

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

<https://sites.google.com/site/cedarrapidsbonsai/>



February 2017

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IBA February Activities

**February 18, 9:00 AM, Presentation at 11:30 AM
IBA Membership Meeting at The Greater
Des Moines Botanical Garden.
909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

Topics: *Open Study Group - free to work on whatever you want. 11:30 Presentations: Mixing Soil - an all interested members activity. Short talk on what makes a quality bonsai soil by Dave Lowman*

EIBA February Activities

**February 16, 7:00PM, Club Meeting.
Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd.
Bring your checkbook and empty 5 gallon
bucket for soil.**

Topic: *Pay dues, pick up club soil, Round table discussion on Bringing Trees out of Winter Dormancy.*

Bonsai Events to be Aware of this Spring

**IBA has two workshops scheduled this
spring.**

**Workshop with Todd Schlafer is now moved
to April 1 and 2 (from April 29 and 30).
The Workshop will be held at the Magruder
Bonsai Studio.**

**Contact Scott Allen for further information
and registration.**

**Bjorn Bjornholm will be giving a workshop
at the Magruder Bonsai Studio. on Sunday
May 14.**

Contact Scott Allen of IBA for information.

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**MABA holds a major event in Indianapolis,
see below for info.**

**MID-AMERICA BONSAI ALLIANCE
2017 CONVENTION**

July 7 - 8 2017

Featuring Matt Reel

Bill Valavanis	
Mary Madison	
Jim Doyle	
Brian Ciskowski	Exhibit
Mark Fields	Demos
Alan Magruder	
Ken Huth	Workshops
Paul Weishaar	
Michael Ryan Bell	
Andy Smith	Vendors
Scott Yelich	
Carl Wooldridge	Seminars

Clarion Hotel
Waterfront Plaza and Conference Center
2930 Waterfront Parkway W Drive
Indianapolis, Indiana
www.MABAbonsai.org
Host: Indianapolis Bonsai Club

LED Grow Lights

SEIBA member, John Clemens, forwarded information on LED grow lights to me and I thought I would pass it on to Iowa club members. John says, I found this recently. LED grow lights. One big plus is they're modular and use less power than fluorescent tubes, plus you don't have the "aging" and loss of intensity like you do with fluorescents.

http://www.leevalley.com/us/garden/page.aspx?cat=2,44716&p=75343&WT.mc_id=2303_4&WT.tsrc=Email

Preparation for Bonsai Potting Season

John Denny

This time of year we begin preparation for repotting season. This is fairly easy if you have only one tree and you plan to put it back into the same pot. All you need is some fresh bonsai soil and a bit of number two aluminum wire. But, what if you have many trees to repot? Or if you want to do better for your trees than you have done in the past? Grab a cup of coffee and let's talk!

My philosophy in bonsai and life is, "Always strive to do better." So, at repotting time, this means find a better pot, use better quality soil, learn to root prune better, begin to tie in your tree better, find a better front that shows off the tree more appropriately, and do a better job of aftercare following repotting (ignore this last one at your tree's peril).

Make sure you have good pots well ahead of time. Make sure they are appropriately sized for your tree. I error on the larger size rather than using a pot too small which can be hard on the health of a tree. There is less room for error. Buying pots can be tricky regarding size. If the tree is already in a pot, you

can be precise in your measurements. Size up, down from what you have. Make sure you are measuring pots the same as a vendor does. Inside dimension or outside dimension. A 16" inside oval length is likely 17" outside dimension. Also, depth of your pot is critical. Shallow pots usually show off the tree better, but you have less room for watering errors and they require harsher root pruning. Remember to allow for a drainage layer of soil. A slightly larger pot also keeps the roots cooler in brutal hot weather and brilliant sun. But picking a pot that is too deep for your tree can lead to constantly wet roots, which can kill your tree, too. It just takes longer.

Make sure you have the right tools. Root scissors, chopsticks, good pliers, wire (1.5mm and 2.0mm). There are other helpful tools to own if you have a lot of trees and do a good deal of potting. If you make your own soil, owning a soil sifter with changeable screens is highly desirable. You don't have to spend a fortune on a sifter set. They will help you take out



dust and fines. I take dust out of all soils and I take fines out of conifer soils. I leave fines in deciduous soil, as those trees require more moisture holding ability in the soil. With sifting ability, you can remove

the biggest particulates to use for drainage. Mainly, sifting is used to zero in on precisely the perfect size particulate. Say you are making a Boon mix of equal parts lava, akadama, pumice. You can sift all three ingredients separately and pull out everything less than 1/8" and everything over 3/8". What you have left are particulates of very uniform size, all between 1/8 to 3/8 inches. You now can mix the ratios any way you wish. A standard Boon mix has equal parts or about 33% of each ingredient. Or, if you are potting pines and junipers, you can make the soil "drier" so it holds less water, by raising the dry pumice to 50% and using akadama and lava at 25% each. If you want a wetter soil that holds more water, then bump the akadama up to 40 or 50%. With soil sifting ability, you will have endless ability to make just the right blend of soil for each tree. I like this flexibility. I don't like the dust during sifting, so wear a mask. You may want to protect your eyes, too. I try to have all my ingredients sifted ahead of time. It is easy and quick to make whatever blend you want as you actually pot your tree.

So, you have your tools ready, and your soil ready. Take your pots that you know you will use and wash them well if they are dirty. Clean or replace the drainage screens. You might even prep the tie in wires for those trees. Every year I make the mistake once of adding soil to my pot, having forgotten to add the tie in wires first. Have your wires already in place and you can avoid this little embarrassment. By the way, wire tie in patterns are a good thing to learn. We have done articles on tie in procedures with photos in the past. Tie in patterns depend on the number of holes in your pot and how well developed your root system is. If you need help with this, ask a seasoned veteran of repotting or check the internet.

Next subject is root pruning. I really didn't understand the value of good root pruning early in my bonsai career. I just cut off the longest roots and crammed what was left into the pot. First, I did not know how to grow good root systems, so I had lots of long scraggly roots. What you want are not long roots, but compact, fine roots. You get these by using good soil (akadama, lava, pumice work great or you can drop the lava and just use pumice and lava. Organic based soil is much cheaper and works fairly well for younger trees.

When it comes time to repot a deciduous tree, remove all the soil and wash the roots with a strong water spray.

Now you can see the roots you will prune. Trim off any extra long roots that would extend beyond the pot edge. Turn the tree upside down and examine the root area immediately under the trunk. You want to clean this area of all large roots. You may need a root cutter to do this. Big roots in this area often are the ones that won't let your tree sit down low enough in the pot. As you look at the remaining roots focus on keeping fine roots and removing coarse, larger roots. Try to keep roots so your root ball is full on all sides. A general rule is to not prune away more than 1/3 of the root system. Take out roots going straight down or straight up. These will just cause problems. The basic shape of your root system should look like a disc – roots all coming out of the tree at the same level, roots full 360 degrees without empty sections, lots of fine roots. Now you can proceed to add soil and tie your tree into the pot.

For pines, junipers, etc., do not remove all the old soil. Do not clean the tree to bare roots like deciduous trees. Only remove half of the soil for pines, leaving half which will have mycorrhiza fungus which helps roots function better.

We will have an article next time with more tips on potting trees. If you want to see some photos of repotting, look at the following website – Bonsai4me. It is not perfect in its information, but it gives you some information and photos which might help you.

http://www.bonsai4me.com/Basics/Basics_Repotting2.html

Ezo Spruce Forest Styling

Michael Hagedorn

Ezo Spruce as it came into the yard a month ago, an unruly but happy mop. In a rather small pot. They can do rather well in small pots, although this spring we'll upsize this one a bit. Ezo also do well on slabs, if one can insure good hydration. They don't appreciate getting as dry as a pine.

The Ezo itself has been a bonsai a long time, I'm not clear on the provenance of the tree beyond that it's about 35 years old, sporting some older bark. It could have been imported. This is of the 'red' type, which has smaller foliage and a red bud.

This spruce was repotted recently, and the tree has

Ezo Spruce Forest Styling - continued

regained vigor after having been weak. Several trunks appear to have died, and were cut away. A few young trees could be reintroduced, although the age of this



tree would be hard to replicate, and Ezo is hard to find to begin with. Something to consider, however...the 'main' group in this forest (the left side) is about the same size as the 'secondary' group (the right side.)



The spruce after the thinning out process of choosing branches.

A Wired Ezo Spruce, from the front. 35" / 89 cm high. I'm experimenting with leaving lower branches on taller trees. Normally thinner bonsai have lower branches removed, but in studying how single trees and those on the edges of forests grow, I see that many conifers tend to retain the lowest branches, sometimes they are even brushing the ground on old trees. That makes me rethink how we usually style tall trees. Oddly enough, some trees feel taller this way. At present, many of these branches are on the long side. With spruce we have to wait for budding to occur. On a strong, wired tree, interior buds will come swiftly, and then we can cut off the longer shoots and redevelop the branches to be shorter. With time, in about 4 years, that should be this tree's future. Shorter branches will make more sense with the small diameter of the trunks.

As the last photo will attest, this tree was styled during quite cold weather...the windows in the studio had very interesting fractal ice patterns last week.

Winter is a good time to work on Ezo. Or any spruce for that matter. As long as the branch isn't frozen you can bend it...

There are a couple of front possibilities for this fella---a very good one is the pot front, which is what we chose here. Enjoy-

The Direction of Iowa Bonsai Clubs

John Denny

Bonsai clubs have members with many different needs and ideas of what they think the club should be doing. In smaller clubs, it is a challenge to please everyone. Often clubs change direction, perhaps last year focused on new members. This year the experienced members may want more topics and workshops for them. The club changes direction. I asked a leader from both EIBA and IBA to comment on what new ideas, new direction, and new areas of focus they see for their clubs this year. I think you will see some great things coming up!

EIBA

President Bill Englert says, "Over the last couple of years we have grown our club nicely adding several new members. Many of the new members were people that visited our booth, saw us at Brucemore Art and Garden Show, or saw our display at Noelridge Greenhouse. My focus this year for EIBA is as follows:

1. Continue to grow the club and educate the public as well as our members about the art of bonsai. Having a little larger club allows us to do more activities.
2. Provide hands on experiences for the members during our club meetings and workshops. This helps both the new and long-time members.
3. Increase the involvement of members during our club meetings using the "Tree of the Month: strategy. This will encourage members to get up and talk about their

tree, share information with the group, or ask for help and suggestions if needed.

4. Always be a source of information for the members, be it new or experienced members. Having several new members join the past two years makes this more important than ever.

5. Continue to share informational books and manuals on the care and design of Bonsai through our club library, member's private educational materials, or good website resources.

Iowa Bonsai Association

Scott Allen answered a few questions on the topic.

Do you have a new focus area for your club this year?

You bet. Growing membership and actually working on trees at club meeting is what we're focusing on. We're also partnering with the Greater Des Moines Botanical Gardens on a series of beginner type Bonsai Classes. Ron H did a Bonsai 101 Class for the GDBG on Jan 21 and had over 55 attend.

What new ideas are you trying?

We've changed our monthly meetings from the 3rd Tuesday to the 3rd Saturday and increased meeting times from 2 hours to 4 hours. By doing this we hope more people will come to meetings and we'll have enough time to actually get something done on our trees. Our first Saturday meeting was Jan 21 and we had more people working on trees than we've ever had in the 8 years I've been a member. In addition to having a longer meeting being there on Saturday puts us in front of the public and thus give the club exposure. We got at least two new members at our first Saturday meeting and I truly believe this move will be the saving grace of the IBA.

We're also implementing a formal display series where someone from the club will bring a tree and formally display it as if it were in a show. Helene and I discussed this after reading an article that Boon wrote about doing this in their club. It encourages people to show trees while also sparking discussions on display.

Photos From Kokufu 2017



Chojubai Japanese Flowering Quince. Bill Valvanis photo



Hackberry. Photo by Valvanis.

Timely Tips

The days are lengthening. Spring is drawing a bit closer. Optimism is growing. Winter has been a good time to read about bonsai – either books or browsing great web sites. I am convinced learning saves bonsai lives, so keep learning! Normally, our bonsai trees need a dormant period. A dormant winter period is usually defined as 40 days below 40 degrees. That does not have to be continuous. Our temperatures this winter and especially lately have been unseasonably warm. Much warmer than usual. How is this impacting our trees and do we need to do anything different than usual?

First, if you are storing in an attached garage, your trees are seeing temps above 40 on a regular basis this winter. I have heard of a few members with insect or disease activity. So, get out there and examine your trees. Look for insect activity. Check your junipers for spider mites, especially. Look for fungus, mold, etc. as well. If you find problems, spray using an appropriate compound and make sure you are safe doing so.

For those who store trees outside, you likely won't have to deal with insect and disease as your trees have stayed colder. Do check for dry soil, though and water if you the soil needs it.

Members are telling me they are seeing signs of early bud push due to the warmth in garages. This is a real issue. If your deciduous trees push too early, they will be very susceptible to die off if the foliage freezes due to freezing temps later in the year. Also, your new shoots will be growing in low or no light conditions and your internode length will be much too long for good bonsai.

So, what can we do in this situation? If you are home, on warmer days you can open the garage door or service door to let cooler air inside. If you have a window, you might be able to crack it to drop the garage temp a bit. Some folks will crack their garage door up a couple of inches. Since hot air rises, the warmest temps will be high in the garage. Add a small fan to help move the air gently, thus mixing the warmer air with the cooler air. You can move trees stored on high shelves to lower shelves or to the floor where life is cooler. All of these little tricks can help. Make sure to have a couple of thermometers in the garage to help you monitor the temps. The whole idea is to slow down the bud pushing process.

This time of year, make sure your trees are watered properly. First, determine if your tree's soil is too wet, too dry, or just right. You can use your fingers to determine soil wetness. Or pick up your tree and feel its weight. This works well for many of my medium and larger size trees. I have a medium to large Ficus. I picked it up the other day and was really surprised how heavy it was. The soil was full of water and I obviously did not need to water it for a while.