

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

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



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IBA February Activities

**February 15 - IBA Meetings at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden.
909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

We'll be having the fundraising auction so members are encouraged to bring anything they don't need anymore and would like to donate to the club. We'll be auctioning Them off.

All Are Welcome.

February EIBA Activities

February 13, 6:00 - 8:00 PM, EIBA Club Board Meeting at Panera Bread on Edgewood Drive.
Topics: Prep for first Club mtg on Feb 19.

February 15, 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM. Winter Gardening Fair, Kirkwood Regional Center on Boysen Rd, Hiawatha. \$45 (Lunch included).
EIBA will give a presentation at this event and have tables in the hallway.

February 20, 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM. Club Meeting. Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd.
Topics: Collect dues. Hand out soil (bring empty bucket if you can), Discussion on Bringing Trees Out of Winter Dormancy.

Bonsai Soil Components for Sale

**Pumice \$20 for five gallons
\$15 if you bring your own Bucket.**

Akadama \$32 per bag, \$30 for members

Contact Scott Allen or Tim Peterson

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How Do I Know If I Should Repot My Bonsai?

Bonsai Smart



A black pine by Morten Albek with a broken pot showing the root mass is ready to be potted

This is a question we ask ourselves annually every spring and we ask it regarding about half of our bonsai tree collection. It is a simple question, is it not? But the answer can be very complex. There are so many factors involved in deciding whether a tree needs repotting. Do not expect a simple straight

forward definitive answer from me. I will, however, offer help with the thought process required to answer the question for you and your tree.

Sometimes it is easiest to know when NOT to repot a tree. If your tree is healthy, growing well, accepts and drains water easily, then leave the tree alone and ask again next year whether your tree should be repotted. I have a tendency to repot a bit too often. Many of the top bonsai people think in terms of every three years. However, do not repot just because your timetable says, "It's time!". There should always be a reason you are repotting. Repotting is stressful to a tree. Removing soil, cutting roots, adding all new soil will slow down the growth of your tree for a few weeks. Why add risk to your tree if there is not a good reason to repot?

Now, what are some good reasons to repot a bonsai?

1. Your tree's growth and activity has slowed down and it has been a couple of years or more since you have repotted. This is especially true if your tree is in poor soil.

2. Water does not penetrate the surface of your soil easily. Water should not pool up or run off the top of your soil. Add some water and watch it soak in. It should do so within seconds.

3. Water does not drain from your soil freely.

4. Your soil does not dry out as quickly as it used to. If the top surface is still wet the next day you have issues. If you suspect root rot, deal with it quickly which often means repot quickly.

5. You cannot push a chopstick into the root ball easily due to packing of roots and breakdown and compaction of soil. If your chopstick cannot get into your soil, neither will water and air easily enter.

6. Your tree is new to you and has soil that is not your soil mix ie native soil or nursery soil. Put it in new soil so you know what soil it is in and how that soil behaves when watering. With pines, you should only replace about half of the old soil at a repotting. Do not bare root conifers.

7. How old is your tree? Younger trees usually require more frequent repotting. Mature bonsai, not so often.

8. What species is your tree? Tropicals may require annual repotting. Pines can go 3-5 years. Deciduous somewhere in between.

9. You have a wonderful new pot for your tree and you think the tree maybe needs repotting, but you are not sure, well go for it. Get your tree into an appropriate sized pot, not too big, not too small.

10. You want to restyle your tree and give it a new front or a new angle of inclination. If your tree definitely is not ready to repot, simply mark the new front and angle and wait another year. If your tree maybe needs repotting, then go ahead and repot to your new front and new angle.

Good soil and repotting can make all the difference to your tree. But, again, do not repot just to repot. Have a solid reason for why your tree needs repotting. If your tree is doing fine and the soil is functioning well, do your tree a favor and allow it to remain strong and happy in its current soil and container.

But, if you suspect your tree and its soil meet some of the above conditions, then repot. Use the best soil you can, root prune appropriately though not too aggressively, tie your tree in well, keep it away from strong spring winds, do not fertilize for 3 or 4 weeks, then your tree should really begin to push new growth. Your tree should be happy and beautiful for a long time in its new environment – enjoy it!



Medium sized Japanese beech from a cutting taken 20 years ago.



Tokoname Pots

John Denny and Bonsai Empire

I ran across a great source of information about the world famous bonsai pots made under the Tokoname label. Bonsai Empire has a blog post with a long article discussing how these pots are made. The post has many photos without being too wordy. Also, there is a 20 minute video named *“The Clay Masters of Tokoname”* where you meet the fourth, fifth, sixth generation potters and watch them work as you learn the various ways Tokoname pots are made. There are many steps along the pot making process. If you like pots, trust me, you will like this blog post. I will whet your interest by sharing just the beginning of the post. To view the full blog post, all the photos, and the video, go to this site:

<https://www.bonsaiempire.com/blog/tokoname-pots>

Tokoname Pots by Bonsai Empire

Tokoname is a medium sized city located in the Aichi Prefecture, Japan. It is one of the six famous old kilns of Japan, producing tea pots, sewer pipes and... Bonsai pots.

Though Tokoname was famous for its clay (Tokoname literally means “Always smooth”), much of that has ran out and what remains are highly skilled craftsman, with a reputation for quality Bonsai containers, both glazed and unglazed. Not too long ago the Tokoname region had dozens of Bonsai potteries, but with the bust of the Japanese economy and declining interest in Bonsai in Japan, the potters too experienced difficult times. Right now about a dozen kilns remain, with fourth and fifth generation artists creating the pots. Invited by the Tokoname association, we shot a documentary

Kokufu Award,
Sargent juniper



Hinoki cypress?



Highly ramified Trident?
Quite a base.



Tokoname Pots - continued

on the true craftsmanship of the Tokoname potters. Focusing on the process of creating a Bonsai pot, we filmed six artists in their ateliers.

(The video “Clay Masters of Tokoname” can be found at this point in the actual blog post. Highly recommended viewing.)

Process of creating Bonsai pots

Here’s an overview of the steps involved in creating a Bonsai pot.

Step 1: Preparing the clay



At the Atelier of Tokoname clay they import, mix, purify and distribute all the clay for the all potters in Tokoname. For different types of pottery, there are different types of clay and the potters can customize their own mixture for the best characteristics.

Once the clay is at the potter, it will be kneaded by both hand and machine to enable the potter to work with it. Normally a potter uses a machine to make the clay more soft and then knead it in the right shape.



Next, there are three different ways to shape a

pot. We’ll explain the shaping with a mould first and after that describe how the wheel and manual methods work.

Step 2a: Shaping with a mould



The slab of clay is created by kneading the clay thoroughly and then creating thin layers by running a thin steel wire across the clay.



The slab is then rolled onto a pipe to transport it to the mould.



Finally, the slab is then pushed and shaped into the mould using a sand bag. Excess clay on the inside

Tokoname Pots - continued

is now removed using a spatula, to make sure the thickness of the clay is uniform. The moulded pot then needs to dry for a day, before the mould can be removed. Usually this is the moment to add the stamp on the bottom of the pot, as well as creating holes for drainage. Finally, with some moulds the rim also needs to be added manually.

Step 2b: Shaping with a wheel

Using the wheel is probably the method that we always think of when talking about pottery. The potters show incredible craftsmanship when creating the perfect shape for the bonsai pot.

While the feet of the pot are automatically created when using a mould, the potter that uses the wheel as a shaping method, needs to create this separately (usually after one day of drying first).

even become beautiful. Scaling up the tree in trunk diameter and overall size changes many things. (Potters know this one too, that your ugliest pot off the wheel is often the most beautiful of all when it's fired.)

The elephantine branch on the right was shortened and an extension off the top was removed, along



with selective removal of some strong shoots. Like all of these, the pot is a grow pot and we don't pay attention to aesthetics.

With early deciduous trees, limit wiring to trunk and



main branch lines, and as much as possible use the natural movements of the species to create form. The most effective way of developing bulk and ramification is to leave more than you think when doing seasonal pruning.

All of these still look messy, we haven't improved the look of the trees much. But that isn't the point of this phase of work. And to leave them in this disheveled, uninspiring state we'll really need to believe in our ugly duckling to swan storyline... as we'll need to relate the story with conviction to bonsai friends who will be wondering what the heck we were thinking.



Step 2c: Shaping with clay slabs

Editor: At this point, the article goes on, but this is about all I can squeeze into this month's newsletter. So, check out the blog post at Bonsai Empire. Web address is:

<https://www.bonsaiempire.com/blog/tokoname-pots>