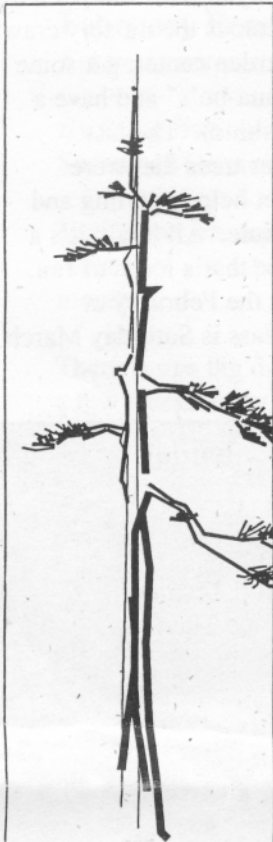


March 2005

Bonsai News



*Milwaukee
Bonsai Society*

*P.O. Box 198
Brookfield, Wisconsin
53208-0198*

*Information Line
414-299-9229*

MARCH MEETING - SOILS AND WATER

Quality of soils and water will be the primary topic of our March Meeting. Both of these are a very important component of our ability to grow bonsai. Jack Douthitt will lead a discussion of on potting soils and water on our bonsai at the March Meeting. Either of these can have a large positive or negative effect on our bonsai. What items are necessary in a soil mix? Should you mix your own soil or purchase premixed soils? What soil components do you need if you want to mix your own soil? What do you need to know if you buy premixed?

Another item that we sometimes overlook is the quality of our water. The pH of the water we use for watering our bonsai has a huge influence on them. What is it and how can it help, or hinder, our bonsai growing efforts? The second item about water quality that is important is TDS. (Total Dissolved Solids) What is it and what effect does it have on our bonsai? Jack will bring his pH and TDS tester to the meeting. If you want to bring a sample of your water Jack can test it for both pH and TDS. He will also (time permitting) do some sample testing of soils for both pH and TDS.

Possible Private Workshop

Walter Pall, from Germany, will be in the area during the middle of May. Walter is an excellent artist and teacher. Unfortunately, we cannot work him into the club schedule of events. However, if enough people (six or eight) want to have a private workshop with him we'll see if it can be set up. Please let Jack Douthitt (414/228-9628) know if you are interested in doing a full day workshop with Walter. The number of people in the workshop will determine the cost.

THIS IS YOUR LAST

ISSUE... if you haven't renewed for 2005. Please check your address label. If it says 2005, you have renewed. If not, this is your last issue. Please do take the time now to send in your renewal (see old newsletters) or renew at the March meeting. Thanks.

MBS Meetings and Information Line:

The Milwaukee Bonsai Society meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. at Grace Lutheran Church, 3030 W. Oklahoma Avenue. Call the MBS Voice Mail/Message System at (414) 299-9229 to learn about upcoming events and meeting times. To contact the club via email: mbs@asapnet.net Look for us on the web at: <http://www.milwaukeebonsai.org>

KRIS' KORNER

Greetings! Didn't that warm spell give you the bonsai fever? Did you get the pruners out for a little bit of trimming? Spring will be here soon (we're hoping), so lay out your plan as to what to do when. I've already made my list of trees that need repotting... about 12!! So, until then, I'm reading as much as I can.

Thanks again to Donna Krischan for her presentation on photography. It's been a long time since I've had a SLR. I've opted for a point and shoot 35 mm and a digital... much easier to use when travelling. I still have come out with some lovely shots of my favorite trees.

Again, a big THANK YOU to Jean Sher and Allen Koszarek for the many hours spent on their power point presentation "coming out of winter". Super photos and soothing music. Quite an atmosphere was created.

We're looking forward to an interesting meeting on soils, soil testing, etc, this next meeting (March 1). Jack Douthitt has some new soil testing gizmo he's going to be demonstrating. I can't wait.

We have the new MBS aprons ready for your purchase in March. \$20 is a great deal! You'll need an apron for our April Group slash, right?

Hope you all are anticipating all the fun we're having this year!
Until March.

Kris

Novice Class 2005

This is a tremendous opportunity for those folks fairly new (under 3 years) to bonsai. It's a 4-Saturday course plus a nursery crawl. Saturdays 1 and 2 are classroom style lead by members of our club. You will receive a 99-page manual that is packed with information. Saturday 3

will be a chance for you to style, wire and pot a tree (usually a tropical). Then comes the nursery crawl. We congregate at a local garden center, get some help in finding "bonsai wanna-be's" and have a great time doing it (rain or shine). The last Saturday, bring some of your trees that were purchased at the crawl to get help in styling and wiring. No potting at that time. All in all, it's a pretty comprehensive course that's loads of fun. And all for \$70. Sign-up at the February or March meeting. Our first class is Saturday March 19.

2005 Club Events Calendar

March

Tuesday 3 - Club Meeting
Repotting Bonsai, Soil Testing
Saturday 19 - First Novice Class

April

Saturday 2 - Novice Class #2
Tuesday 5 - Group Slash
Saturday 16-17 - Master's Class
Saturday 23 - Novice Class #3
Saturday 30 - Black pine workshop

May

Tuesday 3 - Black Pine Demo - Steve Pilacik
Saturday 7 - Novice Class Nursery Crawl
Saturday 14 - Novice Class #4
Fri 20 - Sun 22 - Chicago Show

June

Tuesday 7 - Club Show, Styles, photography
Friday 17 - Sunday 19 - Asian Moon Festival
Sat 25 - Sun 26 - Master's Class

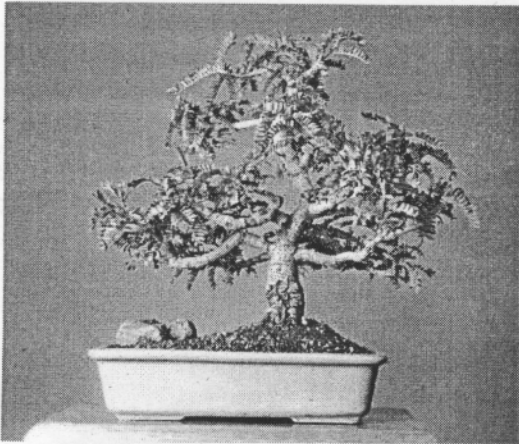
Programs and dates for other activities have yet to be finalized - STAY TUNED!

• *Schotia brachypetala* – the Drunken Parrot Tree

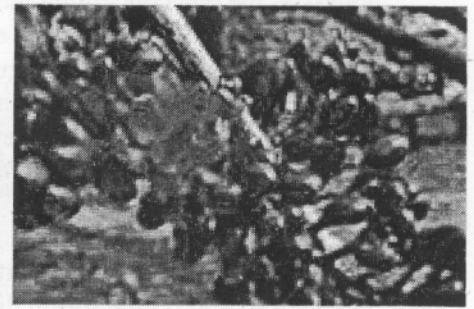
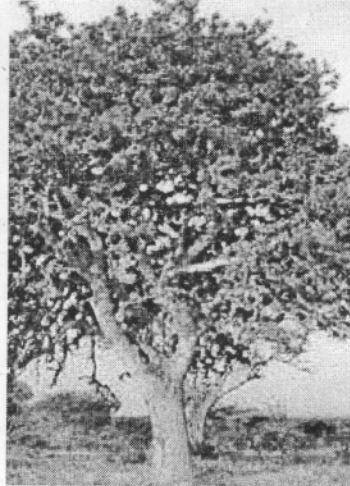
Family: Fabaceae

Common Names: Parrot tree, Weeping Boer-Bean, Tree Fuchsia

Schotia brachypetala is a sub-tropical 10-20 m tree from the dry grassland and scrub forest environments in South Africa and Zimbabwe. It has a broad spreading form, and is attracts a noisy mob of birds and wildlife due to its nectar-rich flowers and edible seed pods. It is said that parrots often over-indulge in the sweet nectar, and can actually pass out on the ground beneath the tree.



Schotia afra bonsai – by Bryan Robinson



Flowers – (Bright red!)

<-*Schotia brachypetala* in natural setting

The flowers are deep scarlet-red, and form on the old wood of the trunk throughout the year. They are followed by brown seed pods that can be ground up and used as a coffee substitute. One of the common names for this tree, the weeping boer-bean, refers to the nectar that drips from the flowers and causes the tree to “weep”.

The leaves of *Schotia brachypetala* are compound, with four to six small leaflets, each about 1 inch long. The closely related *Schotia afra* has similar leaves and growth habit (and is pictured above because it is a better bonsai than mine). The new leaves are bronze colored, changing to dark green as they mature. One of the most interesting features of this tree is the bark, which is rough and grayish brown. On younger wood, the bark seems to form segments, joined to each other with a slight twisting. And, in what is surely great news to most bonsai hobbyists, extracts from the bark can be used to treat hangovers.

For bonsai training, I believe that this tree is rather promising. Its naturally spreading and gnarled habit makes it easy to train in informal bonsai styles. The leaves are not overly large, and the tree grows at a reasonable rate (~1 inch trunk after 5 years from seed). While the tree does not form fine branches, the compound leaves create the illusion of being simple leaves on fine twigs. The development of the root base is also promising, with good lateral roots. Although the tree has not yet flowered, it is due to flower after about 5 years from seed – so that means next summer. Believe me, if it flowers, I will show it off. The flowers will not be in scale for the bonsai, but look at the color!

The care of *Schotia brachypetala* is simple. Just keep it in full to partial sun in summer, keep it in moist and well-draining soil, and take it indoors when night time temperatures reach freezing (late Oct. for me). The tree seems to stop its growth in winter, and requires considerably less water. It is not picky about its soil – just as long as there is good drainage. Fertilize sparingly with balanced fertilizer, since the roots of plants in the legume (Fabaceae)-family can make their own nitrogen. Repotting can be done in early summer. I haven't yet tried to cut back the roots aggressively, but it easily can withstand removal of about a third of the root mass.

There has not been much need for trimming the branches of my bonsai. There is a tendency for several new shoots to form all at once in the same area of the trunk. If this occurs, the least desirable shoots should be removed immediately, saving at least two. Later, when the best-positioned shoot is growing strongly, you can remove any “insurance” shoots. The side branches grow just as strongly as the leader, so the tree seems most suitable for an oak tree style. The side branches should be wired in fall or winter to create sinuous curves. The branches keep the wired shape well, and the wires should be removed by mid-spring. New branches do not form readily in response to pruning. It is best to cut back the branches only after small secondary shoots have formed.

Schotia brachypetala is a good species for indoor growing, and will definitely add interest and variety to any collection. And if you can get it to flower, it will be a show-stopper! It is propagated easily from seed, which is readily available thru internet sources. Young plants are also available occasionally from Trans-Pacific Nursery (www.worldplants.com).

Let's Talk Soil

By Thomas J. (From Dallas Bonsai Garden - www.dallasbonsai.com, submitted by Kris Ziemann)

One of the biggest discussions in the world of bonsai, is the one concerning the soil mix that we use to grow our trees in. Seems everyone has their own special mix, and the next guy's just isn't good enough. This could be awful confusing to the beginner who is wanting to do everything right so as not to be responsible for too many dead trees if he can help it.

So many articles have been written for bonsai publications and online forum discussions, that there really isn't anything more I could add to make a difference. I know what works for my trees and I won't try and convince anyone that mine is the mix that everyone should be using. Rather than that, I would like to just say a few words about the basics of soil composition for the beginners out there.

One thing most bonsai growers will agree on, is that whatever type of mix you use, it needs to be well draining. And of course the reason for this is to eliminate the possibility of root rot. For this reason you should be using a soil mixture which most people would call coarse or gritty. Some of the ingredients for this type of soil mix might consist of sand, which will need to be a specific size and not your playbox type. Here's a picture of the correct type sand to use, which should be grit#00 or #0. This picture shows #00 on the left and #1 on the right, which would be too small a grit to use because it will probably compact on you, and that's not what you want to have happen.

Crushed lava is another component that people like to use and here is a picture of it.



Calcined clay, pumice, a patented item known as Turface, or another highly acclaimed product from Japan known as Akadama, are all used by bonsai enthusiasts.



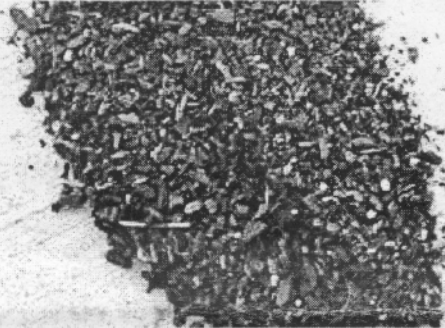
Now which of these materials is used together is where a lot of the controversy begins. I've talked to a few highly respected bonsai artists, and most of them like to use the Akadama-pumice mix with nothing more added except maybe a little crushed lava thrown in. When I say nothing more added, I mean no organics added to the mixture. Organics in this case is referred to as landscapers mix, which usually consists of pine bark mulch with a bit of sphagnum moss and maybe a touch of perlite. Some people don't like to spend the extra money on Akadama since it is an imported item, and for this reason will not use this type of mix. Others say they can see no difference from that and the standard clay-sand-organic mix.

The landscapers mix should be sifted to get out both the very fine parts which has a consistency of powder almost, and the very large pieces which are of no use in the mix. Here is a picture of the large

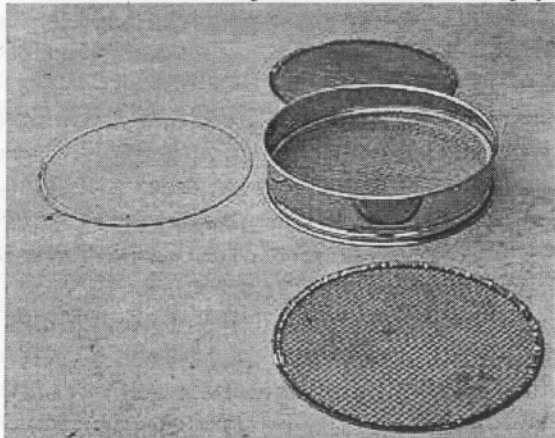
pieces sifted out,



And a picture of the sifted material ready to be mixed in with the other components of choice.



A good set of sifting screens should be purchased which will make the job a lot easier and enjoyable.



The health of your trees, excluding insect infestation, will really come down to the type of soil mix you have and whether or not your trees are taking up sufficient water, or whether they are drowning in water. The soil mix should also be helpful when you fertilize. There is a purpose for using these specific ingredients, and this link will point you to an article that should really be helpful to you in explaining this.

<http://www.evergreengardenworks.com/soils.htm>

(Link Used with the kind permission of Brent from evergreengardenworks.com)

Well after reading all that, I would just like to sum this article up by saying this: since your bonsai soil mix will not really be a soil but will actually be soil-less, it is imperative that you fertilize, and that you do it often.

Fertilization is another aspect of bonsai where many people will have differing opinions on which fertilizer to use and which is best. Again, I won't give my opinion on this, only a few facts to help you decide.

Many people, myself included, like to use mainly organic fertilizers. Organic fertilizers are slow release and allow the plant somewhat of a continual feeding this way. Just like the soil ingredients that have a specific purpose, so do the different types of organic fertilizers. For instance bone meal would be to help the root system. Fish emulsion is a good source of nitrogen. The only thing wrong with using these components by themselves, is that they have no trace minerals to dispense to the plant. All plants need trace minerals for optimum health, kind of like taking a multi vitamin pill.

One mineral that a good healthy plant will need and won't be found in your basic bonsai soil mix is Magnesium. This mineral's function in plants is in the manufacture of chlorophyll. I'm sure everyone knows the necessity of chlorophyll in the life of a plant. For this reason it is a good idea to give your trees a shot of chemical fertilizer every once in a while if you're doing mainly organic fertilizing, because chemical fertilizers come with these trace minerals.

Now that's not to say that there aren't any organic fertilizers out there with these trace minerals added also. A good brand that many bonsai enthusiasts use is a product called Bio-Gold which is a fertilizer made in Japan. This is a product which can be ordered right here at Dallas Bonsai Gardens and should meet all of the needs any bonsai tree should need.

Note: Dallas Bonsai Gardens will soon be listing all the elements in English on a new fertilizer product

from Japan. As most fertilizers from Japan are in Japanese, including the Bio Gold, this new product will be translated in English so that you will know exactly what you are getting.

If your working with any type of junipers in your collection, the trace minerals are a must. As I noted in my article on "Having Fun With The Juniper Procumbens", if your starting to get yellow foliage even though your tree is in full sun, it's probably because it's lacking the needed trace minerals. Here is a picture of the kind of rich and green foliage you should be getting if you have the right kind of soil mix and are applying fertilizer often.

You may decide to use only chemical fertilizers on your trees, and that's ok too. Most chemical fertilizers come with an even proportion of Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium to meet the plants basic requirements, plus added minerals.

Well I hope you'll take some time and really read the article I've linked for you because repotting time is right around the corner. Many beginners dread repotting time when actually it should be something you look forward to. What better way of seeing what your many months of laboring by watering and fertilizing has accomplished, than by getting right in there and seeing for yourself. For those of you who feel unsure about your soil mix, or are hesitant to do your first repotting, maybe you could ask a fellow club member for help. All in all though, repotting is a necessary task in bonsai and your trees will love it also. Good luck with your soil mixes, and above all, have fun doing Bonsai.

Book Review

By Joe Nemeč

Ficus – The Exotic Bonsai by Jerry Meislik

This book by an internationally known bonsai master gives us comprehensive information on how to successfully grow bonsai ficus.

From fertilization to forest plantings, propagation to pests, the knowledge shared in this book is indispensable to those of us who grow and enjoy ficus.

The information is presented in a readable, non-technical, and beautifully illustrated text.

This book is available in our library to all members. (A sample of Jerry's wisdom is below)

Ten Great Bonsai Myths

By Jerry Meislik

(Submitted by Joe Nemeč - used with permission)

Think you've heard them all?

- 1) Never water a bonsai during the heat of a summer day, as droplets of water on a leaf act as magnifying lenses and hot sun will burn the leaf.
- 2) Wire left on a branch during the heat of summer will cause that branch to burn and die. Wire left on during the cold of winter will allow that branch to get too cold and it will freeze and die.
- 3) Cutting a branch during the season when the sap is flowing will cause the branch to bleed excessively and die. Not infrequently the tree itself may weaken and die.
- 4) When cutting a branch or a root, be sure to cut at a specific angle so that the branch or root will heal and not rot.
- 5) When styling a tree as a bonsai, you must remove the lower branches to about one third the height of the bonsai.
- 6) The best branch arrangement calls for the branches to originate from the outside of the trunk curves.
- 7) Bonsai soil mixtures are very critical, and specific formulas should be followed exactly to ensure satisfactory results.
- 8) If you read all the best bonsai books and follow all the bonsai rules offered, you will have a masterpiece bonsai.
- 9) Never place dry organic bonsai fertilizer on the soil of a bonsai as it will burn the roots of your tree and kill it.
- 10) Never cross wires on your bonsai.

(Editor's note: Jerry has expanded the discussion of these myths in an article on his excellent website, www.Bonsaihunk.com.)

February Bonsai Tips: *Editor's note: These February notes apply well to our March.*

By Doug Hawley (reprinted from the Bonsai Society of Greater Cincinnati newsletter)

Unlike any previous month of the year, the bonsai chores are almost exactly the same as the previous month!

There is one big difference, however; March is only a few weeks away, and is probably the busiest bonsai month of the year. This means prepare, prepare, prepare!! Do you have your soil, screens, wire, the right sized pots, optional repotting nutrients (Superthrive, mycorrhizae, and a touch of 0-10-10), and the other things you need for repotting season?

Look at your trees now and come up with ideas of how you might want to restyle them at the time of repotting so you don't lose much time later. Remember, if you have ten or fifteen deciduous trees that start to open their buds all at the same time, you'll have only a few days to come up with an inspiration for restyling (which might mean a new potting angle, wiring and major pruning), then root pruning and repotting all ten or fifteen. Since most of us have other things to do in life also (little things like employment, taking care of kids, eating, sleeping, etc.) it can be pretty overwhelming, and we often end up saying "what the h***, I'm just going to wait until next year."

Repotting time can be a very enjoyable and rewarding time if you are ready. It's the specific day of the year when a tree can most easily move up another notch in quality, in fact, often be literally transformed.

There are a couple of chores in February itself.

This is a big month for pest control. It's the last opportunity to use true dormant oil to get rid of pine needle scale and overwintering aphids, spider mites, etc on your outdoor trees. If you reduce the strength of your dormant oil, you can mix in a little lime sulfur or certain other pesticides and

fungicides (be sure this is OK'd on the label and follow instructions carefully).

This is also approaching the time when indoor pests go wild. Spider mites especially like the warm dry windless environment of our homes, and can creep up on you.

Some experienced bonsai people believe this is the best time of year to tip prune eastern white pine, as it forces new buds. But don't do this to your other pines.

Continue to protect your trees from extreme temperatures. Don't let them dry out, but be sure you don't over water either. Outdoor trees in outdoor storage need water every couple of weeks at the most. Those in garages need water more often. Also, be on the lookout for any deciduous trees that put out buds early. This includes mostly those in warmer winter storage (garages, greenhouses), and those plants which are native to higher numerical (more southern) growing zones where Spring starts earlier. Tridents are among this last category. Remember, if the buds start to suddenly swell, you must repot them immediately if you intend to repot them this year. Needless to say, this is a problem, since we have difficulty in Cincinnati providing the outdoor light new buds need without killing them with a frost or carrying them in and out every day.

Finally, read your bonsai books, magazines and websites. The more you know, the more you'll enjoy.

Your #1 Milwaukee Bonsai Source!

THE CITY GARDENER



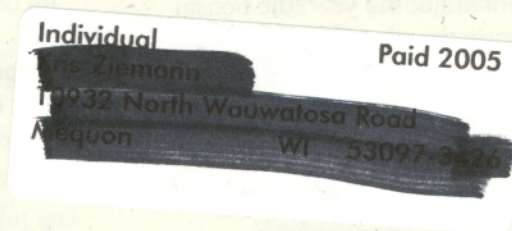
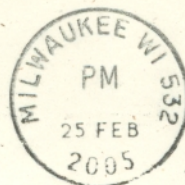
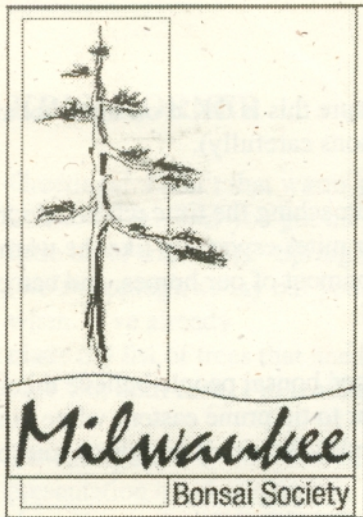
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RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED

Next Meeting of MBS
7PM, Tuesday, March 1
Grace Lutheran Church
3030 W. Oklahoma

MBS Board, 2005

Kris Ziemann – President
Scott Hurula – 1st Vice President
Darlene Shaginaw – 2nd Vice President
Karen Kleineider – Treasurer
Sharon Schmidt – Secretary
Dr. Erskine Tucker – Board Member
Joe Herbert – Board Member
Allen Koszarek – Board Member
Ron Fortmann – MABA Representative
Jack Douthitt – Past President

Other Club Functions:

Houston Sanders – Newsletter Editor
Yvonne Szatkowski - Distribution
Pam Woythal – Webmaster
Joe Nemecek - Librarian



*Sweeping snow
Off this lake
Winter wind*

Lama Surya Das

From Haiku Homepage
<http://home.clara.net/pka/haiku/haiku.htm>