

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
MAY 2013

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www.iabonsai.org

www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com

IBA MAY Activities

May 21, Meeting, 7:00 pm, Des Moines Botanical Garden

Business meeting followed by a workshop, led by David Lowman: *Shimpaku Raft Planting or Group Planting* of available material from Dasu Bonsai. Cost of plant material dependant on what you choose to work with. Soil and wire provided by the club. Pot for purchase from Dave Lowman or bring your own. Notify Dave if you want a slab. Notify Dave (DaSu Bonsai on the web) if you want to work with material other than shimpaku. We encourage you to come even if you do not participate.

EIBA MAY Activities

May 9, 6:30 Board Meeting. Nothing But Noodles restaurant Meeting Room.

May 12, 10 am – 4 pm, Mother's Day Show, Noelridge Greenhouse.

Bring your trees for display by entering in rear of building at 9 am.

May 16, 7:00 pm, Club Meeting, Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd.

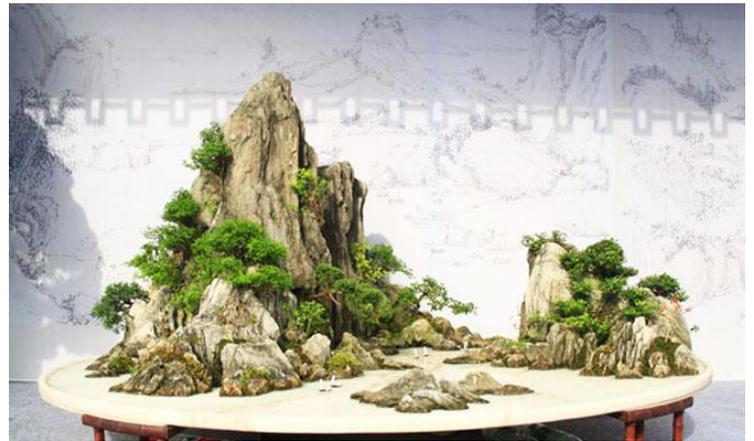
We will review club Foster trees, discuss candling, deadwood and growing thick trunks.

June 22, Noon, Club Picnic, Guthridge Park, Green Pavillion

Dave Lowman will be at the picnic selling bonsai trees and supplies. He will also lead a workshop.

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A fabulous penjing tray display. Rock layout is superb. Great perspective with small rocky island up front. Photo by by Robert Steven .

Timely Tips

I am often asked questions about fertilizing in spring time. Mostly I answer, "It depends on...". Fill in the blank. Things vary with species, whether a tree was recently repotted, etc. However, with the help of information from Michael Hagedorn, I will give some guidelines. Let's start with:

*Begin fertilizing a *young, unrefined tree* when it begins growing in early spring.

*Wait a bit later for *older, more refined trees*. Wait until the new spring growth has begun to harden off.

The guidelines above assume you want your young trees to develop trunk girth, grow branches, bud prolifically and generate good growth and health. It also assumes you want your older, refined trees to maintain their "old" look with smaller internodes, dense ramification, finer foliage, slower growth.

Okay, what does this mean, practically speaking, here in Iowa. In a typical year here in Iowa (are there such years?), we can begin fertilizing our younger trees in late March (unless your tree has just been repotted). If you are fortunate to have an older refined tree, then begin fertilizing in mid-May. This year, we are a bit behind so these dates might be early April and late May.

What happens if we fertilized all of our trees the same - early and hard? Michael points out that our young trees would stay young forever, never acquiring many of the attributes that make a tree look older and refined. The young trees would maintain long internodes, big leaves, long branches constantly growing out of the tree's natural silhouette. In other words, the tree would never become a true bonsai. And what would happen if we fertilized an old refined tree early and hard? It would become young again, destroying much of what was valued in the refined stage, losing our short internodes, which would be replaced with long gangly growth and leaf size would become larger.

Also, Michael says it is more important to fertilize older trees in the fall. And he points out that black pines require lots of fertilizer even on old trees if you are cutting candles each year. As always, guidelines have exceptions.

Dave Kreutz Satsuki Azalea

Workshop

By John Clemens

To all of those that chose or could not attend you missed a stellar workshop put on by Dave Kreutz from Chesterfield, MO of the Greater St. Louis Bonsai Society. I met Dave around 12 years ago when I first got into bonsai when I lived in the St. Louis area. He always stood out to me as an innovative thinker and knowledgeable bonsai artist. There were 7 attendees at the workshop from both the EIBA and IBA clubs.

For those of you that are not familiar with Dave, he runs Satsuki Bonsai-en where he grows and imports many varieties of Satsuki bonsai and supplies. Much of his stock comes directly from nurseries in Japan. Dave also conducts workshops both at his home and at various locations around the country. You can also find him as a vendor at many of the major bonsai shows.

Dave presented an all-day class for the club. As most of us had little if any experience with azalea (as bonsai) we all approached the workshop with much to learn. Dave did not disappoint.

Some things that stood out about the workshop: Dave uses straight Kanuma soil to pot all of his azalea. This is interesting stuff to work with as it is very light, and a bit fragile, but holds water extremely well without being wet. Dave also stresses the use of Yamagoki moss on the soil surface as a way to keep the important surface roots moist. Yamagoki differs from sphagnum moss in that it is very easy to rewet when it dries out.

On heavier pruning Dave had this to say. DO NOT make a hollow, or concave cut on the trunk or branches of azaleas. This type of cut will not callus over properly. It will always leave a hole. Make a *convex* cut and smooth out the edges of the cut. Use cut paste (Top Jin), apply with an old short bristle paint brush or toothbrush. (cont. p 3)

(cont. from p 2)

Dave Kreutz Azalea Workshop

On big cuts, use liquid seaweed (with iron) directly on the cut, let dry then add cut paste. Apply gauze or burlap over the top to help keep the cut paste in place and keep it from flaking off.

All in all, it was a great workshop with tons of great information. Dave holds workshops at his home several times a year and is happy to travel for workshops at your location too. You can find out more about Dave and his azaleas at:

<http://www.satsukibonsai-en.com>



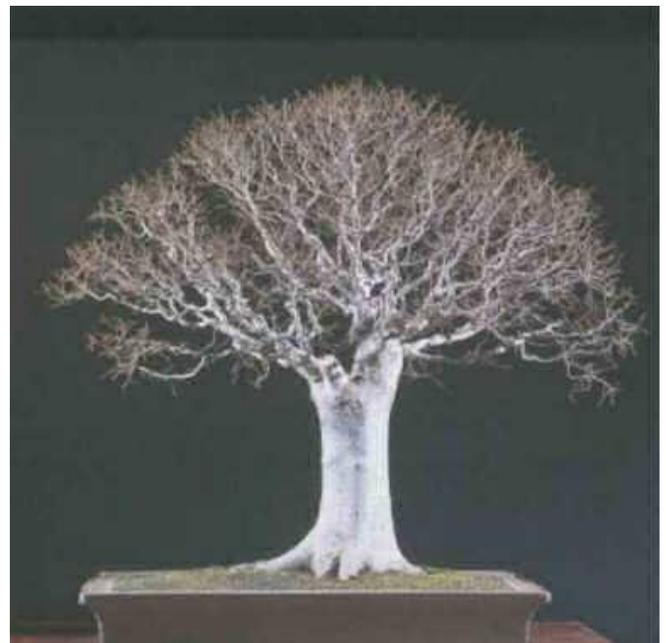
A Satsuki azalea with rather large multi colored flowers.

Zelkova serrata/Japanese Grey Bark Elm

By John Denny



A very nice Zelkova.



A broom style Zelkova with good ramification.

Zelkova has alternating elliptical toothed leaves that turn yellow and orange in fall. They make excellent broom style upright trees and form good nebari. They also can make fine shohin size trees. Treat them as you would most deciduous trees and they should do well for you.

Bonsai Before, Great Bonsai Now, and Tentative Steps into a New Bonsai Future: Book Thoughts

by Ivan Hanthorn

So for two days of early May when snow falls continually, blanketing your garden and your bonsai, what should one do? I pulled out some bonsai books and had a good long read, fueled by strong coffee and a desire to not go out there into that white alien stuff that seemed to just keep coming down, like the goeey old style flocking on Christmas trees for the imagination challenged.

I have recently acquired a copy of one of the very early books on bonsai published in English, Notes on Bonsai, by Alfred Koehn. I love this book. First of all, it is a traditional soft cover Japanese bound book, which was a style of binding that was a specialty of mine in my former life as a book conservator. (Double folded paper for leaves, stab bound with exterior string ties.) It was published by the Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, Tokyo, in 1953. The book covers the essentials of bonsai quite well in only 37 pages. In reviewing it one cannot help but wonder why there has been such a plethora of bonsai books ever since restating all of the same information. Koehn's information came not only from experience after WWII but from a period before the war when he was in Japan.

"Alfred Koehn, recipient of the tropical agricultural diploma in Hamburg, Germany, spent some years in East Sumatra, serving as a technical expert on a tobacco plantation before he came to Japan in 1931. During his stay in Japan (1931–1935), he studied the art of Japanese flower arrangement at the Rokkakudo in Kyoto. He was in Peking during 1935–1950, studying Chinese arts and culture. Since he returned to Japan in 1951, he has opened courses in the cultivation of bonsai at Kofu-en [Tokyo] in collaboration with Yuji Yoshimura. In 1952, he was invited to give lectures at the Exhibition of Chinese Arts and Japanese Flower Arrangement and Bonsai Cultivation held in Hong Kong. He is the author of The Way of Japanese Flower Arrangement,"

During his first sojourn in Japan, Koehn "owned a good collection of miniature bonsai which enchanted many foreign visitors to the Nara Hotel," his residence. Koehn was one of those Westerners who had achieved a genuine understanding of Japanese esthetics as expressed in the related art forms of ikebana and bonsai. It was Koehn's knowledge and interest in Bonsai as a foreigner that let Yoshimura to propose joint teaching and exhibition work together. Notes on Bonsai "was written for those who attended the classes, as a summary of the material covered, and also for others who want to acquire some knowledge of an art, unparalleled in beauty and skill, which a few Japanese have created for the infinite delight of people of many countries."

Other than the increased difficulty of obtaining imported Japanese bonsai material, everything in the book is still relevant. Even the Japanese soil mixtures can be replicated because much of that material is now imported, which was not true until the last couple of decades. The beauty of the book is its focus on essentials, with none of the funk and flash of the bonsai books of the last quarter century. Most importantly, this is the Japanese approach to bonsai at mid-20th century written by an American voice. Notes on Bonsai is long out of print, but can be found on the o. p. market; used copies are listed on Amazon and it occasionally comes up on eBay. (cont. on p 5)

The Chicago Botanic Garden, host to the annual Mid-American Bonsai Exhibit which many of us have enjoyed over several years, has recently published The Bonsai Collection of the Chicago Botanic Garden: Bonsai A Patient Art, written by Susumu Nakamura, consulting curator, and Ivan Watters, curator, with assistance by Terry Ann R. Neff, and Tim Priest (Yale University Press, 2012). The work highlights 64 masterpieces from the Chicago Botanic's extensive bonsai collection (185 trees).

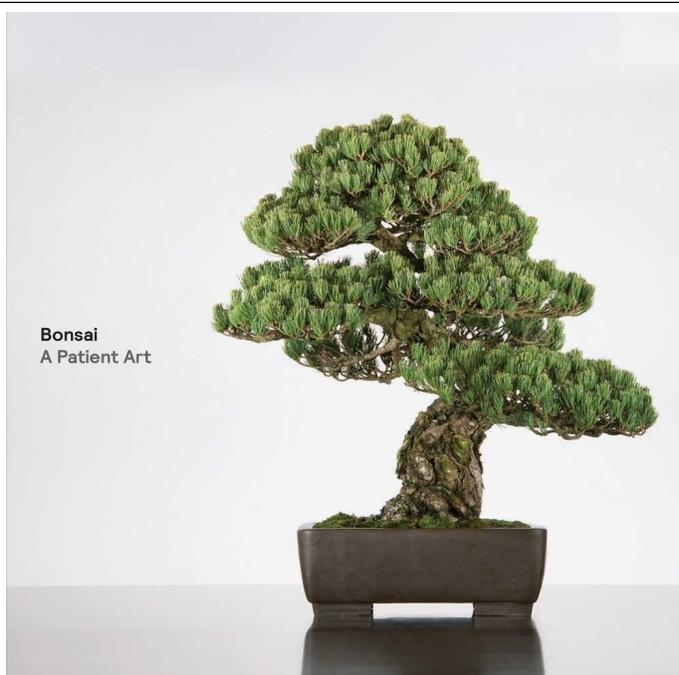
"In an engaging opening essay, the book introduces the practice and philosophy of bonsai, its spiritual resonance, and its horticultural sophistication. Then, alongside each tree's portrait, is a short, thoughtful discussion of the species and style of the tree, as well as its individual history and character." The photographs are outstanding. So are the trees. The more time one spends with the book, the greater the sophistication of the work and of the collection becomes apparent. The trees highlighted in this group of photographs are not cookie cutter trees. Nor are they necessarily ancient. Many have ages between 25 and 50 years, not nearly the length of time often evoked in ancient Japanese masterpieces. What they all exhibit is a great sophistication by the artists in working with the tree material to create with living material through time a very richly suggestive plant formation with definitive character in a superb presentation.

For those who are not familiar with Susumu Nakamura, he is a legendary bonsai master who has served as a director of education for the Nippon Bonsai Association and director of Bonsai Clubs International. He was the donor of 19 of his favorite trees to the Chicago Botanic Garden Bonsai Collection in 2000, therewith raising the collection to the status of one of the premier bonsai collections in North America and one of the best displays of bonsai in the world. Nakamura has a long relationship with Chicago Botanic Garden, periodically lecturing and judging at the Mid-America Bonsai Exhibits. (I exhibited bonsai one year when he judged and we subsequently met and talked; he is an engaging, enthusiastic, and delightful person. He always says nice things about your trees also.)

The Chicago bonsai collection is our reference collection here in the Upper Midwest. It is close enough for us to visit any time of the year. The annual summer bonsai exhibit and sale provides the most affordable and convenient opportunity outside of Iowa to buy outstanding quality bonsai materials and learn from contemporary bonsai teachers. I really do think that this book should be on the shelf of every Midwestern bonsai enthusiast. Published at \$40, it is already available at discount in several places. Amazon currently lists it at \$30.34 with free shipping. This is very much not like the pricing of most of the big bonsai photo books of late. This is a very affordable book. And when looking for inspiration for potting and presentation, one no longer has to regret not having all those expensive Kokufu books that previously were the baseline for such activity. Now you can look at Bonsai A Patient Art.

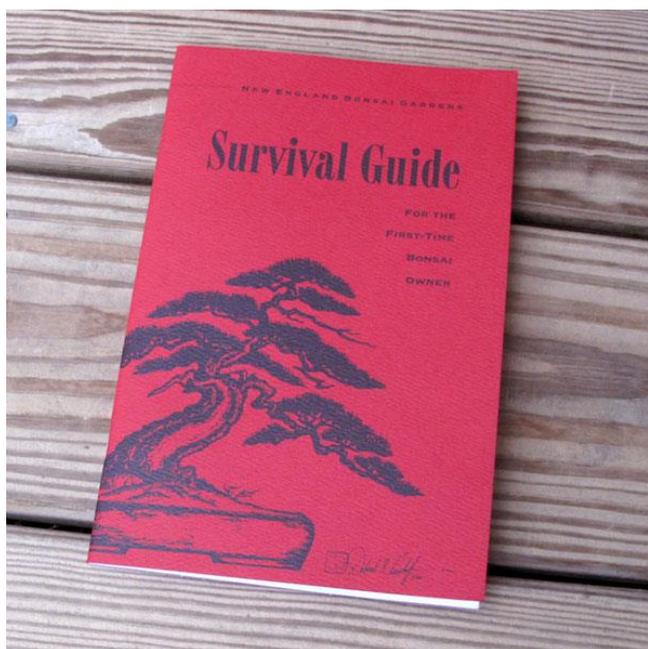
We have new members of the IBA who occasionally ask about what book or books should they think about acquiring at the front end of their growing interest in bonsai. I usually forget to mention the work really intended to be the first book, Survival Guide for the First-Time Bonsai Owner. Published by the New England Bonsai Gardens in 1999, it is still available from them for \$3.95. (www.nebonsai.com) It really will help you keep that first bonsai alive, and failing that, then the next one.

If one added John Naka's Bonsai Techniques I to the above named three books, that grouping would be a very adequate core collection for bonsai reference. Although it is high bonsai activity time, remember to read about the art form and attend club meetings and lectures. Otherwise, as Bill Valavanis often has said, you just keep repeating the same old mistakes over and over and over. Or to put it another way, as Gary Wood said: "Doing it right takes time; doing it wrong takes forever."



Bonsai
A Patient Art

Bonsai A Patient Art



Survival Guide For the First-time Bonsai Owner

HISTORICAL BONSAI PHOTOGRAPH

By Ivan Hanthorne



Japanese bonsai vendor, studio portrait, hand-tinted albumen print, ca. 1870. Note the deep pots then common and the large cycad on the left tray. From the Ryukyu Islands, cycads had been a part of Japanese garden planting since the 17th century and later were adapted into Japanese bonsai presentation. The multiple headed cycad form illustrated is still considered a legitimate traditional bonsai form for cycads, although it seems very unbonsai. As with ginkgo and a few other traditional bonsai plants, tradition trumps all other rules.