

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
JULY 2013

Volume 30, Issue 7



www.iabonsai.org

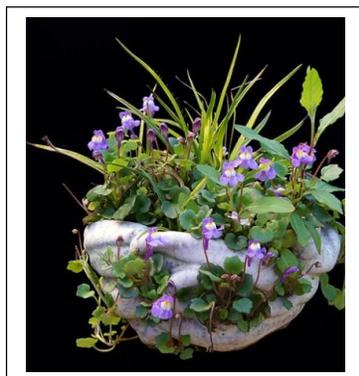
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IBA JULY Activities

JULY 16, 7 PM, IBA MEETING
MAGRUDER FARM, INDIANOLA, IOWA
PROGRAM: KUSAMONO WORKSHOP, Ivan Hanthorn

Kusamono is more interesting, complicated, and at times much bigger than the usual little companion plant. They can stand alone or accompany a bonsai. Bring a shallow or flat tray/pot, 3 or more plants (in odd numbers, not even numbers), and moss. Larry Totton's idea of a plate with a hole drilled in it is very applicable for this. Plants should match in environmental needs (light, water, indoor/outdoor). Call Dave Lowman if you want to acquire any of these materials from him. Last year he made some dynamite kusamono containers.

Everyone should plan to participate but observers will be tolerated. No charge for this workshop. Only costs are your materials. Good time to hit garden shops (e.g. Earl May) for discounted perennials and ground covers that work just fine for this sort of arrangement. One plant should be the main accent plant in your planning.



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Various kusamono above from various bonsai artists

JULY, last week: Remember upcoming IOWA STATE FAIR BONSAI SHOW in August.

Now is the time for final trimming, primping, application of show wire if needed, and moss laying. Put down moss now to make it look natural. Rub some dirt into it, water it lightly, and cover with burlap or porous shelf liner to protect from sun burn. Keep rotating the tree in sunlight to balance direction of growth.

EIBA JULY Activities

July 11, 6:00 Board Meeting. Nothing But Noodles Restaurant Meeting Room.

June 18, 7:00 Club Meeting held at Jim Rajtora's home on Sue Lane.

Jim Rajtora will lead a workshop on bonsai display furniture building at his home.

Timely Tips

Recall last year at this time? We were locked into a month long blast furnace during July. That was tough on trees. I know many good bonsai people who lost trees over winter. I suspect the increased winter loss was due in part to such high heat stress in July.

I have used the guideline of watering twice daily on days above 90F. Last July every day was above 90F, so I watered my trees a lot. Talking with Gary Wood, the traveling bonsai guru from Alabama, I learned I should have watered well once per day, then misted later in the day. That regimen would have kept roots happier and still taken some of the heat stress away, too. Of all the things I have studied in life, bonsai teaches me more “after the fact” than anything. I make great effort to learn and do things correctly up front, so finding out “I should have...” is one of my least favorite things I know. Welcome to bonsai!

We have all heard watering is the most important task in bonsai. The Japanese say it is the hardest to learn. I believe it. Look at all the variables! Weather alone causes variation in rain, humidity, sun, cloudiness, wind. All these factors affect watering. And think of all the soil types. Despite trying to stick to as few basic soils as I can, I still end up with new and different soils from trees I have acquired from other people and nurseries. Now I have added azaleas and yet another new soil type. Some trees are fast growing seedlings, others are slower growing semi-finished trees that require less water. Soils can vary in their water holding capacity. And that capacity changes as the soil ages and compacts. Every species seems to have its own watering needs. Plus, every pot among my 50+ trees is a different size, shape, depth. All of which affects how much I need to water.

Confused yet? I bet you agree that watering is challenging. Look at each of your trees and think about all of the above variables. Adjust watering basis your thoughts. Finally, nothing beats paying attention to your tree. Look at each tree every day. Has the foliage changed? Touch your tree and soil. Is the soil dry? Leaves dry? Go find your watering wand!

“Where?”

By Andrew Smith

Well, like every year, the weather this year has not been normal. Spring was late, or hasn't come, and it's been too dry or too wet, depending on the day and what you had planned to do with it.

As a result, it's already the 2nd week of June and the pine buds are barely break-ing in most of the Black Hills, which is at least a month late according to my schedule, which is the one I go by. I was getting very irritated by this weather until I remembered that I still have over 100 pines to pot, plus other trees I already paid for but haven't collected yet, and the cool weather is actually helping me out by prolonging the transplant season. That made me realize that I should be happy every time we have another gloomy, cold day and it snows on the beach.

That thought was too much for my small pea to digest, so I decided to think about something else. I tried thinking about tree roots, since I am pretty much cleaning, clipping, and planting tree roots during all my waking hours. So the first thing I thought was that tree roots are similar to spaghetti and it was close to lunch and I was hungry. Then I thought about Parmesan cheese, and how it's a good thing it's not in powder form while it's still in the cow or it would be hard to get out. Then I thought about the pastures cows eat in, and then the Earth the pastures are on, and then the solar system and galaxy that the Earth is in. Then I thought about the universe that contains all these infinite galaxies, solar systems, stars, planets and even bonsai trees.

“But what contains the universe?” That's a poser. Everything has got to be some-where, but what space holds space? What reference point is there to locate it by? That stopped me, and for a second I felt like I'd started out potting trees and ended up misplacing the whole universe. Where could it be? But then I realized that the answer is obvious; the universe is right here, and it's never been anywhere else. Whew! So I found it again and went back to tree roots.

(cont. on p 4)

TREE OF THE MONTH: HINOKI

By Ivan Hanthorn

The very first bonsai tree purchased by an American from a Japanese source in the 20th century was most likely a Hinoki. These were the trees that so enchanted westerners, even though the Japanese had by the turn of the last century lost interest in the species as bonsai material. An opportunity to make a lot of money was thus present: sell to the foreigners for a good price what the Japanese did not particularly want to keep.

Often called *Hinoki Cypress* or *False Cypress*, the tree bears the scientific name of *Chamaecyparis obtusa*. The *Chamaecyparis* genus includes *Chamaecyparis pisifera* (Sawara Cypress), popular varieties of which include 'Boulevard ' and 'Plumosa'. *Chamaecyparis thuyoides* 'Andelyensis Conica' is another relative sometimes used for bonsai. Hinoki is much the easiest to work with. There other relatives should be avoided until one has experience and has learned well to handle frustration, disappointment, death, and grieving.

Chamaecyparis obtusa is a popular genus for bonsai however it is difficult to maintain the tree's appearance and is difficult to style well. When finding specimens for use as bonsai or when styling, always consider the existing branch placement as back budding on Hinoki only occurs on green branches and never on mature wood. [There is the Kathy Shainer exception but it applies only after you really know bonsai and Hinokis.] There are a number of varieties available of which *C. obtusa* 'Nana Gracilis' and *C. obtusa* 'Yatsubusa' (both referred to as Dwarf Hinoki Cypresses) are of particular use due to their naturally more compact growing habits. Nana Gracilis can be prone to lose inner foliage easily which it does not replace.

Hinoki needs full sun with protection from strong wind. A thirsty tree species, Hinokis will not tolerate dry soil. Keep soil evenly moist without getting it too wet because root rot can also be a problem for the entire *Chamaecyparis* genus. Trees should be misted daily. They need fed bi-weekly throughout the growing season until fall. All bonsai styles except broom are applicable for this genus. Pruning is the great challenge with Hinokis. Pinch out foliage continually through growing season to keep compact. Allowing over extension of growth can lead to the irreplaceable loss of inner growth. Do not hard-prune in summer. Foliage that is shaded will often dieback during the Winter. A broad conical tree in nature with soft, stringy bark, it can reach heights of 65 feet in its native habitat. The dark green fan-shaped foliage with white bands underneath is its principle attraction as well as its curse.

The essential information has been stated briefly above. Let's now take a look at some pictures, which we all know can be worth thousands of words. The first image below is a rather typical Hinoki bonsai. Following that are two superb, unique, truly awesome Hinoki bonsai. I cannot even think of adequate caption material beyond identification of ownership. These should serve as inspiration to those who wish to work with a Hinoki as a bonsai, following in the footsteps of Americans who for more than a century have been fascinated by this lovely tree species.

(see photos cont. on p 7)

“Where?” (cont. from p 2)

by Andrew Smith

In addition to potting new trees I have quite a few trees that need repotting, so I've been doing that in my spare time, for fun. One tree I decided to repot was a huge old Colorado spruce that I collected from the edge of a very scary cliff with my friend John several years ago.

The tree looks like it's 500 years old, and maybe it is. It has been coming along, but slowly, since I first transplanted it. This year it suddenly formed a huge number of new buds, which I took as a clue that the root system was now strong and developed enough to repot. I never liked the angle it was first planted at, but the original roots determined that.

So I got a great big pot and a wheelbarrow full of soil ready and began wrestling with my spruce tree. It was in a wooden box so I'd tip the box one way and dump out as much old soil as I could, then tip it the other way and do the same thing. Eventually I had the roots pretty much freed from the old soil and I was able to cut the wires and hoist the tree out.

I have a pair of hi-grade stainless steel ashinaga shears that I've had for years but never really used much. This year though I started carry-ing them in a sheath on my belt and found them to be my new favorite tool. They are strong enough to cut a fairly stout branch, but sharp enough to trim needles, roots, twine, burlap and even my moustache, if need be. I've been using them for absolutely everything, and I don't know how I got along without them before. Plus, just wearing them around makes me look like I know what I'm doing.

They came in handy on the roots of the big spruce, to trim away some of the dead and overly long roots, as well as remove some sections that were now unnecessary. When I was done, I set them down and tried the spruce in its new pot. Perfect fit! So I added some soil, placed the tree, topped off the soil, secured the wires and carted the whole thing into the greenhouse where I could water it. It looked beautiful, and happy, and I felt much better, although I don't know if trees can really be happy. But I was. Mission accomplished.

So I wandered out into my newly found universe and back to potting trees. Eventually I reached for my top quality stainless steel shears and found they weren't in my sheath. I'd set them down somewhere. So I went to get them. But they weren't on the pallet where I potted up the big spruce. And they weren't in the greenhouse, or in my jacket pocket, or hip pocket, or by the hose or the rake.

I looked and looked and looked, but they were gone. One minute I had them, the next they had vanished without a trace. Spooky. For two days I looked everywhere, over and over again. I knew I set them down somewhere, and there really weren't that many somewheres in between where I had them and where I didn't.

I looked under pots, under burlap, raked away old pine needles and checked every possible spot. One by one I crossed places off the list until there was only one place left in the whole universe where they possibly could be. But I won't get them back from there, not soon anyway. In the bottom of a great big pot, underneath a wheelbarrow load of soil and a maybe 500-year-old spruce tree; that's where I think my top-notch, stainless steel, Japanese, ashinaga shears are hiding. So it might be a few years before I see them again. So, I found one thing and lost another, which makes me even for the day. And now it's back to potting trees.

Azalea Photos

By John Denny

Azaleas typically bloom in spring around May timeframe. I have collected several photos from around the world to share. One of the fun things about Azaleas is the wide variety. You will see all manner of flowers in these photos – varying colors, sizes, and patterns. Also, you will see Azaleas in nearly every bonsai style. They can be masculine and powerful or feminine and beautiful.



This tree is unique in many ways. It is a cascade and an amazingly healthy and strong one at that. It is both powerful and beautifully feminine at the same time. A great tree!



This striking Kyushu azalea (Rhododendron Kiusianum) has a wild, almost chaotic trunk. Kyushu is not a Satsuki azalea. It blooms in April, a month earlier Satsuki. Nice small flowers. I could envision this with a more typical azalea type pot – shallower, softer edges, glazed. What do you think?

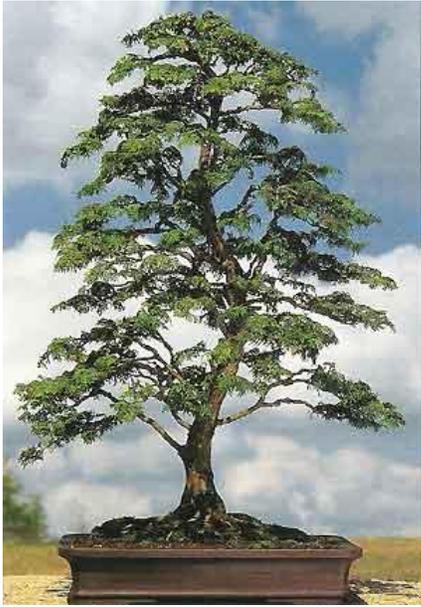


Delicate flowers and a very cool pot.

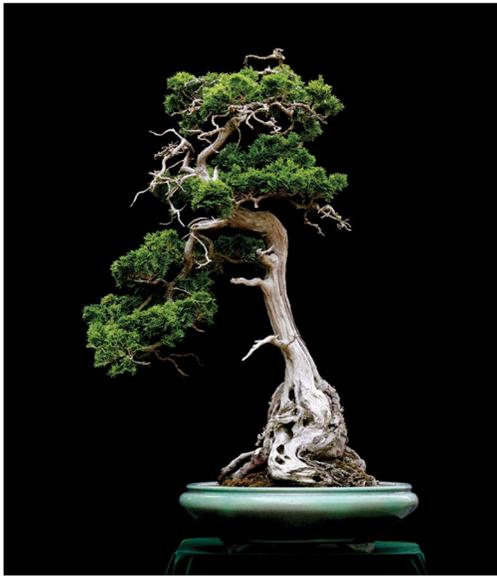


This tree has an amazing powerful trunk with beautiful, delicate flowers. It took a lot of careful wiring to get all the flowers lined up perfectly. I like the pot for such a strong tree. From Crespi Bonsai Museum.

(Cont. from p 4) Hinoki



From the website WhyBonsai.



Dan Robinson's wild Hinoki.



Suthin Sukosolvisit's Hinoki