

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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April 2018

Volume 57, Issue 4



IBA April Activities

April 21, IBA, SPRING SHOW/EARTH DAY CELEBRATION AT THE GREATER DES MOINES BOTANICAL GARDENS.

Everybody is members welcome.

EIBA April Activities

April 19, 7:00 PM, EIBA Club Meeting of 2018, Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd.

Topic: "Pests and Diseases" by Al Pierson, air layer demo by John and Bill, details on Andy Smith Workshop.

May 10, 6:30 PM, EIBA Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road

Topics: Mother's Day Show prep, May club mtg prep, NewBo display planning.

May 13, 9:00 AM, Mother's Day Flower Show Noelridge Greenhouse

Topics: Come see our EIBA Bonsai Display!

May 17, 7 pm. EIBA Club MTG, John Denny home.

Topics: Outdoor display discussion. Demo: Muck and its use in creating bonsai art.

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Kokufu-ten 2018 Photos

The Kokufu-ten is Japan's leading Bonsai show, with an incredibly high level of Bonsai trees on display. It takes place each year at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Below are some photos demonstrating the quality of trees in the exhibition. These photos came from Bonsai Empire website.





SCARS

By Andrew Smith

Scars, I guess, are the marks of living. Perhaps you could say they are sometimes the marks of careless living, and perhaps you could say that when it comes to scars, charity demands that it's better to give than receive; but going through life unscarred is not really going through life at all, though we wisely avoid them when we can.

I remember my grandfather's burly arms, which had thin, white lines crossing them, as did his cheeks. He came here from Germany and the thin, white lines were scars from sword duels. As a youth he'd been a member of some sort of brotherhood whose main purpose seemed to be: 1) Finding something to argue about, 2) Getting offended that someone would dare to take the opposite side of your argument, though if they didn't you'd have to keep looking for someone who would, and then, 3) Settling things in a rational way with bloodshed and a sword. But I don't think the goal was really to kill anyone. I'd guess, more likely, it was just to get some good scars on your arms that you could flash around the burg to catch some pretty fraulein's eye.

My Dad used to tell me that when he was a boy they always ate Sunday dinner at my great grandma's farmhouse, and there were usually at least 30 people there and once in a while as many as 60. He would sit at a huge long table with six or eight of his uncles sitting across from him and he said every one of them would have knuckle marks across their foreheads from the night before. They were Irish and this was before there were smart phones, or even TV sets, to entertain themselves with, so they did the best they could to have fun with the limited means they had. And they got scars.

In many instances we wear our scars somewhat proudly, as evidence of challenges we have survived and stories we have the right to tell. The few scars I bear are more evidence of plans that weren't thought all the way through before they were put into action, but I only admit that here. To most people I present them as manifest proofs of hard challenges I have lived through. Or at least as lessons; learned, or not.

I sometimes wonder if the current tattoo craze has come about because real scars are somewhat risky, difficult and usually quite painful to acquire. But you can pay a couple hundred bucks and in an hour get some sort of graffiti etched on your shoulder or calf that serves the same purpose—it makes you look like you've lived

Scars- continued

through something, and only you (and your tattooist) know what it was.

In bonsai also, scars are highly valued. All you have to do is down a six-pack of Bud heavy and try juggling a few sets of giant Masakuni concave cutters to see what I mean. I'll bet you can't. Anyway, the high value the ER doctor will place on patching up your forehead and reattaching the end of your nose will amaze you. It's just the end –it can't be worth that much! Unless you don't have one. Ultimately, it's just making room in your bank account for more money anyway, so don't worry about it. No one else at your office party will have a story as good as that. Believe me; I know.

And the scars on our bonsai trees from decades of hard living are also treasured marks of character. The silver jins and sharis, the bent and twisted branches, and the rough, contorted trunks tell the tale of a relentless struggle to thrive, or at least survive, in an often hostile and impoverished environment.

And it's not just the trees in my greenhouse that have these scars! Mother Nature herself is not always so good of a gardener as you might imagine. She must partake over often of the fruits of her own vines, for she often forgets to water for weeks, or even months, on end. And then when she does water she is just as likely to pour a whole month's worth of water in an hour, as she is to give a drop in a month.

And that's not all, for she lets it freeze during the growing season, keeps it too warm during the dormant season, sends hard hail against fresh flowers and gales of tree-toppling wind when the ground is soft from too much rain. Scars, continued In bonsai the end result of this careless exuberance, for those that survive it, is sometimes beauty. Other times, it's just a bad tattoo. For instance, last year I went with a friend to a place I knew to collect some pine trees for bonsai and found the whole area had been battered by hail a few days earlier. The ground was a green carpet of freshly sheared pine needles and the trees themselves, large and small, were denuded and scarred; with missing bark, needles, shoots and broken branches, all from a devastating rain of large hail. I had seen large pines severely beaten up by hail once before, but never the small pines beneath them too. The damage was amazing. The trees looked so torn up that I began to wonder if they would be strong enough to survive transplanting.

So, we dug a couple of the less mangled ones and then left to find a different area.

The trees we dug hung on and made it through the year, though they looked as ratty as an old cat hairballs behind the couch (I got one of those). This year they are looking a little stronger and have new buds popping out to replace some of the foliage they lost.

But what caught my eye were the scars. As they healed, the hail gashes made elliptical diamonds of shari running along the upper side of the branches and trunks. I have seen similar scars thousands of times on the branches of old pines before, but I never knew exactly what caused them. I'm not sure I ever really thought about it; just, "something" caused some scars along the trunk. It made shari, which is good, and I didn't worry about it. But now I know.

I've worked for 35 years in the woods in the Black Hills and have not run into that level of hail damage before. But now I see these old pines must encounter this type of hail at least a few times in their long lives. Undoubtedly, some don't survive it. But the ones that do, have scars.

Deadwood on Deciduous

By Susan Daufeldt

I don't know how many times I've heard it: "Deadwood doesn't last long on deciduous trees." This appears to be a stock response when one expresses an interest in deadwood on deciduous. And I have no idea from whence this notion springs. And what does "long" mean?



Deadwood on an old Slippery Elm.

Commonly, in bonsai, we think of deadwood on junipers and other conifers. But when I look at the world here around me, I see mostly deciduous trees and A LOT of deadwood.



An old tree with significant deadwood.

“Long” is relative, but there is no question that deadwood lasts long enough on deciduous trees for the concept to have relevance in bonsai. There is an old Slippery Elm in my back yard that has a lot of deadwood on it. In the fourteen years I’ve lived here, the dead wood not only remains, but continues to increase in magnitude and prominence, while the tree itself is vitally alive. When I took a good look at that tree fourteen years ago I thought it was dying and that it was only a matter of time before it came down. Now I think that tree is going to out-live me. It is more vibrant and appears healthier than when I moved here, in spite of all its deadwood.



The amazing trunk of an old willow. Yes, this tree is alive!



Perhaps the most amazing sight was the final fashion model of the day:

On a recent hike, I took a plethora of pictures of deadwood on deciduous trees. It was fascinating.

This tree appears to be completely dead - but it’s not. See the twiggy branches growing out of the top side of the slant? Those branches belong to this trunk and are very much alive. It put me in mind of some bonsai I have seen: Junipers that are almost entirely deadwood with a little tuft of green foliage proclaiming that they yet live. Food for thought: Deadwood on deciduous.

Potting Tips and Tricks

By John Denny

Each year I pick up new ideas regarding repotting of bonsai. Sometimes it might be an idea that I heard a few years back, but just tried for the first time with my own trees. I will share four ideas from my own repotting work this season.

1) I had heard of using steel wire instead of aluminum wire for tying trees into pots. Todd Shlaffer brought it up recently while helping study group participants repot trees. The main reason for using steel is that it does not stretch like aluminum can. Tall trees in the wind can really stress a tie in job, potentially stretching aluminum and thus allowing extra movement of the roots. Not good, right? You can buy steel wire at stores like Menards. Buy a diameter that is not too different than 2.0mm aluminum. Steel wire is a bit stiffer, but not too hard to work with.

2) Here is a slick way to tie in a tree that has a very solid root pad. I was first taught this technique by Michael Hagedorn at a Seasonal several years ago. Once you remove some soil and roots from the top and bottom surfaces and the sides, you can take a chopstick and drive it hard into the side of the root pad. Do this about mid depth or slightly higher and angle the chopstick downward just a hair. Cut off the chopstick leaving half an inch to an inch of exposed chopstick. Now, tie your wires directly over the exposed end of the chopstick. Pull up, then twist. Repeat until the tree is solidly anchored in place. Do this on the other side of the tree, also. You will be surprised how solid your tree is joined to the pot. Remember, this is only for trees with solid, firm root pads.



4) I changed the angle of a collected Ponderosa this year. The new angle shows more trunk movement in the semi cascade style. I also pulled the top of the tree forward towards the viewer. This resulted in the roots behind the trunk to rise up above the pot level. What to

do with these now exposed roots that I would not be able to cover with soil???. Solution: build a wall. Take some wetted sphagnum moss, fluff it up as best you can, and place a fine layer on those exposed somewhat vertical roots. Now sprinkle some soil over the top of the moss. Take a hand full of soil spread across your palm and quickly press the soil against the root/moss surface. Pack it into the moss. Now repeat the process with another layer of fluffy sphagnum moss and top with a final layer of soil. Press the layers together against the roots. You can place a top layer of moss over the previous layers and water it in gently. The near vertical soil layer should stay in place, protecting the roots that rose above the top of the pot level. Viola!

5) A friend said to me recently that he repotted a couple of young trees he had grown from seedlings. One he had placed in his club's bark based soil and the other in Boon mix (1/3 each pumice, akadama, lava). No organic portion in this soil. When he removed the trees

from the pots he was amazed to see how well the roots had grown in the Boon mix. The roots were a solid mass of fine roots. The roots grown in the bark based soil, while decent, were not as fine, with fewer but longer roots. Another satisfied customer for Boon mix. When I first went to Oregon to a Michael Hagedorn Seasonal, I was shocked to see such incredible root systems which were the result of his soil (pumice and akadama).

It was also, I figured, due to the great growing conditions offered by Oregon climate. But, once back home, I began using either Boon mix or a combo like Hagedorn used. I expected that I would not get as fine of root structure as Michael, due to Iowa weather. However, I was very, very pleased to see the vastly improved roots I was able to achieve. Buying and shipping akadama and pumice was expensive at first. But, now IBA (Scott Allen and Dave Lowman) have been bringing in pallets of pumice, akadama, and red lava. So, if you are getting serious about bonsai, it is now possible to acquire these soil ingredients more easily and cheaply. Your trees will thank

you for giving this kind of non-organic soil a try.

Timely Tips

John Denny

The calendar says it is April. Or is it??? This morning I awoke early with the intent to repot a couple of trees in the garage. The early morning outside temperature was 13F. I had another cup of coffee and some pancakes, instead. It is predicted to warm up considerably this week, but I have heard that forecast before!

This time of year is repotting time. It is also time to begin placing trees outside as the new leaves need light. However easy it sounds, getting your trees outside is not so easily done in reality.

First, newly repotted trees that have had their roots severely disturbed, require some healing time. Leave them in your garage or shed for two three weeks or so prior to placing them outside in strong spring winds. Those winds will stress the tree for water, which partially recovered roots may not be able to supply. Bring the trees out slowly so they do not get sunburned on day one outside. Also, do not let the roots freeze at night until they are truly recovered. Bring them back inside if we get a solid freeze.

Trees that have not been repotted can go outside earlier and with less worry. (Do bonsai hobbyists ever not worry?) Deciduous trees are pushing leaves now or will be soon. You will need to get them more light than your winter storage area can supply. If you leave them in low light, the branches will grow long internodes, which is the opposite of what you want for good bonsai structure. However, these fresh new beautiful leaves are very tender and are highly susceptible to night time frosts or hard freezes. You must bring the deciduous trees back into a safe temperature zone, such as your garage. Usually just for a night or two. It is the price we pay for this hobby.

Junipers and pines that have NOT been repotted this spring can go outside and can withstand light frosts. But, as they experience warm spring days, they quickly lose their winter hardiness and can become victims of a hard freeze. So, take care. If you see a cold night predicted, you may have to bring these trees back inside as well.

A couple of tips for this time of year. First, you can add shredded sphagnum moss to the top of your soil surface. This moss will help hold moisture in your soil so it does

not evaporate as quickly in the spring winds. Having moss on top also helps protect the roots near the soil surface, effectively making your root zone just a little deeper. Every little bit of extra root zone can really help your tree stay strong.

A second tip is a watering tip. In spring we often hear about spring showers. When it rains we think, "Ah, nature is watering for me today. I can take the day off and skip watering." Well, unless you received a very strong rain, you likely should water anyway. A light or even moderate rain usually will only wet the surface and not the entire root zone. Remember, water should be running out the drain holes if your tree really was watered well. Go out and check to make sure the rain truly wetted the entirety of your soil depth. If not, find your watering can or wand and finish the job nature started!

Enjoy the beauty of your bonsai tree's fresh new growth, but be cautious and stay attentive to the weather forecasts and the needs of your trees. frosts. But, as they experience warm spring days, they quickly lose their winter hardiness and can become victims of a hard freeze. So, take care. If you see a cold night predicted, you may have to bring these trees back inside as well.

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