

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

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

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Activities

August 19 - 21, Chicago Bonsai Show. View bonsai show, bonsai demos and lectures, CBG bonsai collection, many bonsai vendors, numerous CBG gardens.

September 3 – 5. Japanese Festival at Missouri Botanic Garden. Fortieth anniversary show. View 14 acre Japanese garden, Chinese garden, bonsai collection, Japanese cultural events, many vendors.

IBA July Activities

August 16, 7 pm. IBA Membership Meeting at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden 909 Robert D. Ray Drive

Topics: Round table discussion - Bonsai Tree Physiology will be our topic. Kat Nelson will be presenting. Bring a tree (any tree) and Tree of the Month

EIBA July Activities

August 18, NO MEETING this month! Due to Bruce more Show. Come visit Bruce more.

August 27 Bruce more Show 9:00 am. EIBA will have a booth again this year to display trees.

If you would like to show a tree, let Bill Englert know.

Congratulations to Zoe Nady Blue Ribbon and Best of Show Iowa State Fair 2016



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A Review of Bjorn Bjorholm's Intermediate Bonsai Course

John Denny

Bjorn Bjorholm is a young American from Tennessee who has been living and working for ten years in Japan as a bonsai apprentice and professional. I met Bjorn at Brussel's Rendezvous and took two workshops with him. I came away quite impressed. Bjorn has become very good at his craft. Besides bonsai knowledge, Bjorn has a couple of other attributes. He is an excellent teacher, especially one on one. Another strength of his, is his ability with a camera and editing videos.

Bjorn has combined his teaching, video ability, his bonsai knowledge and his access to great trees into a video course on bonsai. His first video course, Beginner Bonsai Course, was well received. He has released a follow up course, Intermediate Bonsai Course, sold and managed through Bonsai Empire.

I purchased the Intermediate course and have been working my way through it over the past month. The course consists of 3.5 hours of high quality video, broken into several subjects. Bjorn narrates as he works on trees showing detailed techniques and discussing



the many nuances of various tree species and how best to handle them.

Topics covered are: Pruning, Wiring, Junipers in two segments, Black and Red Pines, White Pines, Hinoki, Maples, Alternating Leaf species broken into several segments, and Broadleaf species in three segments.

His lectures and demonstrations on Black and Red Pine were excellent with good close ups of candling. The same with his work on white Pine where he demonstrates detail wiring large trees and placing small branches into optimum position. Bjorn has worked on some beautiful and very large pines during his apprenticeship. He once told me he spent 40 hours wiring a large white pine in preparation for Kokofu-ten show.

His two major sections on Junipers were very good as well, showing how to care for trunks, bark, and dead wood. He goes into very good detail on wiring techniques in this section. Bjorn works on some great junipers in this portion of the video.

I am currently watching his sections on deciduous species. He offers a lot of information and again good video to support his teaching.

If you like learning bonsai and want to invest some money into improving your knowledge and your techniques, check out Intermediate Bonsai Course by Bjorn Bjorholm. You can purchase it for \$49.95 from Bonsai Empire (Bonsaiempire.com). Once you purchase it, they will set you up for unlimited electronic access to the course.

Bjorn has many, many videos on YouTube. Here is a time lapse video he posted recently where he worked on a very nice juniper. It is only three minutes and is fun to watch. Enjoy.

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/15638bf43e643f86>

Needle Juniper Restyling Michael Hagedorn

This tree is too tall. And the branches are a bit leggy, too. One of the problems we get into in bonsai design is that with time and growth, height and branch length can begin pulling us away from the trunk. Literally destroying the design, making it weaker. And this tree has a nice trunk, which is a good enough reason to consider redesigning it, to compact the design.

It's also got another possibility---it currently flows to the right. There's nothing wrong with the right flow, but I was thinking a tighter design would be going left, even if for the time being we'll lose some of the density, interest, and development in the branching. So for the short term, it won't look as good... But the right branch looks young, which is yet another reason to stay away from using it as a key branch, indicating flow. Given that thinking---and willing to be patient for a few years of re-growth for the design to recrystallize---we redesigned this tree this week.

It's a Needle Juniper, *Juniperus rigida*, which we don't see much outside of Japan. The summer trimming is over, when the long extensions are cut. Working on needle juniper will make the expressive among us let out periodic yelps, as it has the most dastardly stiff, pointy needles of any conifer. It is nice having apprentices.



Needle Juniper before redesigning. Curiously, this looks a lot to me like old work in Japan and the United States, with long leggy branches and apexes that seem much too tall. The nice things about such work is the involvement in the branching and padding, which is

often pleasing. The bad thing is we tend to ignore the trunk, because we're so engaged with the foliage...

Juniper Restyling - continued



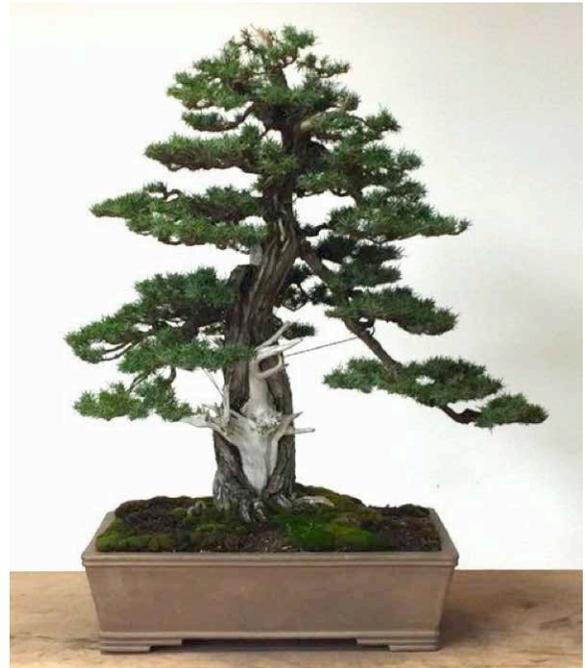
Step one...shortening the crown.



Branches cut off the top.



Reworking crown area.



Tree with shortened crown.
A small jin remains up there.



Step two, reconsidering the flow.
The key branch on the right will be removed.

Branches cut off the right side to shorten the key branch, and make it a balance branch.



Final redesign. It will take a few years to crystalize the form, especially the density of the crown and the length to the bottom branches. The main thing in its favor currently is that it's now a more compact design, refocusing on the trunk. It should be good for about another 10 years before it might need another trip to the shop, to lift the hood and see what could use tinkering.

All About Akadama

Posted in, "Bonsai Care"

by Jonas Dupuich on July 15, 2016

What is Akadama?

Akadama is a fundamental component of bonsai soil. It is used throughout Japan as a potting medium for both bonsai and general gardening purposes. More and more, it is used around the world in the cultivation of bonsai.

The term akadama is Japanese for the words "red" – the color of the particles – and "ball" – the shape of the particles. These particles are balls of volcanic clay that have been mined and naturally dried or baked to a desired hardness. The dried particles are then sifted and bagged for distribution.

Why is Akadama Used for Bonsai Soil?

Akadama is effective as a potting medium for bonsai because it has good water retention properties and it

drains well. Even better, akadama particles slowly break down over time.

When bonsai are transplanted, cut roots need soil that drains well to stimulate the production of new roots. These roots grow quickly and help trees recover from the stress of repotting.

Over time, root growth and consistent watering break down akadama particles. As the particles break down and become smaller, their ability to hold water increases. Given enough time, the particles will completely break down until all that is left are tiny pieces of clay.

The breakdown of soil particles is important in the cultivation of bonsai as smaller soil particles promote slower growth. During the refinement stages of bonsai development, slow growth is a primary goal as vigorous shoots can thicken branches and make old trees look young.



Akadama



Wet akadama – note the darker color



Akadama dust



Wet akadama dust

As akadama continues to break down and roots begin to fill the pot, drainage can slow to a crawl. Keeping bonsai happy in soil that drains poorly is difficult as roots need both air and water to stay healthy. When drainage is poor, watering is done with care until the tree can be safely repotted during the next repotting season. Once in new soil, the bonsai regain some vigor and the process repeats.

Akadama Brands

Akadama is available under a variety of brand names. While the clay is similar in each, the rate at which the particles break down can differ dramatically. Some

bonsai growers prefer soft akadama that breaks down quickly – others prefer hard akadama that breaks down slowly. The key is finding out which brands work for your trees in your climate.

Moderately hard particles might break down quickly when used for trees that grow fast and live in humid climates that receive a lot of rain. The same mix could last years before fully breaking down when used for trees that live in drier climates and grow slowly.



Popular brands of akadama include Kotobuki, Ryusen, Double Red Line, Ibaraki and Nakayama brand akadama.

Akadama bonsai soil



Also popular are pre-mixes or ready-mixes – bonsai soils that include akadama as well as other ingredients including

pumice, lava and other volcanic particles. Common brands of pre-mixes include Clay King and Aoki mix.

Clay King pre-mix

Akadama Bonsai Mixes

Although akadama is one of the most commonly used mediums for bonsai soil, it's rarely used on its own. Combining particles with different structural and water-retention properties allows for the creation of nearly limitless bonsai mixes. How can one determine what makes the most sense for a given bonsai in a given climate?

The best answer is experience. If you don't have experience with a variety of bonsai soils, try and find someone who does – preferably one who lives or has worked in a climate similar to yours.

Akadama - continued

Popular Recipe for Bonsai Soil – Boon Mix

Boon Manakitivipart is a successful bonsai professional who studied bonsai in Japan and has worked throughout the United States. (Full disclosure – I’ve studied and worked with Boon for 20+ years.) When Boon began traveling to work on bonsai, he was struck by the general lack of tree health. Before he could work on trees, he needed trees to be healthy – very healthy – and the first step to get bonsai healthy begins with the soil.

Boon created a modified version of the mix he used in Japan and began testing it in collections in California, Washington, Florida, Texas, Connecticut, Ohio and points in between. The mix is simple: equal parts pumice, lava and akadama with some decomposed granite and horticultural charcoal added.



Horticultural charcoal



Decomposed granite



Lava



Boon Mix



Pumice



Akadama

The basic Boon Mix is a great starting point for bonsai growing anywhere in the continental U.S. Depending on where you live, the recipe can be adjusted based on your needs. If, for example, the akadama breaks down too quickly for your trees, try using a harder brand of akadama or adding more pumice or lava to the mix. If your trees need more moisture, try a mix with more akadama in it.

Depending on the region in which you live, pumice, lava and akadama may be hard to find. In these cases, check to see if there are good local alternatives or try ordering online. If you can’t find lava, for example, using more pumice is a good alternative. Again, the best place to begin your research is with experienced bonsai enthusiasts who live or work in your area.

Pre-mixes can also be used to approximate Boon Mix. A mix using two parts Clay King, one part pumice and a handful of horticultural charcoal will approximate the ratios of pumice, lava and akadama used in Boon Mix. The recipe:

- 1 part pumice
- 1 part lava
- 1 part akadama
- 1 handful decomposed granite
- 1 handful horticultural charcoal

It's impossible to overstate the importance of good drainage when it comes to bonsai soil. After selecting soil ingredients, it is important to make sure they are well-sifted. Sifting bonsai soil serves two purposes. It can be used to separate particles that are too small to use in bonsai mix, and it can separate particles by size.

Bonsai sieves are available for the purpose, or you can build your own. A fine mesh will quickly sift out dust and tiny particles that impede drainage. Larger screens



Sifting
bonsai soil

will separate soil by size. In general, smaller particles are used for smaller bonsai and larger particles are used for larger bonsai.

Akadama is generally available pre-sifted. Lava and pumice are commonly sold sifted and unsifted. You can save money by sifting your own soil, and you can save time by starting with pre-sifted ingredients – select whichever option makes the most sense for your collection.

Do note that even pre-sifted soils can break down due to shipping and handling. Sifting ingredients as they are mixed will ensure as little dust as possible ends up in your soil.

Timely Tips

Now that we are into August, our trees have slowed their growth. Energy is available now for turning fresh green twigs to brown and for beginning to build roots. What shall we focus on with our trees?

We can begin fertilizing black and red pines now and all through fall. In fall we can select the best new buds and perform needle thinning as well.

Junipers in my collection are looking pretty good, but I am wary of red spider mites. I began using Floromite spray and have been happy with the results. It offers a residual of about a month after spraying. Mites get active in August so check for them. Also, keep a daily spray of water on the foliage to keep mites knocked out of the foliage. If you have weak, yellow foliage on the inside areas of your junipers, remove it. Keep the soil free of weeds.

Tropicals should be repotted by now. They need about six weeks of good root growth prior to the end of their

active growing season. It has been nice not worrying about low night time temps and having to bring in my tropical. But, soon, it will be time to begin watching night time temps again. Keep your tropical fertilized, though wait a few weeks if you have repotted them recently.

Deciduous trees still are putting out new leaves, though much more slowly now. Keep them fertilized. Pay attention to the leaves for signs of disease or pests. Spray as needed. Also, with hot weather, mist the foliage in late afternoon. This will reduce stress on the trees and also keep the leaves looking nicer later into the summer season.

For those going on vacation in August, make sure you have a good plan for watering your trees while you are gone. I have heard too many sad stories of friends, kids, neighbors, relatives who forgot to stop by and water the vacationing bonsai hobbyists trees. I have also heard sad stories of automatic water sprinklers not working properly.