

# Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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

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

February 2018

Volume 55, Issue 2



## IBA February Activities

**February 21, 9:00 AM, 9:00 AM, Open Study:**  
*Bring a Tree*

**Group and Presentation at 11:30 AM, Topics:**  
*Making a bonsai soil mix, group activity.*

**IBA Meetings at The Greater, Des Moines Botanical Garden. 909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

## EIBA February Activities

**February 8, 6:30 PM, EIBA Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road**  
**Topic:** *February Mtg agenda, club soil distribution preparation.*

**February 15, 7:00 PM, EIBA Club Meeting of 2018, Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd.**  
**Topic:** *Dues, Soil Handout, Review 2018 Schedule, "Taking Trees Out of Hibernation"*

**March 3, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM, Winter Garden Fair. Kirkwood CC.** *Sign up for various classes and visit our EIBA bonsai tables.*

---

## Corporate Sponsor

**DaSu Bonsai Studios**

[www.bonsaitrees.com/](http://www.bonsaitrees.com/)



## Inside This Issue

IBA Activites	1
EIBA Activites	1
Gateway to Bonsai - 2018	1-2
Spring is Just Around the Corner!	2-3
Sizing a Bonsai Pot	3-5
Reader Comments	5

## Gateway to Bonsai—2018



April 19-22, 2018

Presented by American Bonsai Society and Bonsai Society of Greater St. Louis

Gateway Convention Center  
Collinsville, IL ( 10 minutes east of St Louis)

Easy access from St Louis airport to the Convention Center with ample parking

For more information and on-line registration, go to

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

3 GREAT Headliners!! Marc Noelanders, Bjorn Bjorholm, and Matt Reel

20 Workshops, 17 Seminars, 3 Critiques, and Vendors galore

Ikebana Display and Workshop  
Some workshops are filled, so register quickly.

Juried bonsai exhibit with awards and prize money, \$1000.00 for Best in Show, 2nd Place -\$500, 3rd Place, \$250, Best Conifer-\$250, Best Shohin Display-\$250, Best Tropical-\$250, Best Broadleaf-\$250, Best Native Bonsai & ABS Medallion-\$250, Best Ikebana-\$100

Call for Entries—entry forms and information sheet:

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

Go to [www.absbonsai.org](http://www.absbonsai.org). Go to “events”, click on the gateway picture and a larger picture with clickable links will appear. Click on “bonsai exhibitor entry form”.

Remember one form per tree display (shohin being ONE display). Include a tree picture in jpeg format with your entry. Can be a separate file keyed to your entry form.

Email Your Entry to:

[gatetobonsai2018@aol.com](mailto:gatetobonsai2018@aol.com)

Joshua Roth New Talent Contest—The Joshua Roth-American Bonsai Society New Talent Contest is intended to recognize and promote new bonsai talent in North America.

The first stage of the competition requires each entrant to submit photographs of three trees they have personally designed and styled. Those entrants selected will then be eligible to compete in the second stage, which consists of the production of a bonsai from provided raw material,

on Friday, April 20, 2018 during the ABS/BSGSL “Gateway to Bonsai”

---

## Spring is Just Around the Corner!

*John Denny*

It has been cold and very snowy lately. But, have heart bonsai enthusiasts. Repotting season for many begins in the first half of March if your trees are kept in a garage. Those whose trees are kept outdoors must wait a few weeks longer.

Repotting a bonsai tree is maybe the single most important bonsai technique you can perform on your bonsai tree. Fresh soil and good root pruning can rejuvenate your tree. It will set your tree up for the



*A gorgeous black pine with massive trunk and aged bark  
Note the many new buds acting as accents of spring.  
Omiya Art Museum.*

next two to four years. Use good soil, the best you can find or afford. Do a good job root pruning. In general remove about a third of the roots. You want to keep the

*Spring - continued*

fine roots. Prune away the big heavy roots. If you have long stringy root systems, then you likely need better bonsai soil.

When repotting, make sure you tie your tree in so it is very solid in the pot. It should not wiggle. If it does, then the wind will move the tree and tear up the tender new roots just as they are trying to be established.



*A triple-trunked Trident maple with a single fused nebari, full of fresh yellow-green spring leaves. This tree resides at the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum*

Water your tree in very well. Some soil components like Turface or bark can have a hard time absorbing water if they are dry. Water your tree for two or three minutes, let sit, water again. For freshly repotted trees, especially deciduous, I like to shred sphagnum moss over a rough, open soil screen and add that to the top surface. Water it lightly, so it will settle and form a nice layer that stays put.

Do you know which trees you plan to repot? Do you have to order any new pots? Better hurry. Do you have soil? Tie in wire of the proper size (usually 1.5 or

2.0mm)? You may want some sphagnum moss that you can shred to cover your newly potted trees. How about root pruning scissors or other tools for the repotting season?

Generally, we repot deciduous trees first. Ideally, the right time is when the root tips just begin to push. The tips will show white. You can wait a bit later in the month to repot your other species.

Remember, once you have repotted a tree, keep it protected for a few weeks. Deciduous trees can stay indoors for a time. They may begin to push new leaves, which means they need light. If you can get them outside for some sun that will help them, but the new shoots will be very tender and can't handle the frosts of early spring. That means you will have to bring them back inside on cold nights below freezing.

Pines can go outside much earlier than deciduous if you have not repotted them. They can handle some colder nights, though not too far below freezing. If you have repotted a pine, keep it protected for a couple weeks until the roots have had a chance to get going. Remember with pines you do not want to remove all the soil during repotting. Leave 40 to 50% of the soil in place. Pines benefit from a beneficial fungus, mycorrhiza, which grows on the roots. Leaving half the soil, means half of the mycorrhiza remains to help the tree.

Junipers can be repotted after the deciduous trees are finished being repotted. Do not fertilize any newly repotted tree for three weeks. Keep them from any strong spring winds. After cutting roots on repotted trees, the tree will have limitations getting water from the soil to the foliage. Heavy spring winds can both dry the soil rapidly and take too much moisture from the foliage. They can do this faster than the new roots can keep up. So, protect them from wind. Also, introduce your trees to the sun gradually the first week. Sunburn can happen otherwise.

Spring is a great time of year to work with your trees. It is exciting to watch them come to life. Do all you can to help them during this rather vulnerable time in early spring.

---

## 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 too 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, break the rules!" I will leave the choice to you!

---

## Reader Comments

Here are a two excellent suggestions from reader Helene Magruder of Indianola. Thanks, Helene!

"I have a tip for you. It was in the National Bonsai Foundation newsletter. Use a battery powered toothbrush to clean deadwood. They are pretty cheap and do a great job. I have one of those little power washers but I don't like using it indoors as it spatters everywhere. I think the toothbrush does a better job and not so messy. I tried it on a really green stained tree and it worked like a charm.

The ABS convention is in St Louis (actually Collinsville, IL) in April. There won't be a convention any closer than that so it is a great opportunity. Headliners are Bjorn Bjorholm, Mark Noelander, Matt Reel and Todd Schlafer. Besides a juried show, there are workshops and great shopping, ABS offers seminars on a wide variety of subjects which are free. Registrants can also observe workshops. For information go to:

[absbonsai.org](http://absbonsai.org).