

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

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

April 2020

Volume 68, Issue 4



IBA April Activities

All IBA Club meetings and Board meetings are canceled this month due to Covid - 19.

We hope that you and your trees stay healthy and we will see you soon when this is over.

EIBA April Activities

All Board Meetings and Club Meetings have been canceled.

We suggest members stay in touch with each other through email chains and discuss bonsai goings on, ask questions, offer items for sale, etc. Stay in touch! Keep our bonsai community vibrant during tough times.

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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

Repotting Tips

From Michael Hagedorn

Many trees like their roots far away from anything saturated, which is the bottom of the pot. Two in particular, pines and azaleas. And in muddling about the Western bonsai world I've been haunted by the number of pines planted in very shallow containers.



The pine that Matt Reel is working on is in a deep pot, and this is typical for pines. This has as much to do with horticulture as aesthetics.

'Rules' are slippery things, as anything in bonsai has exceptions. So consider this a 'slippery-rule', a 'you might want to consider', and not necessarily a 'darn it you'd better do it or get swatted with a bamboo chopstick' sort of offering—but please, in general, get your conifers, particularly pines, in deeper pots, and your deciduous might go in shallower ones because you can get away with it horticulturally.



This maple in Shinji Suzuki's tokonoma is in a pot typical of this kind of tree. It works better aesthetically, in two ways. A shallow pot will make the nebari continue spreading, and the delicacy of the trunks is enhanced by a shallower pot. But a maple is also a tree that appreciates water. And a shallow pot will retain more moisture than a deeper one, in a soil-to-soil relative way. It's a wetter pot.

Now the disclaimers. Breathe in. (That's for me). You can certainly plant your pine in a shallow pot (loud thwack of a chopstick on my fingers), but consider mounding it. Mounding and getting live moss established will help greatly in drying out the root ball the way a pine wants it. Mounding helps drain excess water, and moss prevents excessive drying of the surface, which might sound like an oxymoron but it works.

The happy zone of any tree is fairly specific. The top often dries out a lot. The bottom might stay too wet. And the pine likes the middle zone. So most pots for pines should be deeper to broaden that happy zone. Or, if you mound a tree by 3" above the lip in a 3" pot, then you've essentially given the tree 6" of growing space and a fairly broad happy zone. Shallow pots for conifer bunjin, clumps, and forests are good examples where mounding is appropriate and often used.

Pine in a shallow pot, mounded. Without an **erosion free and water retentive surface**, however, like live moss, mounding is unlikely to be a happy equation. Happy potting!



Bonsai Shelter in Place

John Denny

I have always loved repotting season. It is my favorite part of the annual bonsai cycle. My trees get fresh soil, root pruning improvements, sometimes a better front or inclination, often a fine new pot! But, the past couple of repotting seasons have been quite the personal challenge. Let me explain.

Last year, in late February, I suddenly had to have heart surgery. For eight weeks, I was limited to lifting no more than five pounds per hand. You have seen my trees. While not feeling well, about all I was able to work on were potting up some shohin pines I had grown from seedlings. They looked good in their nice ceramic pots after several years growing girth in nursery pots. Todd Schlafer came for two days and helped pot up a couple of big trees. Dear friend, Bill Englert, helped me pot a larger deciduous tree. But, that was it. I left at least a dozen and a half trees untouched. Those trees needed repotting this year for sure.

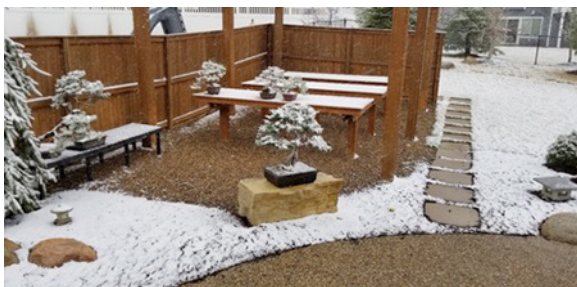
Not so scary, really. I had repotted a lot of trees over the past fifteen years. But, having a friend or

Bonsai Shelter in Place - continued

mentor is exceptionally helpful. Especially for a guy who has lost much of his vision. A friend can help you lift the big trees. He can make soil blends while you take the tree out of the pot. He can help chopstick soil away on the opposite side of the tree and the process speeds up. She can help you decide on the perfect front and then hold the tree in place while you tie it down. She can chopstick soil into the opposite side, Finally, your friend can complement your tree's new look and take a photo before you add shredded moss to the top and water the tree in.

Working with a mentor like Todd or Gary Wood, assures your tree gets the best repotting possible. Todd can explain why my front is not as good as his front. He shows me new ways to tie in trees, new uses for a tool, and explains how this particular tree should be taken care of and when it will be wired. I love learning and I really like knowing my trees are repotted properly. And some days, it is just great to hang out with a friend working on trees and talking about life as you work. All of that was not available this year. So, I forged onward. Me, my tools, soils, pots, wire, and trees. If I needed help, I had to choose between asking the Wisconsin wife or Ellie, the 12 month old puppy on caffeine drip.

I moved some of my pines and junipers outside to my cedar benches just to create more room in the garage and to clear an opening to get at all of my bags and buckets of various soils. My first trees outside were promptly greeted by Mother Nature.



I began to warm up with a few small deciduous trees. Things went well until I was watering in a

small tree in a round pot. Boy, I missed centering that tree by a fair amount. Could have used a friend on that one!

I have grown several shohin Zelkovas from seedling. Most are in Sara Raynor pots, but I had two that I had air layered the tops off of and now the base trees were ready to be cut back and placed in pots. Here is a photo of the tree with roots. Quite a major root removal job. I ended up with a different pot, sized in between the two in the photo. With good after care, the trees should survive.



I cranked out a few trees a day and finished 27 deciduous trees without much concern. My old fingers did not like the cold and my old eyes needed more light in the garage. But, I was ready for pines.

I began with one of several seedlings I had grown for five to eight years in nursery pots. I thought it turned out nice. The tree has left and right branches, a new leader which is hard to see which will hide the scar when I remove the rest of the sacrifice branch, and a back branch. If I can get a few new buds to pop, the tree can be very nice down the road. In hindsight, I wish I had waited another year or two and let the tree attain more girth and begin to bark up which happens about 8 or 9 years of age.

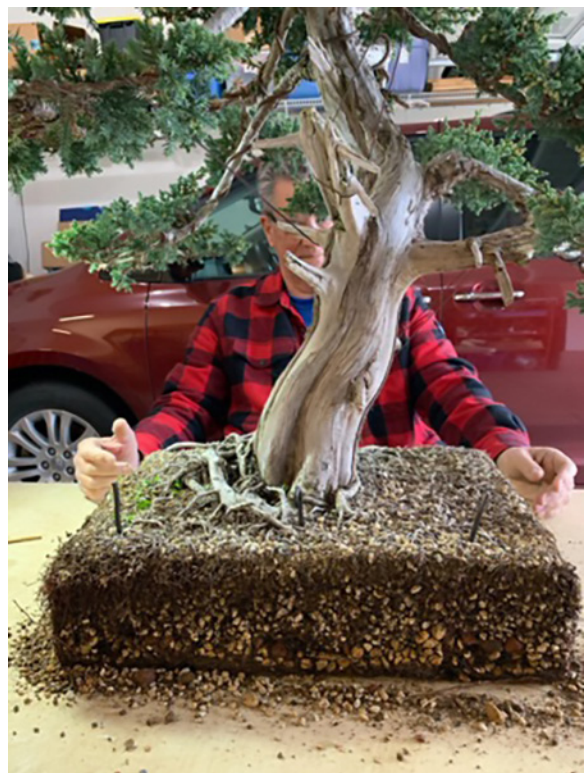


I finished up a couple of larger pines and moved on to smaller junipers which went well. I saw lots of nice healthy roots. Then it was time to work on a couple of big boys. I broke down and had to ask my wife to help out. The two trees were a large tall Prostrata and my Blue Alps. Both are currently beautifully wired by Todd Schlafer, so I had to be extra careful not to screw up the wired branches. Thus, I needed a helper to hold the trees on their sides while I worked. The Prostrata went well, though Gail complained of her sore back having to hold the big tree in an awkward position. I raced as fast as I could, since I still needed her for the Blue Alps the following day. We finished the tree. After watering in, I was not too happy with the top of the tree which was not forward enough. Oh, well. About two hours later I realized I had made a real bone headed mistake while working so fast. Three years back, I bought a pot online. It arrived the day I was going to pot the tree with Gary Wood. Gary noticed a slight crack in the corner of the pot. We potted it anyway. It looked good. I received a new pot and have saved it for three years waiting for the day I could use it to replace the pot with the slight crack. In my haste, I forgot my plan and simply put it right back in the cracked pot! Well, that pot lasted through all of the heat and cold for three years without issue, so I trust it will last another three or four. At least I have a back-up.

The next day we tackled the Blue Alps. Since it had been watered recently, I was not even able to lift it by myself. Ellie is just a puppy, so I had to ask you know who to stop sewing potentially lifesaving masks and come help me lift a very heavy and prickly tree. Speaking of Ellie, she slipped out the garage door while I was moving a five gallon bucket of stain. The chase was on. Up the street, down the street, chasing kids, running every time I came close, ignoring my every command. I tried, "Treat!", "Walk! Let's go for a walk!" That got her attention, but not action. I even laid on the ground playing dead (yes, in some neighbor's front yard with them all watching),

calling, "Ellie, come find me." Nope. She ran further each time. I met a lot of neighbors and their kids. A mom finally corralled her in a garage. It had been a long exciting afternoon adventure for Ellie. I brought Ellie home and took a nap.

Okay, back to the Blue Alps. Here is a photo of the tree out of the pot. What a root system! Nary a single piece of soil fell out of the root ball which held its shape perfectly. This tree was going into a smaller pot. You can see the thick wires I placed to show me the front and also to show how much soil and roots I would have to remove. I took a heavy duty putty knife Todd had suggested I buy last year and used it to chop down through the roots. It worked extremely well, much better and faster than using any of my now dulled root shears. Good tip, Todd. The tree dropped into the new pot perfectly and we drove home some bamboo stakes into the root pad and wired the tree into the pot. It looks good in its new pot. Plus, I could lift it now!



The Blue Alps was my 40th tree of the 2020 Shelter in Place Repotting season. Whew! Next year will seem like a breeze. I hope!



One last photo of my “team”.

Timley Tips

John Denny

What is going on in your bonsai garden this time of year? Or what should be? Trees have awakened from their slumbers of winter. Many have been repotted at this point. So, what do our trees need in April?

Leaves have opened for most species. They need sunlight. Pines should be outside by now soaking up rays which helps them create the energy they need. I also have junipers and spruce outside.

My deciduous trees are pushing leaves, but since I have so many, I do not want to take them outside for fear of a cold night when I would have to haul them all back inside. A major task. So, I keep them in a well lit garage. I keep the garage door open when I can to add more light. If I only had a few deciduous trees, I would put them out, then watch the night time temps closely. On those nights predicted to drop below freezing, I would bring the deciduous trees inside for protection.

For trees I have recently repotted, I am keeping them in the garage so their roots can recover prior to putting them out into wind and heat where the

trees can transpire moisture faster than the new roots can replace it.

My tropicals, I keep indoors until night time lows remain above 50-55F. I do occasionally bring them out on a warm day for sun. However, it is easy to get distracted and forget to bring them inside at the end of the day. The sun helps them, but don't leave them out.

This time of year I fertilize lightly with fish emulsion or Bonsai Pro which is 5-6-5. Just enough to get the trees started growing.

Keep your trees watered, especially when it is windy. Water helps in two ways. One, of course, is for the health of the tree. As mentioned, wind can remove a lot of moisture from both trees and the soil directly. Additionally, water makes your pots heavier, which keeps trees upright – a position trees prefer!

Lastly, enjoy the fresh new growth of your trees in spring. It is one of the prettiest times of the year!