

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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IBA June Activities

June 21, 7 pm. IBA Membership Meeting at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden 909 Robert D. Ray Drive

Topics: Present *Chat and Chop!*

Round table discussion: Black Pine De-candling and selective defoliation for deciduous/tropical/subtropical.

Bring a tree (any tree) that is healthy and you want to reduce its' leaf size or needle size. and Tree of the month

EIBA June Activities

June 7, 6 Workshop on Clumps, Groves, Forests with Gary Wood. Held at home of John Denny in Fairfax.

June 9, 6:30 pm. Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road

Topics: Plan June Picnic, discuss July meeting.

June 25, Noon. Club Picnic at Guthridge Park, Green pavillion in Hiawatha.

Topics: Dave Lowman will be vending bonsai plants, tools, pots, wire, and supplies. Contact Dave ahead of the picnic if you want specific items. Club will have auction of trees, pots, stands to support club treasury. Club will provide meat and beverages, bring salad or dessert items to

Inside This Issue

IBA Activites	1
EIBA Activites	1
Noelridge Park Mother's Day	
Flower Show	1-2
Todd Schlafer Workshop	2-3
Root Over rock	3-5
Timely Tips	5



Noelridge Park Mother's Day Flower Show John Denny

The Eastern Iowa Bonsai Association showed several of their bonsai trees at the Mother's Day Flower Show held at Noelridge Park greenhouses. A crowd of 2200 people

enjoyed the event and most all stopped to look at the Bonsai display with many asking lots of questions. There were numerous positive comments about the trees and the display.



The display was informal which fit the overall concept of the Flower Show in the greenhouse. The approachability of the display led to the visitor's inquisitiveness. The age range of the attendees was varied with many young people, families, and grandparents.

Todd Schlafer Workshop April 29 and May 1 Scott Allen

The Iowa Bonsai Association hosted Todd Schlafer for two days on Saturday April 29th and Sunday May 1st. Saturday and Sunday workshops were available to IBA and EIBA members with a few members taking advantage of both days (Me being one of those :O)). The workshops were held at the Magruders farm (Bonsai Heaven) near Indianola, IA.

For those of you who aren't familiar with the name Todd Schlafer. Todd is a student of Ryan Neil and has studied under Ryan for many years. He is one of Ryan's top students and the two days we spent with Todd was testament to his knowledge as well as his ability to teach. His teaching style was



laid back and teaching seemed second nature. Todd was easily approachable which for a novice like me made the whole workshop more enjoyable and thus more rewarding. Todd took the time and made sure EVERY participant had at least one fully styled tree by the end of each workshop and many of us walked away with many finished trees. In addition the material Todd offered was top shelf and pricing was very reasonable compared to other workshops I've attended.

I won't attempt to encapsulate Todd's style of teaching or techniques taught as I'm not a writer and wouldn't articulate it well. What I will do is say Todd did a GREAT job and everyone I talked to was extremely happy with Todd, his teaching style, and the workshop. So much so that the IBA has scheduled another 2 days of workshops with Todd for April 29 and 30 of 2017 so mark your

calendars now and plan to join us for another 2 day trip to Bonsai Heaven with Todd Schlafer.

My sincere thanks to the following:

Alan and Helene Magruder for their hospitality. You guys are the BEST!!!

All that participated in the workshops. Without you guys this kind of workshop wouldn't be possible!
Todd Schlafer for making the trip to Central Iowa.



Root Over Rock Style

John Denny

Of the many Japanese based bonsai tree styles, one of the more unusual and dramatic is the Root Over Rock style. This style is not to be confused with placing a tree (or trees) in a rock planting or into a pocket in a rock where the tree roots live within the rock pocket. In a true Root Over Rock style, the long roots of the tree have actually grown onto and down the side of the rock and then down into the soil in which the rock sits. The rock, tree, and soil are generally held by a shallow style pot.

This style is designed to emulate the phenomenon of a tenacious little tree which has struggled to send its roots out in search of water and nutrients, even fighting



their way over stone to find the water it needs in the soil below. It is a very dynamic style.

Many species of trees can work in this style – pines, conifers, deciduous, tropicals – but some of the most common species used are Trident maples, Ficus, Liquid Amber (aka American sweetgum) as they have the best ability to mold roots to the rock. A key aspect of this style is the roots actually adhere to the rock rather than simply grow along and down the rock without connection. Other species which work well are elms, hornbeams, quinces, Shimpakus.

In this style you want a nice tree, of course, but you also need a great looking rock. One that catches your eye. It should not be too big, but remember your tree will grow, so the rock cannot be too small either. Plus, the rock has to fit into an attractive small pot. So, you have a number of visual features to work with in this style – tree, rock, long visible roots, soil, and pot.

When selecting your rock it can be helpful to find one with cracks and crevices in which you can place the roots and they will attach themselves more easily and naturally to the rock. It can be advantageous to have a small handful of decent rocks and a few small trees to try matching up roots with the rock and its specific crevices. Also, when choosing a stone, look for a longitudinal stone and one that is darker seems to show off the dry surface of the roots, especially Tridents and Ficus. You

can find rocks anywhere – hiking, building supply stores, rock shops, at the water's edge of streams and lakes. Bring home a few options.

When selecting trees, it is easiest to work with young trees, with long roots that will reach from the location of the tree's placement on the stone all the way into the soil at the base of the rock. Older trees can be used, but the larger roots will have a harder time fitting snugly to the rock and likely will not attach well in the long run. Grow your tree in a tall nursery pot first to get the length of root you need. You will need roots one and a half times as tall as the distance from the soil to your tree when it is placed on the rock.

How to Create this Style

Late winter or early spring is the best time to start this project. Here is what you will need prior to beginning: a tree with long roots, an attractive stone with crevices for root attachment, muck which is a combo of clay and peat moss wetted and mixed to the consistency of putty, a nursery pot and eventually a shallow ceramic pot. Select your stone and select your tree. Hopefully, the rock has a flat bottom so it will sit well in the pot. The tree should be washed to the bare roots. Prune away roots too hardened to work with. Supple roots are best. Also remove any roots which get in the way of allowing the tree to sit on the rock precisely where you want it. By the way, good RoR displays generally do not have the tree sitting directly on top of the rock. Often the rock is a longitudinal rock set at an angle and the tree is placed somewhere along the angle, not at the apex.

You will need an extra pair of hands for the next stage where you set the tree on the rock and then drape the roots over the rock. Roots should be placed on both sides of the rock so it can be viewed from either side and the roots will grasp the stone better. Try to work the key roots into the crevices the best you can. As you do this, use some cotton string or raffia to tie the roots gently against the rock. This string can leave marks on the roots similar to wire marks, so be careful not to over tighten. Raffia has less tendency to leave tie marks. Tie in a couple of places. Some people prefer not to use anything to tie the roots in place and will proceed directly to the next stage.

Next apply the muck onto the outside of the rock helping to hold the roots onto the rock and into the crevices. The muck will also nourish the roots while they are growing over the next couple of years.



Now take the plastic or plastic bags and push the plastic against the muck and roots to help push them against the stone. Begin the plastic from the base of the tree and form it all the way down to the bottom of the stone. Tape the plastic to hold in place. I have also heard of people using tin foil doubled over in place of the plastic. The advantage of the foil method is that foil can be used to hold the roots against concave spots on the rock. Push the foil tight against the stone. Make sure roots are extending below the plastic or foil as these roots are the ones that will sit in the soil and supply nutrients to your tree.

Next plant the tree into a nursery can up to the base of the tree. This gives the root growing from under the plastic something to grow into and it helps keep pressure against the roots growing down the rock. (If your tree is winter hardy, you may plant the tree directly into the ground.) Trim any excess foliage away so the roots have less foliage to supply until the roots are established. Shorten the trunk and as the tree grows and branches develop start training the top of the tree. After a year or two, depending on how fast the tree is growing, you can remove some of the plastic or foil near the top and begin exposing the top of the roots on the rock. Leave the rest of the roots to grow for another year. You can begin a rough styling of the tree at this point.

As the roots on the rock are exposed, you can carefully remove the mock. You will likely have extra roots which you will want to remove. Take off any roots that are not adhering well. Remove crossing roots and finally remove excessive roots to simplify the design.

This style is a bit more complicated to create and definitely takes more time, but the rewards can be excellent. Give it a shot and you will have a bonsai tree style that few others have!



Timely Tips

Have you noticed how fast your trees are growing? This time of year we mow our lawns repeatedly due to near perfect growing conditions. It is the same, trying to keep up with managing the growth of our trees.

With most deciduous trees, cut back new shoots to just a couple of fresh leaves on alternate bud species and to two or four on paired species like maples. You can clip away oversized leaves. Besides being unsightly, they also keep light from entering the interior of your trees. Right now my deciduous trees need a lot of pruning as the interiors are shaded and buds and new small leaves need sunlight.

Pine Candling on Black and Red Pines is usually reserved until June.

Junipers can use some cleaning up. Remove old brown or yellow foliage. Remove unwanted new buds that have sprouted from branch crotches, buds that are too close to each other or to existing branches. Prune out new foliage sticking straight up or hanging down from good existing branches. This clean up will also let more light inside your tree.

A couple of points on watering. If it rains lightly, water anyway, especially on deciduous trees with a lush canopy of leaves that force water droplets outside of the soil area. It takes a very good rain to really soak your tree and soil. Also, watch how your water absorbs into the soil. It should not pool or run off. If it does you have some work to do. You can scrape off the top thin layer of soil and top dress it with fresh soil. You may also need to poke a chopstick down into the soil to open

a few entry points for the water to enter. Trees with issues like these are prime candidates for repotting next spring.

Weeds are growing now. Get after them early. As usual my oxalis is showing signs of a bumper crop! Keep the soil surface clean of weeds if you can.

Maintain your fertilization. It is easy to skip a week, two weeks, a month. The other day my older boy was raising his voice at one of our dogs. "Rocky James Denny!" (Yeah, our dog has a middle name for just such occasions.) I asked what the problem was. He said Rocky went to the bathroom in the house. Upon closer inspection, it was just a larger organic fertilizer cake he had stolen off my black pine which sits on a low table out back. I am guessing that row of pines are missing more than one organic cake.

Take note of how nice your foliage is right now. Note the color, the edges, the center of your leaves. Use this mental picture as a comparison so when an issue arises like color change, edge curling or drying or yellowing, holes in the leaves, you will note the changes earlier. Be on the lookout for issues like insect pests, fungal or bacterial disease, nutrition issues, damage from heat, wind, dryness.

I always encourage folks to take photos of their trees. Right now, the foliage is likely lush and pristine. Snap a couple of photos before the summer heats up and the spring lushness slips away. Bonsai should be fun and enjoyable. Enjoy your trees in all their fresh green glory.