku could soon be a mainstream method of relaxation. This nicely dovetails with the way nature inspired Japanese gardens provide a tranquil and peaceful existence for homeowners.

## Emotional Health

While any manner of physical activity constitutes exercise, shinrin-yoku concentrates as much on the emotional well-being of the mind as it does on the wellness of the physical body. Forest bathing is meant to also provide transcendent experiences for the participant. These experiences are defined as extreme feelings of well-being, happiness, and attunement to nature and all living things. These outings aren’t meant to be hikes that push the strengths and limits of the body, and they are by no means an extreme sport.

Instead forest bathing is a gentle ambling through the lush woodlands at a pace and distance preferred by the individual. Twenty to forty minutes of shinrin-yoku was the amount of time it took to produce the health benefits previously mentioned. But scientists want to emphasize that any amount of time spent in nature is better than no time. Even brief moments in the forest allow the brain to take a “timeout”. The benefits continue to multiply with consistency of shinrin-yoku sessions and show peak levels after one week.

## Friendship

Walks can be taken alone, as a group, or with the direction of a guide. As forest bathing establishes roots in Western countries, many organizations are popping up, offering training and accreditation to would be guides and helping to further the presence of forest therapy as a universal toll for wellness.

Those who engage in group waling events have reported they have developed deeper communication skills and strongly connected friendships. Many studies into the effects of nature exposure in humans have found that increased outdoor activity can dramatically improve our ability to pay attention and focus, with some parents finding the practice very beneficial to children suffering from attention Deficit/Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), helping those children with the often difficult realms of education and friendships.

Editors: We feel the same experience can be attained regardless of tree size, so keep the above in mind as you spend time with your short friends. We think benefits apply whether in the woods, visiting a Japanese Garden, working with bonsai, observing artwork with a nature theme.



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MAY 12-15, 2016

*Bonsai in the Garden Learning Seminars*

presented by

The American Bonsai Society & The Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park  
Including the Michigan All State Bonsai Show

## ABS Show and Learning Seminars – Michigan in May

Featured Artists Include:

Julian Adams Jim Doyle Doug Hawley David Hodgetts Ted Matson Jerry Meislik Frank Mihalic Martin Schmalenberg Andy Smith

### Workshops, demonstrations, lectures and other festivities

The 2016 Learning Seminars will bring nine talented bonsai teachers from ABS for the traditional two days of classes plus a special Sunday event lead by regional bonsai teachers. This event will take place in the charming venue of the Frederik Meijer Garden and Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

For additional information and schedule of events check out:

<http://www.absbonsai.org/2016-abs-bonsai-in-the-garden-learning-seminars>

## Sizing a Bonsai Pot

John Denny

Repotting bonsai trees generally begins in early March. In order to be prepared many hobbyists are currently buying pots whether online, from catalogs, from other club members or from retail stores. Many new to bonsai feel selecting the correct size pot for their trees is somewhat of a mysterious guess. They are often wrong, buying a pot they cannot fit their tree into or having to pot it up in a pot way to big which makes your small tree look even smaller and less mature than it is.

Bonsai is often interpreted to mean “tree in a pot or tray”. The pot is a critical part of the overall stylistic impression and also a key part of the horticultural success. American bonsai hobbyists do not spend as much money on the pot relative to that spent on the tree as do the Japanese, never the less, buying a proper pot is important and worth understanding. Buying the wrong pot for your beloved tree has been accomplished thousands of times in bonsai history. Let’s see if we can reduce the chance of failure.

First, let us begin with basic pot sizing guidelines based mainly on styling. Then we can discuss the inevitable exceptions to the rule. Recall the movie “Pirates of the Caribbean “, where the pirate captain when questioned about one of his pirate rules, says, “Well now. It’s not exactly a rule. It’s more like a guideline.” I would say these guidelines are not really guidelines, they are more like mild suggestions. Very flexible and open to change.

1. For oval or rectangle pots, the length should be approximately  $2/3$  of the height of the tree. If the tree is a wide, heavy trunked tree, then use two thirds of the width of the foliage. This guideline has worked well for me when buying pots online. Measure your tree and calculate two thirds. If your tree is already in a ceramic pot, measure the current pot. Stay the same length or decide if you want a larger or smaller pot, but use the old pot length as a reference point.
2. The depth of the pot should be roughly equal to the diameter of the tree’s trunk just above the soil line. Wide canopy trees tend to look good in shallower pots than this guideline. Powerful squat trees, like a short thick pine might look best in a slightly deeper pot than the guideline measure.
3. Round pots are generally  $1/3$  the height of the tree. A fifteen inch tree would look good in a 5 inch diameter round pot.
4. Although not strictly a size guideline, the heaviness or lightness of the pot in terms of style (not actual weight) is important. Bonsai trees can be categorized as feminine or masculine. A powerful, thick black pine should go into a masculine appearing pot – unglazed, heavier looking pot walls and legs, squared corners not rounded. A more feminine style of tree, say a graceful Japanese maple, appears best in a glazed, oval with shallower sides and a lighter glaze.

I place successful horticulture above successful style. Dead trees usually fail to impress anyone stylistically! So, first, think about what size your pot should be to keep your tree healthy. Low profile pots (shallow) can make your expensive new Japanese maple look great, but does it offer enough space for the tree's root system to be healthy and to grow a bit. How aggressive will you have to prune the root system of the tree to get it to fit the shallow pot and are you willing to water the shallow pot daily and twice on days of high temperatures or low humidity or on windy days? Also, think about whether your tree likes a more moist soil which may require a bit deeper pot. I keep trees like Hinoki cypress, azaleas, fruiting or flowering trees in somewhat deeper pots. I also do not show many trees, so I figure I can err on the side of horticulture over a stylish show pot. Just my preference.

Another reason for a deeper pot is when transitioning a tree from a larger nursery pot into the tree's first ceramic pot. We never know what the roots in the nursery pot might be like. We may only be able to remove a certain amount of heavy rootage during the first repotting. Having a pot with a bit of extra depth can be helpful. If you bought a shallow pot, you may have to wait a couple of more years to use it! Yet another reason for a slightly larger pot would be if you expect your tree to grow very actively. An older tree generally will grow more slowly than a younger one. A species like a Trident maple will grow harder and create a larger root system requiring a pot with more room. Also, if you plan to fertilize aggressively your roots will grow more actively and fill the pot more fully. Go a little bigger or deeper here.

Bottom line, horticulture needs may suggest that you want a slightly larger pot than standard guidelines might tell you to buy.

Let's talk pot shape. We can pick up on masculine/feminine again. Pots range from very masculine – deep squares or rectangles with square corners, unglazed, dark color. One can soften the look of a pot by softening or rounding the corners a bit, adding cloud style feet rather than heavy squared feet. Walls can be thinner and the pots less deep. Next you can move onto heavier deep ovals of darker colors which convey a midpoint between masculine and feminine. Pots become feminine as you get shallower, use lighter colored glazes and textures.

Trees with a lot of movement like gently twisting junipers are more feminine than a squat, heavy trunked upright. Trees with lighter foliage are feminine in style. Dense foliage calls for a more masculine pot style. Trees with strong evident nebari are more masculine. Trees with a heavy craggy bark are also masculine and smooth barked trees like Zelkova are feminine. Look at your tree and think of these factors and you will be more successful in selecting a properly styled pot.

Guidelines for pot size and pot style can help you avoid mistakes and save you money. Guidelines can get your favorite tree into a pot that makes it look better and keeps it healthier.

Guidelines help the majority of us make good decisions. However, as I heard the famous bonsai personality, Walter Pall say, "If you want to make good bonsai, follow the rules. But, if you want to make great bonsai, sometimes you have to break the rules!" I will leave the choice to you!

## Redwood Bonsai Style Photos

John Denny

Below are two equally beautiful Redwood bonsai. The first style is what I call the “redwood stump” style. A short, stocky stump is used to grow out branches from young shoots. The second is a more classic formal upright style.



*This ancient looking tree is a Coast redwood (Sequoia sempervirens). Ancient look, stocky trunk, lots of deadwood, young branches. Photos from Bonsai Tonight.*



*Classic redwood looking like a towering tree. From Pacific Rim collection.*