

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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IBA June Activities

June 16, 9:00 AM, Open Study Group and Presentation at 11:30 AM

IBA Meetings at The Greater, Des Moines Botanical Garden. 909 Robert D. Ray Drive
Topics: *How to artificially age a tree, Dave Lowman.*

Everybody is welcome.

EIBA June Activities

June 14, 9:00 AM, Mother's Day Flower Show Noelridge Greenhouse
Topics: *Come see our EIBA Bonsai Display!*

June 16, 2018 EIBA Bonsai Show at NewBo in Czech Village. 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM
This promises to be a good show. Come on down and talk bonsai while you check out the bonsai tree displays.

June 23, EIBA Picnic Noon atm Guthridge Park Green Pavillion, Hiawatha
The club will supply meat, buns, drinks, plates, silverware. Members can bring a dish to pass.

Dave Lowman will be vending bonsai trees, accent plants, bonsai supplies. Call him ahead of time to ask for any specific requests you might want him to bring.

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State Fair Time!

DEADLINE FOR IOWA STATE FAIR ENTRY IS SATURDAY - JUN 30, 2018 @ 1:00AM

Check Iowa State Fair website for details. State Fair is being held Aug 9-19, 2018. We encourage you to trim your trees, shine your pots, find the perfect accent plant and show off your best tree!

Kingsville Boxwood Bonsai (Buxus microphylla 'compacta')

John Denny



Dwarf Kingsville boxwood planning by Rodney Clemons from Stone Lantern's Bonsai Bark blog.



This planting by Boon Manakitivipart was the winner of the Certre Award at the 2010 U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition. Note how the tiny leaves make this planting look realistic.



This tree graced the cover of Bonsai Today issue 108. The tree is owned by Michael Persiano

Boxwoods make good bonsai trees and can work in many bonsai styles from informal uprights to small groupings to landscapes on rock. Boxwoods can make fine shohin and mame sized bonsai. They make a good tree for both beginner and experienced hobbyists.

There are several types of boxwoods, all of which are understory shade tolerant trees. Common boxwood, Kingsville (sometimes called Japanese boxwood), and Harland boxwoods are three basic types used for bonsai. Each are slow growing trees. It can take 20 plus years to reach a trunk diameter of 3". Common boxwood grows fastest and is more coarse than either Kingsville or Harland. All have small leaves, though Kingsville are prized as the tiniest leafed variety.

We will focus on Kingsville boxwood for this article. Boxwood have many good characteristics that are useful for bonsai. Dark green leaves that reduce well, naturally short internodes and they can take hard pruning that prompts prolific back budding. Boxwood also have shallow, fibrous root systems that often produce powerful surface roots and nebari. Kingsville have a mature looking bark, light in color and rough, which gives an aged look early on. The trees often grow in a "park" like fashion naturally. Often interesting trunk and branch shapes occur. Since the trees grow slowly, it is often best to keep the natural contours rather than prune them into forced shapes. These trees look great as individual trees or in small groupings. Recently, boxwoods have been used extensively in plantings on rocks. Rodney Clemons does workshops annually at Brussels Bonsai helping students select interesting rocks and adding muck where needed to create pockets for soil, then pruning several smaller Kingsvilles and placing them artistically on the rock. Excellent results can be had, even by beginners.

Boxwood can be air layered successfully, and are best started in April. Cuttings can be taken from Autumn to early Spring; use cuttings of at least 4"/10cm length for greater success.

Small wounds on Buxus heal well but larger wounds, particularly on older parts of the tree, are very slow to heal and are better used as deadwood features. As Buxus wood is very hard, intricate carving and jinning can be carried out without fear of deterioration.

Pruning and trimming Boxwood

Boxwoods regularly need thinning of the foliage mass to allow light into the inner branches to stop them becoming bare and to prompt back budding. Boxes back bud easily, even so well, that it can be a problem

keeping up with managing all the back budding. Regular pruning helps to increase ramification and reduce leaf size as well. However, it is also important to allow some free growth to ensure the overall vigor of the bonsai is maintained. Free, unrestricted extension of the first flush of growth can be allowed in Spring to strengthen the tree, followed by strict pinching and pruning for the rest of the year to refine the foliage.

Repot every two years. Roots are nice and fibrous. You can remove up to half during root work.

Boxwoods keep a nice green look, though they can lighten or yellow in cool weather. Dappled sun is best. If you want to increase back budding and ramification, then partially defoliate by keeping the terminal leaves and removing inner leaves. Boxwoods are hard to wire as the branches become very brittle early on. Only wire very young branches while they are still flexible. Pruning works better to shape a boxwood.

Kingsville boxwoods can be found at regular nurseries, bonsai nurseries, bonsai outlets, or can be found sometimes as old landscape shrubs that homeowners want to remove. Whatever your source, you can have a lot of fun with boxwoods. Look for Kingsville boxwoods and you can be quite creative in what you do with them. Since they are very forgiving, as bonsai trees go, even beginners can have great success in creating and maintaining great looking bonsai.

Which Pot Would You Pick?

John Denny



Perhaps you have seen this photo montage from Bonsai Bark, the blog of Stone Lantern. This was put together by Boon Manakitivitipart. One tree (a nice Kingsville boxwood) with seven pot choices. How to choose? Well, you could use instant intuition and choose one in five seconds. Often, the first choice is our best one.

Or, you can be a little more analytical and think about factors like which pot matches the tree in visual weight? Some pots below may be too heavy, too deep, or too masculine. Some may be the opposite. Look at the shape of the pot. Is it a strong rectangle with harsh corners? Or a rectangle with softer corners and less heavy lip? Or is it a more feminine oval shape? Some pots may be too distracting. You notice the pot before the tree. How about color relative to the tree? Is the pot color complimentary? Not so easy, is it?

For most of us, at repotting time of year, we have our one tree to repot and we have one pot and only one pot of the correct size. "Well, I choose that one."

But, if we learn more about pots, we will do a better job of purchasing the right pot to begin with and we will be happier with the resulting tree in a pot final result. It is easy to buy a pot, thinking it looks great, then when the time to repot comes, it is apparent your special pot is not so special with your tree.

When I go to visit someone else's bonsai collection and I see the trees are all in nice, appropriate pots, I may not say, "Wow, what great pots!" But I will say, "My, what a nice collection of bonsai." Pots matter. Pots quietly support and improve the beauty of your tree.

To get better at selecting pots, do exercises like this one by Boon. Look longingly through pots for sale on line, go to the Chicago Show in August and visit Sara Rayner's booth, visit anyone with a nice bonsai collection and just look at every pot, look at bonsai books and notice the pots, scout the web sites of top bonsai masters around the world and look at the pots they selected. You will learn and learn some more about matching pots to your trees. (Caveat: these suggestions can be damaging to your bank account! Be careful.)

Have you chosen one of the seven pots yet for Boon's tree?

Fiberglass Window Screen – Solving Problems in the Bonsai Garden

Susan Daufeldt

Problem: Your soil goes all over the place when you water. You put it on. You wash it off. Repeat daily. Problem: I just can't grow moss. I have too much sun. I have too much wind. I have Robins (large,

red-breasted, North American songbird that positively delights in stripping the moss off of pots just for fun)... Problem: Hot pots resulting in damage and death, especially in mame and shohin-sized bonsai.

Solution: Fiberglass Window Screen. With scissors, cut a piece slightly larger than your pot. Cut in to the spot in the screen where the trunk of the tree will emerge. Cut a circle out of the screen just slightly larger than the diameter of the nebari. Fit the screen over the pot and around the trunk of the tree. Because this screen is very flexible and soft, this is simple to do without damaging the tree. I use the kind that is made so that pets can't tear it – it's more durable.

If you are putting the screen over moss, do not press the screen down or staple it down on to the moss. The moss will not like that. Give it a little room to grow. The screen will provide enough shade and wind protection for most mosses. If you are using the screen to prevent soil displacement or to prevent pots from getting too hot, you should still leave a little room. When you water, the screen will cause the water to flow through very gently. As always, be sure to water thoroughly. Note that while the screen will help to keep pots cooler, it's not a refrigeration system. You still need to be careful with respect to placement especially with small and/or shallow pots.

Drawback: Not especially attractive. You can, of course, remove it for periods of time, depending on your problem. (If your only problem is soil displacement, you could take it off after or until watering when you are going to be in the garden. If your problem is Robins, you can remove it when you are going to be sufficiently present to prevent the activity. And so forth.) In my garden, I have found that the benefits far outweigh the drawback.



Timely Tips

John Denny

Wow! Everything is growing like crazy in the bonsai yard!! Great to see. New leaves. New shoots. New candles. New weeds even.

This time of year is about Growth Management. Time to sharpen your pruning scissors and get busy.

Much of the fast spring growth is behind us. Shoots are beginning to harden and now is a good time to clean up the excessive growth. First, recall our discussions about what stage of development as a bonsai is your tree? It can be in one of these stages – Growth, Developing, or Finished Bonsai. A young tree that you want to grow a thicker trunk is in Growth mode. Most of our trees are already in a bonsai pot (trunk growth is slowed) and we are working on developing better branches and ramification. And a few lucky trees have made it to the final Bonsai stage.

Let's talk about how these stages impact Growth Management this month. If your tree is in Growth stage (ie you are growing seedlings, or you have young trees in nursery pots), then you will let your tree grow hard and not prune much. Don't worry about clean silhouettes. Letting shoots grow will thicken trunks and branches. The only thing to prune out are things that can become future problems. Too many branches growing from the same location. Remove one. Branches growing in the wrong direction that you can't fix by wiring. If your tree is in Developing stage, then you can work harder on removing more problem shoots that grow straight up or straight down or that cross each other. You can begin cutting new shoots back to a pair of buds once the shoot has six or eight leaves. You will get more light into the middle of the tree, smaller future leaves, ramification, and shorter internodes. All of these things help your tree develop towards becoming a bonsai. Slow down your fertilizing some in this stage so you do not get wild growth.

And if your tree is already to the finished Bonsai stage, now you reduce your fertilization even more or your tree will become MORE coarse and look younger rather than older and more refined. Trim shoots now and maintain a clean silhouette.. IF the tree is strong, now is a good time to defoliate either fully or partially. This forces smaller leaves and further ramification.

If you have double flush pines like red and black pines, June is the time to decandle the candles. By cutting candles, the tree will replace those candles with a second flush of new and smaller candles which then give you smaller needles. If you have single flush pines like white pines do not cut the candles. If they are very long, you can break them in half, but generally, I just leave them be until fall.

Juniper foliage can be thinned. Grasp the branch and pull the tip downward exposing how the branchlets come off the sides of the branch. Almost for sure you have too many. Thin some of the shoots. This opens up your foliage to air and sun. Remove any weak or yellowing foliage. Check your junipers for mites and other critters.

Tropicals should be outside growing like crazy right now. Most tropicals should be repotted in June/July when they are growing hard. You also can defoliate them. I defoliate Willow Leaf Ficus every couple of years. The absence of leaves makes pruning shoots much easier as you can see what you are doing. You will be rewarded with smaller leaves and more and finer branching.

These ideas on pruning are general suggestions only. If you are new to bonsai or new to a given species, say Japanese maples, then ask someone in your club who has Japanese maples, precisely what to do for your tree. Same goes for pines if they are new to you, or azaleas or flowering trees in general.

It is rewarding to trim the wild spring growth of your trees. They look so refined and well groomed. So, sharpen those bonsai scissors and get to work!