

# Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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

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

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## Activities

**October 18, 7:00 PM, IBA Membership Meeting at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden. 909 Robert D. Ray Drive Topics:**

*Workshop/Activity, Chat and Chop!  
Bonsai from a skip (wiring and styling)*

*A trash to treasure concept predicated on the you tube video 'Bonsai from a skip' by Graham Potter.*

*Workshop will allow for differentiation: Any member may bring a Yamadori to style. All others will get simulation materials provided and Tree of the Month.*

## EIBA October Activities

**October 13, 6:30 PM, Board Meeting at Pane-ra Restaurant on Edgewood Dr. Topics:**

*Officers 2017, Holiday Party, October club mtg,*

**October 27. 7:00 PM, Club Meeting at Pier-son Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd. Topics:**

*Collecting Trees from the Wild West and Carving Deadwood with Power Tools. Guest speakers Ron Heinen and Scott Allen of IBA club.*

**November 17, 6:00 PM, IBA Holiday Party at Leonardo's.**

## 2016 IBA Fall Bonsai Show

*John Denny*

Iowa Bonsai Association held their annual Fall Show in October at the excellent venue Reiman Gardens and it was, as usual, a very successful show. The trees and displays were excellent. There was plenty of room between displays, which allowed the viewer to focus more on each individual tree. Each wall had multiple special trees.

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## IBA Fall Bonsai Show Photos



2016 IBA Fall Bonsai Show - continued

The vendor area was fun to browse with Dasu Bonsai offering a wide range of bonsai and bonsai supplies. At the IBA club vending table, there was a good selection of collected trees for sale.

The show had many visitors who were interested in bonsai and asked all kinds of questions. IBA had many knowledgeable members there answering those questions, which gave a good impression to visitors. Show visitors also always enjoy watching Ron Heinen work on one of his large trees. Ron did not disappoint. People enjoy seeing the extremes of both small and large trees.



A large thanks to all the people who put forth the effort to organize the show and to those who brought their trees and set up such good displays. Special thanks to Ivan Hanthorn who, after 10 years of being the Special Arrangements guy, is retiring from the job. Ivan and Alan Magruder, among others, have made the Fall Show a really good show for a long time.



## Pierson's Flower Shop Opens a Bonsai Section

*John Denny*

Al Pierson has always been kind to the Eastern Iowa Bonsai Association. He has let us meet at his shop for a few years now. Al knows a lot about tropical plants and trees and has always had a couple of bonsai for sale at his shop.

Fortunately, Al survived the recent flood despite being right down by the river. (In 2008 his floor was 8 feet under water.) Al is expanding and will add a good amount of bonsai trees to his inventory. Al will be adding some nice Fukien Tea, Arboricola, Serissa, 4 types of Ficus, and also Chinese Elm. These trees retail for \$39.99 to \$149.99. Al points out these trees are included in his 50% off sale which he is running on all his plants and orchids. Can't beat that sale!

Al is adding rolls of wire in the 1.5mm to 2.5mm range. Pierson's has added more pots in the range of 6" to 8" and tools scissors and knob cutters. The tools are priced in the beginner range.

Pierson's has all the horticulture needs you may require, whether it be chemicals, sphagnum moss, and other odds and ends a bonsai hobbyist might need. Check them out and give Al some business to say "Thank you for helping the local bonsai club!"

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## Flowering Quince Photos

*John Denny*

Chaenomeles is a genus of 3 species of deciduous, spiny shrubs from mountain woodland in Japan and China. They are appreciated for their early flowers which appear from early January onwards on bare branches and can

continue after the appearance of leaves.

Tri color Toyo nishiki flowering quince by Bill Valvanis



## Do You Have a Bonsai Philosophy?

*John Denny*

We each do bonsai for different reasons. We each have had varying experiences and influences, which affect our overall view of bonsai and therefore determine how we choose to go about our own version of bonsai.

However, most of us have not actually sat down and pondered the question, "Do you have a Bonsai Philosophy? And if you do, can you explain it or write it down?"

Why are you asking me such questions? What does it even matter? How does it help me or my bonsai to think about a personal bonsai philosophy?

First, if you just want to have a bit of fun with bonsai, just dabble in bonsai, then I would suggest you grab your tools and go play. But, if you wish to be serious with bonsai, I think it worth the effort to think, to ponder, to kick some thought around in your head. Why? How will it help me?

Having an overarching philosophy allows one to have a more thorough understanding of how to get the most out of our trees, out of ourselves and our talent, get the most from our limited funds, and how to best enjoy ourselves in this hobby.

How do we come up with a philosophy? Not just a generic philosophy of bonsai, but a philosophy just for

you and your tree collection. Let's start by asking more questions, questions that will lead us closer to our own answers.

1. What got me interested in bonsai? A trip to the Rockies, studying Japanese Zen Buddhism, growing plants, climbing trees as a kid? We should understand what got us interested in the first place? What was the spark?
2. What kind of trees do I like and why? Flowering trees? Wild trees? Sculpted trees? Trees with lots of deadwood or lots of green foliage? Tropical, pine, juniper, deciduous trees? Do I want many kinds of trees or do I want to focus and specialize in a category?
3. What kind of art do I like? What artistic aspects of bonsai do I like best? Powerful trees, feminine trees, colorful trees, movement, negative space, accents, kusamona, furniture and display, photography? Which artists do I like best and what is key in their work that excites me? Do I have a favorite style of tree – literati, forests, formal uprights, etc.
4. What are my best bonsai talents and how do those drive a given philosophy? Am I creative or more of a technician? Am I good at carving deadwood or setting branch structure? Am I talented at horticultural creating healthy vibrant trees?
5. What are my influences in art, literature, philosophy? Thoreau? Ansel Adams? Rodin and sculpture of movement? How do these influences impact me regarding my bonsai?
6. What aspect of bonsai do I enjoy most? Displays and showing trees? Growing and horticulture? Working with my hands pruning, wiring, carving, potting? Learning and teaching bonsai?

Ok, you get the idea now. Ask your own questions. Start taking some notes as you consider these questions. Now, let me get more specific and show you an example. Recently my favorite bonsai blogger, Michael Hagedorn, updated and reorganized his website. I was looking around it and found what I would consider Michael's philosophy of bonsai, what works for him.

Your philosophy does not have to be as long or eloquent as his. But, as you read Michael's words, study how his statements lead to his understanding of bonsai and how that in turn leads to specifically how he creates the style of bonsai he does. By knowing himself and his philosophy, Michael hones in his work and makes better trees and better art.

“Most artists would probably refer to this area as the ‘artist’s statement,’ so you can call it that if you wish. One part of bonsai that I find particularly resonant is the chance for the artist to be a bit invisible, to have the medium of a tree eventually be its own spokesperson. And then there are a number of things I think about or am conscious of when doing bonsai, and that serve as inspiration. I’m convinced that how we apply a wire to a tree—our attitude towards that—actually says a lot about us. It’s a very fingerprinted action. Also recently I’ve been very conscious of urbanization—having just moved to a city—and the possible health benefits of even modest touches of authentic nature, not stylized nature. So focusing on what is beyond the city in a very blunt and honest way gets me beyond some of the assumptions of what a bonsai is supposed to look like, to the questions of what is wild, and what is natural? I think a lot about natural beauty, the kind of beauty that is not created but born, and how we can be a part of that or against that. Minimizing a tree’s natural beauty is almost like cooking a vegetable until it’s most definitely dead. I like trees that breathe. That have a life I’ve not agreed to.

Although it may be hard to see those things in the work, they are part of the stew at the moment. And although I do engage in invention and experimentation, the raw values of wabi-sabi continue to guide my work. I really don’t think we’re doing bonsai any more when we stray too far from the original aesthetic values that gave birth to bonsai, and those are less about how something looks than how it feels.”

Alright. That is M. Hagedorn's bonsai philosophy at the moment. (Just like trees, philosophy is alive and changing as we change.) Your bonsai and your background are not the same as Hagedorn's and your bonsai ideas should be different. No one is right or best. Understanding your guiding principles will let you sharpen and focus your skills, your vision, your

art. Your bonsai collection will improve. You will develop your own style, which others will notice. Ryan Neil emphasizes the power in collected mountain trees. Hagedorn emphasizes the natural lightness or femineness of plant material from the woodlands of Oregon, often showing whimsy and creativity. Dan Robinson focuses showing the age of ancient trees. Walter Pall likes less sculpted trees. Marc Noelanders features sculpture in trees with beautiful branch placement.

Do you have a style? I don't. If I had a clear artist statement, perhaps I would then have a style and could better focus my efforts. A philosophy is like having a goal and a map to help you get there. As our trees get put to bed this winter, perhaps that is a good time for us to think more deeply about why we do bonsai and how we want to do bonsai and what precisely we want to get out of bonsai. Or, what the hell, we can skip the heavy thinking and just have fun! It's your choice.

## Why Own Ficus?

John Denny

Ficus (or figs) are Tropical trees, meaning in Iowa, they need to be brought inside this time of year and kept inside for the winter and brought back outside in last spring. Keep them above 55F. For some hobbyists, this is inconvenient. For some, worrying about night time temps constantly is a hassle. For others, they do not have enough space, nor good lighting indoors to support those trees. Others may want to travel in winter rather than care daily for



Tropical trees.

However, there are many good reasons to keep Tropicals trees. I like having trees to look at and care for in winter. They remain nice and green and green is both pleasing and relaxing, especially when looking out the window in January which can be rather bleak.



Ficus and Schefflera can be some of the easier trees to maintain. They are tough. They can recover from some rough treatment. I know this from experience! Another reason I like Ficus and Schefflera is they are great trees to learn with. You prune them hard and gain confidence they will grow back. You can totally defoliate them and they always bud back and the leaves will be smaller and your tree canopy will ramify nicely. It works! You repot them annually so you get better at root pruning and repotting. These trees usually do not cost a lot, so if you did really screw up, your loss is minimized. Also, many Tropicals grow fairly quickly, though a little slower in Iowa than in Florida. This means you will see results faster than other species., so you get a more mature tree faster.

I could go over all the usual information for How To Care For Ficus, but I will let you search that on your own. A good article is Dave Bogan's Ficus Forum, which you can find at <http://www.bonsaihunk.us/ficusforum/FicusTechniques/FigTechnique59.html> What I WILL share is a link to a fun video by a guy named Adam Lavigne who blogs about bonsai. Here he takes a medium sized Ficus (a narrow leaf ficus) and he shows you its flaws, demonstrates how to get rid of those flaws and how to create some excellent looking cuttings and also very interesting root cuttings. He ends

up with many new trees to work with. Remember, Tropicals grow fast and those cutting become nice little trees quickly.



This video is fun and informal. It begins a bit goofy, but stick with it. It is 16 minutes. Have fun and you will see some of the reasons Ficus are so much fun.

<https://adamaskwhy.com/2016/09/24/check-out-the-first-full-length-adamaskwhy-youtube-video/>

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## Timely Tips

Temperatures in early October have remained warm and we have seen some lovely days full of sunshine. However, things will be changing soon. I see a low of 34F for tomorrow night. That will signal the advent of Fall and the beginning of the hardening off process for our trees as they prepare for winter.

Our trees need to see gradually lower night time temperatures as we move deeper into fall. Daylight will be shortening, also. This gives the trees a major clue they should be preparing for winter. Early fall has encouraged the build up of root systems, while reducing any new foliage growth. Let your trees gradually adjust to lower temperatures. If there is a sudden drop well below freezing you may want to bring your trees inside for the night. Pines can handle the cold pretty well. Junipers, too. Deciduous can be more susceptible to cold injury. I usually don't worry down to 28F, but if the predictions are lower than that and you actually get temps on the low side of that prediction, then your trees may be vulnerable. Pines, I don't worry about until 25F. These are my guidelines for my trees in my location. Yours may be different.

Be thinking about your winter storage space. Have it ready ahead of time, especially if you have several trees. Make sure it is clutter free, clean, and you are able to water in that area. Hang a couple of thermometers in your storage area, so you can learn how your temps vary. If you store in a shed or garage and the temp outside drops to 10F, you need to know what the temp is in your storage area. Check the temp on inside vs outside walls. Check near the floor and 6 feet above the floor. If you need to, you can add a heater that can kick on if storage area temps reach a low level. Make sure the heater does not kick out too much heat and does not blow too hard directly on trees. If you have a lot of trees, space them out rather than crowd them together if you can. Also, make sure to spray them for pests and

disease when you bring them inside.

There are two philosophies regarding ideal storage temps. One is to keep the trees roots, which is what we are really worried about, just above freezing and keep them there. For me, that means 33F to 38F. The other strategy is to let them freeze and keep them frozen. Just remember you can't water a frozen tree, so water them well before letting them freeze. If your trees are outside, mulch them. Prevent animal damage.

As you bring your trees inside, make a list of which trees need repotting or need a new pot. This helps you make a shopping list for any new pots needed and helps you remember in spring what your potting plan is.

I tend to water my trees once a week in storage, based on my soils and storage temperature. You will have to find what works for you. I water my azaleas twice weekly as they remain green and slowly active. Watering in winter is a challenge.

I have both over and under watered trees over the years during winter and caused damage. Remember, dry soil and freezing temps is a deadly combination, so avoid that combo. It is harder in winter to test the moistness of soil with your fingers as my fingers are wet and cold from watering and it becomes harder to tell soil moistness. When you do water, make sure to water thoroughly. In my early winters, I sometimes under watered so I would not have ice forming on the garage floor. And since I have a lot of trees, I tend to water too quickly, wanting to stop being cold and wet and get back inside where the coffee is warm. I have to force myself to take my time, even if it means breaking my watering into two sessions. Another watering tip. Do NOT miss any trees by accident. If you have many trees, this will happen sooner or later. So, go slow. Follow a pattern. Do not put small trees behind bigger trees. Keep your shohin in plain and obvious sight.