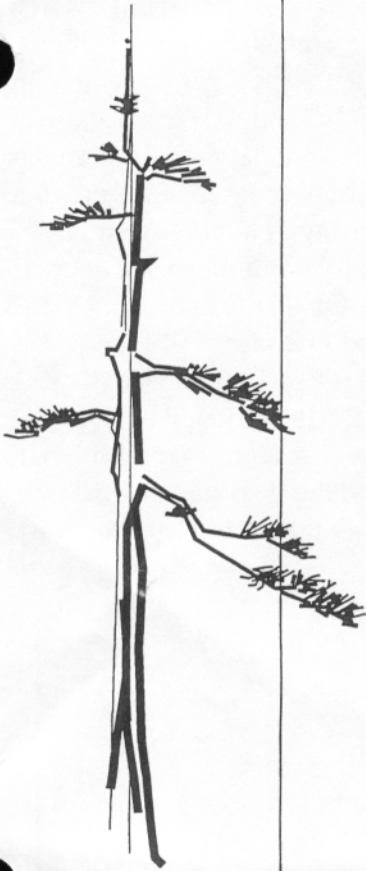


March 2006

# Bonsai News



*Milwaukee  
Bonsai Society*

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

*Information line  
414-299-9229*

## **MARCH MEETING – LIVE DEMO Repotting**

The root of bonsai is in the repotting. Keeping those roots happy is so important for a healthy tree. Yet this subject is almost completely skipped in bonsai workshops. Everyone can benefit from observing how others perform repotting. Jack Douthitt and Kris Ziemann will be repotting a number of trees and answering questions you may have about your own trees. We'll also have some tips on how to do bonsai "on the cheap". Bring along any tips you may have.

Here is a chance for you to observe in person how experienced growers perform repotting. A picture is worth a thousand words, and a demonstration is worth a thousand pictures.

## **Electronic Newsletter**

To help the club save mailing expenses, we would like to develop an electronic newsletter. Anyone interested in receiving the newsletter by e-mail, please notify your omnipotent newsletter editor ([bonsaidiot@tds.net](mailto:bonsaidiot@tds.net)) to be added to the distribution list. You will still receive the snail mail copy, unless you request otherwise. I know that we tried this once before, but this time the newsletter will be easy to receive as a .pdf file. The mailing expense limits the size of the newsletter, so an electronic version will allow some additional material to be included from other clubs.

*MABA Convention News--*

## **SAVE! SAVE! SAVE!**

MABA Convention Chairman, Ron Fortmann has extended the registration deadline for priority registration until the close of the MBS club meeting, Tuesday, March 7, 2006. For this meeting, only, we will continue to offer the priority full registration price of \$175 single, or \$300 double. Full registration includes admission to all demonstrations, exhibits, vendor areas, workshops (as a silent observer) and Saturday night banquet and Sunday morning breakfast.

After Tuesday, the price increases to \$225 single and \$400 double. So if you are pretty sure you are coming to the best bonsai event of 2006, right here in Milwaukee, bring your checks or credit card to the meeting.

## **THIS IS YOUR LAST**

**ISSUE...** if you haven't renewed for 2006. Please check your address label. If it says 2006, 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.

## Thoughts for March

At last it is March! After months of low maintenance, the sleeping bonsai are starting to wake up. In two or three weeks, I will be so busy with "urgent" repotting projects that I will miss the quiet of winter. The trees in the unheated greenhouse have to be watched closely, and unfortunately will start to open their buds long before the last frost. The best option is to watch carefully, and re-pot them as soon as buds start. The re-potted trees are watched carefully and protected if the temperature goes below about 25°. Pre-bonsai trees growing in the ground bud a bit later, and get root-pruned or potted in late March or early April. These are much easier – another reason to delay putting them into bonsai pots ☺. Although they don't go outside until May, the trees wintering indoors somehow know it is spring and put out a spurt of new buds and growth. Due to all the soft new growth, the trees may suddenly require watering twice as often, so they must be watched much more closely. I usually give them a shot of low nitrogen fertilizer this month to support this new growth.

Just like the trees, the bonsai club also starts to awaken in spring, with a flurry of activity. And hopefully a spurt of growth! This month we have an important demonstration of repotting techniques at our Club Meeting. In addition, there are novice classes starting up, and the "master's" classes begin for the new year. Just like your bonsai, the club activities need extra attention this month. Get involved, and it is amazing how much you learn!

Until Next Month.

Editor

## Novice Class 2006

By Kris Ziemann

It's time for NOVICE CLASS 2006! If you are brand new to bonsai, or even if you have been in for a few years but have never taken the Novice classes, this is for you!! A series of 4 classes (3/11, 4/8, 4/22, 5/13) + a nursery crawl (5/6) will give you terrific information about styles of trees, pots, tools, pruning, soils, fertilizing and much, much more. The first two sessions are classroom style lead by

members of our club. You will receive a 99-page manual that is packed with information. Class 3 will be a chance for you to style, wire and pot a tree (usually a tropical). Then comes the nursery crawl! We gather at a local garden center, get some help in finding "bonsai wanna-be's" and have a great time doing it (rain or shine). For the last session, bring a few 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. ALL OF THIS FOR ONLY \$75 for the 5 sessions! We will be meeting at the church Saturdays from 9:00 - 12:00. Space is limited, so call or email Darlene Shaginaw (414-324-0727) (dar-mkgal@wi.rr.com) to reserve your spot. Bring your check to the next meeting (March 7) or send it to Darlene. You're sure to enjoy this educational experience!

## 2006 Club Events Calendar

### March

Tuesday 7 - Club Meeting  
Repotting Demonstration  
Saturday 11 - First Novice Class  
Sat-Sun 18-19 - Master's classes

### April

Tuesday 4 - Club Meeting  
Group Slash  
Saturday 8 - Novice Class #2  
Saturday 22 - Novice Class #3  
Sat-Sun 29-30 - Master's Class

### May

Tuesday 2 - Club Meeting  
Member worknight- BYOTree  
Saturday 6 - Novice Class Nursery Crawl  
Saturday 13 - Novice Class #4

### June

Tuesday 6 - Club Show + Something special  
June 22-25 MABA CONVENTION

### July

July 4 - No Meeting

Plus more events to come!

## 2006 MABA CONVENTION IN MILWAUKEE

By Jack Douthitt

If you attended the American Bonsai Society Symposium that we hosted in 2002, you know how exciting such a convention can be. This summer you will have another awesome opportunity to learn from bonsai artists from around the world, and to purchase outstanding material and tools from sixteen distinctive vendors. Right here in Milwaukee! All in one short weekend! The Milwaukee Bonsai Society is the host for the 2006 Mid-America Bonsai Alliance (MABA) Convention at the Sheraton Four Points – Airport on June 22 – 25, 2006.

The Convention Committee cordially invites you to attend this spectacular event that will present Luis Vallejo from Spain working on collected Winged Elms from Oklahoma. Luis has been a consistent winner at the Ginkgo Awards exhibit in Belgium, and is well known throughout Europe as an outstanding bonsai teacher. His workshop trees are collected material that the Oklahoma crows have already styled into their version of a bonsai and now it is our turn! This is the only opportunity you will have to work with such an outstanding bonsai teacher on this high quality material.

Roy Nagatoshi, Jerry Meislik, and Guy Guidry will also be here for demonstrations and workshops. Dana Quattlebaum, Andy Smith and Jack Douthitt will present bonsai workshops and Jeff Moths will conduct a workshop on Kusamono. Also there will be presentations on bonsai judging and Suiseki. Plus there will also be an outstanding exhibit of bonsai from around the Midwest. It promises to be an outstanding bonsai event! Additional information and registration forms will be available at the February meeting. You have to register to participate! Workshops are limited to eight people per workshop, so register early to get the workshop that you want! Do not miss this exciting event!

### Convention Volunteers Still Needed

The MABA 2006 Convention is beginning to take shape. In order for the Convention to be successful, we need your help. The committee members have been working on the convention for over a year and soon it will be the time when other club members have to step forward to help make the convention a roaring success.

Some of the areas where help will be needed include: Registration, Raffle, and Security.

Prior to the convention help is needed to stuff the “goodie bags” that every attendee receives. Helping with the registration means that you get to meet a lot of people and to show them some of that famous Milwaukee hospitality. Helping with the raffle means helping to accept and catalog the items being donated. And moving items from the store room to the raffle area takes manpower. Selling raffle tickets is a big job, but it is also a lot of fun! Volunteers also provide security in the Exhibit, Workshop, and the Demonstration areas. It is a necessary but easy job.

You do not have to be registered to be a Volunteer. You do have to be either a full registrant or a day registrant to work in the demonstration and workshop areas. But there are many other areas where you do not have to be registered.

The Convention is being held at the Four Points Sheraton at the Airport. Parking is free. And every volunteer will receive free raffle tickets! You may win the item of your dreams just by volunteering! A sign up sheet will be available at our meetings.



# Something from the IBC: Care Tips for your Bonsai #3 - Spring

## by Jim Lewis

(provided courtesy of Springfield Bonsai Club Newsletter)

Ahh Spring! When There's Never Enough Time to Do It All

For growers of bonsai, spring is the busy season. For some of us the spring workload has been the impetus for reducing the size of our tree collection as we find that we simply cannot do all that must be done when buds start to swell.

It is easy to become impatient when the air starts to warm in the late winter, especially for those of us with large collections and so much to do. But here as in much else in bonsai, patience can be a tree-saving virtue. Pull a tree from its pot and snip at its roots too early, and an early spring freeze may set it back years -- or worse.

You can make your spring easier by parceling out the chores over the season.

### Early Spring

There are spring things to do, even while the snow still lies on the ground, or before you know that Jack Frost will make his last visit for the winter. Here's a short list:

1. Clean pots. We've all got pots laying round with bits of last year's soil in them, or with tartar-like crusts of calcium around the rim. The last dull and still-chill days of winter are ideal for making your pots look like new. Simple soap and water does for the old dirt. The calcium deposits are another matter.

How tightly these deposits adhere to the pot depends, I think, at least a little bit on the glaze used by the potter. Unglazed (or matt-finished) pots are the most difficult to really clean. The deposits seem to bond to the rougher surface. I have never successfully managed to remove all traces of calcium deposit from an unglazed pot. But steel wool and a good rub with mineral oil will help at least to cover it up.

Smooth, glazed pots usually can be freed of calcium with a caustic bathroom cleaner and a plastic-wire pot scrubber. Wear rubber gloves. You may need to give a final burnishing -- dry -- with steel wool, especially if the surface is the least bit textured.

While you're cleaning your pots, you also can be:

2. Planning which pots will go with which trees this year. (This decision, of course, will help you determine which pots to lavish the most elbow grease on.) You might want to refer to David DeGroot's "Basic Bonsai design" as you make your plans. His chapters on pot selection are the best coverage of the subject I have seen.

As part of this pre-spring activity, of course, you will be:

3. Deciding which of your trees may need repotting this year -- and for what reason, or reasons. Except for small shohin-size trees and young trees of many species, most bonsai only need repotting once every 2-5 years or so. You may make an exception for THE new pot for that azalea you repotted only last year, but for the overall health of your trees, exceptions should be infrequent. In general, deciduous trees and broad-leaved evergreen trees need repotting more often than needle-leaved conifers.

Here is where maintaining an accurate record of your tree collection is important. Once you have more than 4 or 5 trees, remembering when you last repotted any one of them can be tough. It becomes impossible once the collection exceeds 20 (or even 10) trees. So, whether you keep these records on a computer, or a spiral notebook, one of the bits of information you need to keep is the date the tree was last repotted. (You also should note growth habits of the roots to help you decide how often it might need to be repotted.)



## Mid Spring

But now the snow is gone, buds are swelling, the robins are back on the lawn, and it is spring and time to repot!

If it has been more than 2 years since the last repot on a tree, you will want to check on the condition of the tree's roots to confirm whether this will be a repotting year for that tree or not. The simplest test is to grasp the trunk and gently try to move the tree from side to side. If it moves easily, and if the tree is otherwise healthy, you don't need to repot this year; the roots have yet to fill up the pot. If it doesn't move, you should lift the tree from the pot and look at the roots. In most pots a firm grip on the trunk and pulling straight up will lift the root ball from the pot. On pots with convex sides, or lips around the rim, you may need to run a thin blade around the edge of the pot first. The tree and root ball should come free as a unit.

Examine the roots. If they twist around the bottom of the root ball, and even up the sides, you need to repot. If you see more root than soil, you need to repot. But if there is soil on the bottom and around the edges of the root ball, you can wait another year. Make a note in your bonsai record for that tree, then carefully replace the tree into its pot. You may need to add a little soil at the bottom and around the edges to replace soil that dropped away. Be certain that all air spaces have been eliminated!

I won't go into the mechanics of repotting here. They're covered (and illustrated) in some detail in almost all bonsai books. In particular, see Sunset's "Bonsai: An Illustrated Guide to an Ancient Art," the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's "Handbook on Dwarfed Potted Trees: The Bonsai of Japan," Harry Tomlinson's "The Complete Book of Bonsai" (available in pocket size as the "RD Home Handbooks: Bonsai"), Herb Gustafson's "Bonsai Workshop," or others for excellent descriptions of the process.

Note that while many of these books imply that you should trim a corresponding amount of top growth after you have trimmed the roots, in my opinion this really isn't necessary on a healthy tree that is acclimatized to life in a pot. On deciduous trees, I usually snip the very tips of the branches -- perhaps a millimeter or two, no more -- on the theory that this may promote budding farther back on the branches and help improve the tree's ramification. Of course trimming to maintain shape, or that leads to major new design elements is another matter entirely.

If you are like me, spring is leaking into summer by the time the necessary repotting is done -- and there always are trees that just don't make it this year. Those, you carefully note in your bonsai record book so they'll be first up NEXT spring.

Jerry Stowell's "The Beginner's Guide to American Bonsai" has a fairly useful chart in one of its appendices that indicates when some species of trees might best be repotted.

### **Other spring chores** — But wait, there's more to do!

Spring is when the birds -- and bonsaiests -- begin to think about reproduction. For bonsaiests, thoughts turn to cuttings, air layers, and even seeds. Bonsai Today issues #8, #64 and #77 have excellent articles on growing cuttings, including a useful table in issue #77. Air layering is covered in depth in Bonsai Today #2, and almost as well in #33. The ABS Journals for both spring and summer 2002 also deal with layering. Many bonsai books also cover these subjects in some detail. See also the Evergreen Gardenworks web page -- [www.evergreengardenworks.com](http://www.evergreengardenworks.com) -- for excellent articles on propagation.

Spring isn't TOO late for transplanting from the ground to a pot, though late winter would have been much better. You can still transplant pines before their candles start elongating; maples can be transplanted as buds leaf out, but beech, hornbeam and hophornbeam are best transplanted to pots before any green appears, so it may be too late. Hawthorn and other flowering plants should be dug before flower buds burst. Tradition says to move azalea after flowering, but that is only because most people can't bear to see a spring without azalea blooms. They'll (the azaleas) be happier if you debud them and transplant in the spring like any other plant.

Spring cleaning is best done -- in the spring. Clean your bonsai tables -scrub off the winter mould left behind by cold, wet weather and rotting leaves. Now that your empty pots are all clean, scrub the crud off the sides and lips of pots that have trees in them. Rake the soggy, dead leaves from your garden and walkways and toss them on the compost heap -- they can help grow bonsai some day in the future. This last cleanup will reduce the likelihood of serious insect infestations later on.

In early spring -- about the time you're cleaning your empty pots -- you should clean, oil, and sharpen your tools. Replace those that have seen better days; dull, ill-fitting tools whose blades no longer meet cleanly damage your trees. With the exception of concave cutters (and, possibly, knob cutters) you do NOT need to buy "bonsai tools." Many garden tools will do as good a job for MUCH less cost.

Spring also is the time to get stocked up on fertilizer, and on pesticides, if you use them. While fertilizer may have a fairly long shelf life, many pesticides -- even in tightly sealed packages or bottles -- can degrade over the course of a year or two. If you are a chemist, you may be able to figure out what these chemicals degrade to, but most of us aren't -- and you don't want to spray an unknown chemical on your trees. Take the old containers to a hazardous waste disposal area and let the professionals dispose of them properly. Then buy fresh.

Bugs show up in spring, too. The first on the scene will be the "bad bugs." Predators don't arrive until they are confident of finding something to eat. In spring, more than at any other time in the growth cycle of your bonsai, the basic pesticide adage -- use the LEAST toxic method of control that works -- is especially important. Leaves and roots are new, and tender; a chemical that might not cause significant damage in summer may be a disaster now. Springtime pest control is best limited to soap sprays (except on maples!), horticultural oils (keep the trees out of full sun for a few days), heavy sprays of water, and hand picking. And remember, if you dose a tree with anything aimed at killing every last possible pest, you're likely to damage the plant. You're looking for control, not annihilation.

In spring, you also start fertilizing. Non-flowering plants need a balanced fertilizer -- approximately equal amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Occasionally you should use a fertilizer with micronutrients, including chelated iron, manganese and magnesium. (Other important micronutrients include Zinc, Sulfur, Boron, Copper, and Sulfur.) Whether you use "organic" or "inorganic" fertilizer has little importance in bonsai nutrition. Most organic fertilizers, however, lack needed micronutrients, so judicious use of both kinds is probably best. Most authors suggest less nitrogen for flowering plants until after they flower, but I don't think I would ever use a fertilizer with no nitrogen. Even flowers need and use it.

Every two weeks is a good general springtime schedule for fertilizing. For trees that I am pushing for growth, I will fertilize every week until mid summer. Follow label directions. Diluting to half strength is NOT needed. You can start fertilizing within a week after a tree has been repotted -- sooner, if root work was limited. (An increasing number of growers seem to fertilize immediately after root work. It probably won't hurt.)

For its overall coverage of pesticide issues and fertilizing, I like "Rodale's All-New Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening." It, naturally enough, favors the organic side of things, but it presents a balanced coverage of both organic and inorganic pesticides and fertilizers. All too many bonsai books spout absolute nonsense on these subjects. I don't wire in the spring. Trees grow too rapidly, and wires quickly start digging into the bark. Since I actively dislike wiring I don't want to have to do it more often than is absolutely necessary. However, the chart in Stowell's book also provides a suggested schedule for wiring.

Since spring only happens once a year, you have a limited amount of time to do all that needs doing as everything springs to life again. This busy season always makes me reconsider those winter collecting trips -- at least until NEXT winter.

Editor's Note: Jim Lewis has been doing bonsai for nearly 30 years -- seriously for 15. He's retired from working with the State of Florida as Director of Environmental Education. He's been the "owner/moderator" of the IBC for about 5 years.

...more Convention News

## Talented MBS Members Lead Classes at MABA Convention

Our own **Rita Luedke** will lead a class on Ikebana, the ancient art of flower arranging. This will be open to convention registrants and their companions and will produce the centerpieces for the banquet tables for the Saturday night banquet. This was extremely popular at the 2002 convention and will take place on Saturday morning from 9:30 to 11:30. This offering is FREE and sign up is on a first come, first serve basis, at the convention, only.

Our own **Leo Schordje**, a long time Tai-Chi practitioner has offered to lead daily morning sessions in this ancient martial art. This oriental exercise form promotes balance and health and burns as much energy as skiing when effectively performed. This class will be open to all convention registrants and their companions FREE of charge. Look for the exact times and places posted at the convention registration area.



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RETURN SERVICE  
REQUESTED

Next Meeting of MBS  
7PM, Tuesday, March. 6  
Grace Lutheran Church  
3030 W. Oklahoma



Individual Paid 2008  
Kris Ziemann  
10932 North Wauwatosa Road  
Mequon WI 53097-3426

53097+3426-32 C030

### MBS Board, 2006

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Scott Hurula – 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
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### Other Club Functions:

Houston Sanders – Newsletter Editor  
Melba Stockhausen - Distribution  
Pam Woythal – Webmaster  
Joe Nemecek - Librarian  
Mary Turner - membership chairperson  
Jean Sher - telephone response



*The rain-soaked forest  
With moist puddles on its floor  
Mirrors the wet sky*

- Mary Turner