

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

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



February 2021

Volume 75, Issue 1

"I sometimes think that bonsai is just the art of making the best out of what went wrong and then convincing yourself you like it that way." Andy Smith, "What Could Possibly Go Wrong?," *American Bonsai Society Newsletter*, July 2020.

Bonsai Soil Components for Sale

Pumice \$20 for five gallons

\$15 if you bring your own Bucket.

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

BioGold fertilizer from Japan

\$92.50 per 5kg bag

Contact Scott Allen or Tim Peterson

Inside This Issue

From the Editor	1
From the IBA and EIBA Presidents	2
Introduction of the Staff	3-4
Timely Tips	4-5
Noah's Arc (<i>Arc of Knowledge</i>)	6-7
Bonsai Heresy: A Book Review	8-10
Name That Tree	10

Corporate Sponsor

DaSu Bonsai Studios



www.bonsaitrees.com/

From the Editor

Gear up for Spring and a whole new year of bonsai! Your trees know nothing about COVID-19 – they are going forward with their lives. May you be carried along in the excitement of that! As you know, we have some changes on the Newsletter staff. I have the privilege of serving as your Editor and as a contributing writer. Noah Butler will be a regular contributor. Dave Richmond continues to handle the layout. John Denny continues with the Newsletter in an advisory capacity and you will see some reruns from his Timely Tips printed in prior years. This is always good information for those who are new to Bonsai and a good reminder for those who are not. Remember that prior Newsletters are available on the Iowa Bonsai Association website www.iabonsai.org

We hope you enjoy the first issue of the IBA/EIBA Newsletter of 2021. Remember that this is your club! If you have ideas, thoughts or comments, we'd love to hear from you. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

Susan Daufeldt

scdaufeldt@icloud.com

sdaufeldt@daufeldtlawfirm.com

(319) 430-3822

From the IBA and EIBA Presidents

IBA

Good day members and friends. It's a new year (thankfully) and I'm looking forward to Spring thaw and the awakening of my trees.

As I'm sure you all are! 2020 was a crazy year and I hope you're all doing well and we're on a path back to some sort of normalcy. The IBA is hoping to resume club meeting on Apr 17th but we will continue to follow CDC recommendations regarding public gatherings. I'm also scheduling a couple workshops for mid-summer and late-fall which will also depend on where we're at with the pandemic.

Don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns you might have regarding Bonsai. We are here to help.

Here's wishing you, yours, and your tree's the best in 2021.

Scott Allen

Scott@vividpix.com



Scott Allen, IBA President

EIBA

At this time and because of the situation with COVID 19, the Board has made no firm plans for the coming year except the following:

- (1) The Board will meet February 11, 2021, via Zoom, at 6:30 pm to reevaluate the situation; and
- (2) On Saturday, February 20, from 10 am until Noon, the Club will be collecting dues from and dispensing soil to members at Peirsons Greenhouse on Ellis Blvd. NOTE: This will happen during AL's winter orchid sale!!! Don't miss out!! I look forward to seeing you then!

Please feel free to call or email me with any questions or ideas for the coming year.

Susan Daufeldt

scdaufeldt@icloud.com

sdaufeldt@daufeldtlawfirm.com

(319) 430-3822



Susan Daufeldt, EIBA President

Introduction of the Staff

Editor

Susan Daufeldt

Susan Daufeldt grew up on an Iowa farm. She is a self-taught naturalist and horticulturalist with an academic background in sculpture and metal working. Susan fell into bonsai by accident in the spring of 2014 and immediately began collecting and dreaming of bonsai developed from native Iowa material. She is deeply grateful for years of Gary Wood's patient instruction in the art and the support of and instruction gained through the Iowa and Eastern Iowa Bonsai Associations.



Susan Daufeldt

Art Director

David Richmond

David Richmond is an Emeritus Professor of Art at Simpson College, Indianola, IA, with an academic teaching background in photography and design. He has been involved in bonsai for the past fifteen years and thinks of it as a four-dimensional art form – it has three-dimensional characteristics, but, he notes, the fourth dimension, time, is a critical aspect of the art.



David Richmond

Columnist

Noah Butler

Noah Butler has been interested in bonsai for 25 years. Five years ago he got serious. He thinks of himself as a beginner who is working hard to develop intermediate skills and understanding. He is an educator, researcher and experimentalist and a life-long learner who is inherently curious about “how things work.” The information in his articles comes directly from his interactions with professionals such as Todd Schlafer, Jennifer Price, Ryan Neil, Jonas Dupuich, Bjorn BJORHOLM and Michael Hagadorn and from seasoned bonsai practitioners.



Noah Butler

Columnist

John Denny

John Denny bought his first bonsai tree 18 years ago. He studied in Portland with Michael Hagedorn attending several Seasonals. John mentored for many years with Gary Wood and more recently with Todd Schlafer who studied under Ryan Neil. He has made many trips to Brussels Rendezvous, doing numerous workshops with top instructors from around the world. He has shared his knowledge through editing the joint IBA/EIBA Newsletter for many years. John's bonsai philosophy is, "Nurturing living things on a daily basis is good for one's soul."



John Denny

Name that Tree

Can you tell what kind of tree this is?
(Answer at the End of the Newsletter)



Timely Tips

John Denny

It has been cold and very snowy lately. But take heart bonsai enthusiasts. Repotting season for many begins in the first half of March if your trees are kept in a garage. Those whose trees are kept outdoors must wait a few weeks longer. Do you know which trees you plan to repot? Do you have to order any new pots? Better hurry. Do you have soil? Tie in wire of the proper size (usually 1.5 or 2.0mm)? You may want some

sphagnum moss that you can shred to cover your newly potted trees. How about root pruning scissors or other tools for the repotting season?

Generally, we repot deciduous trees first. Ideally, the right time is when the tree is preparing to break and root tips just begin to push. The tips will show white. You can wait a bit later in the month to repot your other species.

Repotting a bonsai tree might be the single most important bonsai technique you can perform on your bonsai tree. Fresh soil and good root pruning can rejuvenate your tree. It will set your tree up for the next two to four years. Use good soil, the best you can find or afford. Do a good job root pruning. In general remove about a third of the roots. You want to keep the fine roots. Prune away the big heavy roots. If you have long stringy root systems, then you likely need better bonsai soil. If you have an older, established tree, the current repotting practice is to leave the central root ball intact, teasing out and removing roots on the outside or removing soil from only one half or one-third of the root ball during a given repotting season. This can be species specific (see below). This is a good time to review credible sources on the internet for information on repotting particular species.

When repotting, make sure you tie your tree in so it is very solid in the pot. It should not wiggle. If it does, then the wind will move the tree and tear up the tender new roots just as they are trying to become established. Water your tree in very well. Some soil components like Turface or bark don't absorb water well if they are initially completely dry. Water your tree for two or three minutes, let it sit, and water it again. For freshly repotted trees, especially deciduous, I like to shred sphagnum moss over a rough, open soil screen and add that to the top surface. Water it lightly, so it will settle and form a nice layer that stays put.

Remember, once you have repotted a tree, keep it protected for a few weeks. Deciduous trees can stay indoors for a time. They may begin to push new leaves, which means they need light. If you can get them outside for some sun that will help them, but the new shoots will be very tender and can't handle the frosts of early spring. That means you will have to bring them back inside on cold nights below freezing.

Pines can go outside much earlier than deciduous if you have not repotted them. They can handle some colder nights, though not too far below freezing. If you have repotted a pine, keep it protected for a couple weeks until

the roots have had a chance to get going. Remember with pines you do not want to remove all the soil during repotting. Leave 40 to 50% of the soil in place. Pines benefit from a beneficial fungus, mycorrhiza, which grows on the roots. Leaving half the soil, means half of the mycorrhiza remains to help the tree. Junipers can be repotted after the deciduous trees have been repotted.

Do not fertilize any newly repotted tree for three weeks. Keep all repotted trees out of strong spring winds. After root pruning, trees will have limitations in drawing water from the soil to the foliage. Heavy spring winds can both dry the soil rapidly and take too much moisture from the foliage. They can do this faster than the new roots can keep up. So, protect them from wind. Also, introduce your trees to the sun gradually the first week. Sunburn can happen quickly and be very damaging.

Spring is a great time of year to work with your trees. It is exciting to watch them come to life. Do all you can to help them during this rather vulnerable time in early spring.

Noah's Arc of Learning

Noah Butler

Article I: Leaning Towards Larch

In the preparation of this article, I am indebted to Todd Schlafer and the folks at Bonsai Empire and Bonsai Mirai. My thanks to them for sharing their knowledge and expertise concerning the care and maintenance of Larch as bonsai.

Larch make beautiful bonsai. As true beauties, they're one of the few deciduous conifers. Larch foliage turns a brilliant yellow in the fall before the needles drop, making for a spectacular autumnal show (Fig. 1). Larch are also great bonsai material because they are tough and fast-growing, so branches and trunks thicken relatively rapidly and bonsai development occurs within years, rather than decades.



Fig. 1. Larch forest in autumnal colors.

Photo credit: Mariusz Folda of IBUKI Studio Bonsai & Ceramics

Common species for bonsai cultivation include the Japanese larch (*Larix kaemferi*) the European larch (*Larix decidua*) and the American larch (a.k.a. Tamarack, *Larix laricina*). Each make excellent bonsai and they only differ by subtle colorations in the twigs and small branches, which appear red-to-purple on Japanese species and straw yellow on European/America species.

Larch are also great for bonsai because each of these species are pest and disease resistant and very forgiving of hard root reductions, heavy bends, and drastic pruning. Moreover, there is almost always something to work on, so they keep those with fewer trees engaged throughout the growing season.

There's really only two things that larch will not tolerate: 1) dry soil; and 2) re-potting at the wrong time. But we'll cover those matters.

Sun and positioning: Larch love full sun and do well in heat, as long as they're kept sufficiently watered. The only time larch need protection from intense sun (and temps above 90 F) is after a heavy late-spring or summer prune, as foliage removal also reduces the tree's cooling system of evapotranspiration, or water loss through the foliage.

Substrate and re-potting: Because larch are moisture-loving trees, 100% akadama is a great choice. Larch do not tolerate drying out! If using other volcanic clays, consider adding pumice and some organic material, such as pine bark, to appropriately increase water retention. The timing for spring re-potting is absolutely critical. Larch should only be re-potted after a tiny bit of green is visible in the buds (Fig. 2). Re-potting before buds show green, or after buds fully break, is very stressful to larch. Keep a close eye on them in the spring if you're planning to re-pot. Larch will also tolerate 40-50% reduction of root mass, so settling nursery stock into bonsai pots is generally not a problem.



Fig. 2. Larch buds tell you when it's time to re-pot.

Photo credit: Robert Nocher, Shohin Bonsai.

Pruning: General overview — The goal for larch is to get 3-4 flushes (rounds of elongating growth) each year. Each subsequent flush after every pruning session should yield tighter internodes between buds, thereby building ramification. (Fig. 3). Don't cut too close to a bud (or whorl of buds at base) when pruning. Leave a ¼". Buds on new, fleshy shoots are small, but appear as caramel-colored, so you should be able to spot them. Each pad should reflect a triangular shape, so consider this when pruning. Intervals between the flushes and pruning is about 3-4 weeks, so flushes do not need to lignify. Just cut back fleshy growth. Also note that larch do not readily back-bud on old wood, so protect buds on branches close to the trunk, as you might need those shoots later.

First flush: Let the first flush run in the spring until late April or early May. The first flush will nearly always have very long internodes between buds. Every single shoot of the first flush has a series of buds at the base (Fig. 3). Cut back to this whorl of buds. The second flush will emerge there.

Second flush: Late May or early June will be the second pruning, or about 3-4 weeks after first. Multiple shoots may have emerged from the whorl, so select 1 or 2 laterally positioned shoots and remove the others growing either straight up or down. Prune above the first set of paired buds on shoots that you've selected (Fig. 3). Note: if your tree requires elongation and development, prune to the second or third set of buds, or do not prune at all. When these shoots reach the desired thickness AND the desired length that reflects the silhouette, then prune to sets of buds positioned to match the pad silhouette.

Third/fourth flushes: The third and fourth pruning sessions will occur in early July and early August, respectively. As before, cut back to tight internodes (Fig. 3). Do not do any pruning after mid-August. Make sure the tree has enough time to re-charge and mobilize sugars before winter dormancy.

Wiring and styling: General styling characteristics — In the late winter or early spring before bud break, wire pads and sub-pads on individual branches such that they are staggered and layered (Fig. 4). Copper wire is best for holding power. Inner shoots growing upward are valuable to build the "cloud" shape of the mature pad, so do not cut them entirely off. But do cut back to buds to keep them compact. Larch thicken fast, so be aware of the wiring biting in deeply as summer and fall approach— if you wired in the spring, you might have to unwire and wire again, or wait to re-wire next spring. Guy-wires are also effective.

Fertilizing: Any organics, such as BioGold or fish emulsion, are great. Do not fertilize in spring, either before or during the initial flush. Only fertilize after the first pruning of the first flush. Fertilize heavily (after first flush) in order to get that 4th flush.

I hope this overview and pictorial guide has sparked an interest in larch. And if you already have larch in your collection, perhaps you'll feel more confident about turning it into a prized specimen with tight ramification and delicate branching. If you have questions, comments or clarifications, please let me know. I would also be happy to hear your suggestions about topics for future articles. Send your questions and suggestions to noahsullivanbutler@gmail.com

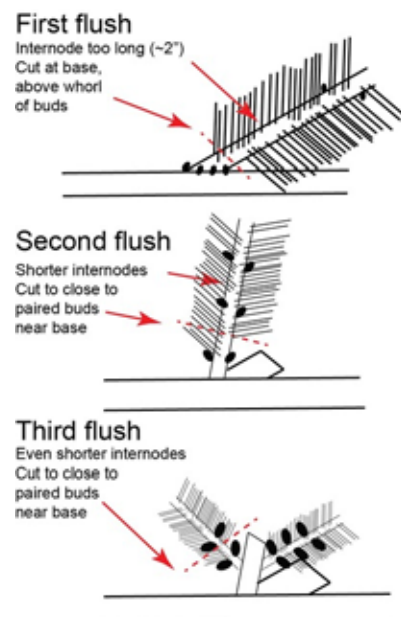


Fig. 3. Flush pruning larch to build ramification and fine branching.



Fig. 4. Larix styled with staggered, triangular pads. Photo credit: Bonsai Empire..

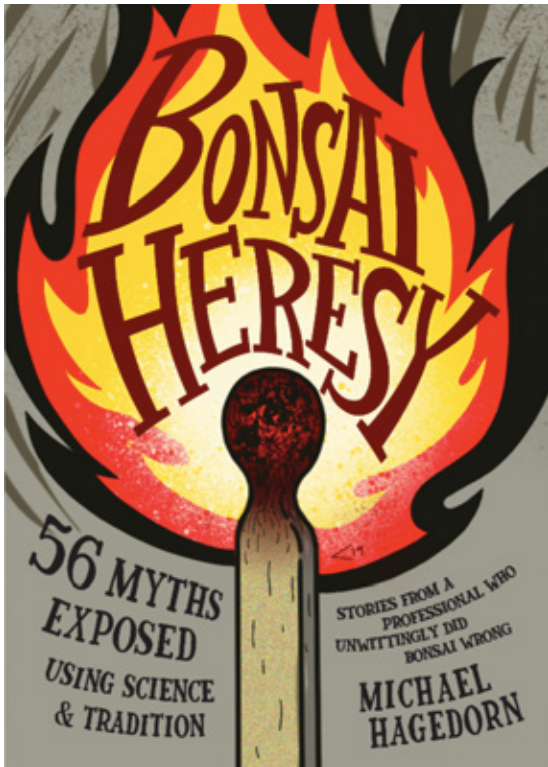
Book Review – *Bonsai Heresy* (Hagedorn, 2020)

Susan Daufeldt

“To a ten year old, my family’s position that Dinosaurs were real yet Dragons were not was an annoying splitting of hairs.” (p 11)

It was December 28, 2020, and I wanted to be in the woods when the snow began. The ubiquitous “they” were predicting nine inches, to begin at 1 pm. I was deep in the woods by 12:30, visiting old friends among the trees, viewing coyote tracks and hunting for signs of mink along a frozen stream bed. There was a snowflake. Then there were two more. Then it became a matter of urgency to get out of the woods and getting home safely became a matter for urgent prayer. After two hours of shoveling snow, trying desperately to keep our thankfully short driveway open so that my husband could get in the drive when he came home from work, I felt that I had earned an evening reading by the fireside.

My husband and I bought our own Christmas gifts this year. This excellent strategy resulted in each of us getting exactly what we wanted. In my case, it was *Bonsai Heresy* (Hagedorn, 2020) and a set of hand carving tools from Stone Lantern. While the darkness settled in and the snow continued to fall, I settled in to read this very thought provoking book.



Bonsai Heresy, book cover

The cover has a picture of a flaming match and beneath the title, “56 Myths Exposed Using Science & Tradition; Stories from a Professional Who Unwittingly Did Bonsai Wrong.” Between sections of the text the picture of the match reoccurs, making my fireside choice seem just that much more appropriate.

Bonsai Heresy is a deeply thought provoking book filled with technical information, instructive anecdote and Michael’s captivatingly whimsical humor. In a brief introduction, he provides some background and states that, “Bonsai Heresy has several goals in mind. First, to help us unlearn and rethink past notions; second, to tease apart bonsai tradition from invented approaches or ideas that are filling the ignorance void; and third, to find the exceptions to the rule that are nevertheless as important as the rule.” (p 5) He also acknowledges that his discussion of these topics may cause discord and admits to an impulse to put “a simple Post-it Note on the front door,” reading: “Michael? He’s off insulting some perfectly nice bonsai folk in Acapulco. Please leave a note under the door” (p 7) - This to avoid the angry attacks of those who hold sacred some of those past notions, invented approaches and ideas.

In the technical introduction of the book, Michael addresses the myth that bonsai methods should be exclusively based on science. “Labs,” he says, “I practically grew up in one.” As the child of an entomologist, he ultimately learned all about grants and the necessity of funding in the arena of science. Because science is so expensive and competitive, he explains that, “basically, scientists aren’t interested in whether one bonsai technique works better than another and this is where the great divide happens.” “[W]hat the Japanese Masters are doing is passing on a tradition that was built not on the scientific method ... but by the alternative cheap and easy and communal anecdotal method. Bonsai tradition is the sum of many people

bumbling around trying things.” (p 14). Michael makes a strong case for the value and importance of anecdotal discovery, but is careful to distinguish between valuable anecdotal discovery and fantasy.

He writes, “We shouldn’t get overly attached to scientific results; as my colleague wildlife arborist Brian French says with a smile, “Science is 90% correct,” suggesting it’s a fluid process and is most helpfully a guide to the next question. And investigative process that builds on past knowledge is, by default, incomplete. And though well documented anecdote is certainly useful for adding to our bonsai knowledge and forms the basis for tradition, the dissemination of untested observations can muddy the anecdotal waters with false ideas. (p 17-18).

This is exciting to me. If we knew everything (science) there would be nothing left to learn. As it is, we don’t. And that leaves the way open to a lot of and interesting study through observation. But we need to be careful in that process.

As the evening progressed, somewhere around page 75, when I was wondering if it is really dark under the snow (and if it’s NOT dark under the snow, how much light gets through and what are the properties and effects of what gets through), a flaming piece of Box Elder leapt out of the grate and made a mad dash across the hearth for the living room rug. (Box Elder, in general, makes excellent, very well behaved firewood.) Having replaced the escapee in the grate and extinguished the fire on my living room rug, I continued to ponder the premise that temperate trees don’t need light in the winter. I know this to be true. I know a number of bonsai practitioners that keep their trees in complete darkness in the winter and bring lovely, healthy trees to club exhibitions every year. But I have a notion, based on observation, that while they may not need it, it may be helpful, at least in some cases and for some purposes...

My attention was very quickly diverted, however, into a fascinating discussion of DIF. DIF is the day/night temperature differential and Michael presents very interesting scientific and anecdotal information indicating that it may be as important or even more important than dormancy to temperate trees. (p 79-84).

The most exciting part of this book for me, personally, is the Black Pine Decandling Story (p 98-103). Michael writes, “The multiple-flush possibilities of Japanese black pine [] were discovered by accident. Or rather, they were discovered because a perceptive Japanese master by the name of Saichi Suzuki observed an accident. And then understood its possibilities. It was an electric event in bonsai history.” (p. 98). The story involves caterpillars. Yes: Caterpillars. And I also have a caterpillar story. I am still exploring its possibilities.

Perhaps the most deeply thought provoking portion of the book is Michael’s discussion of watering. On page 138, he lays out a temperate tree’s water usage through the growing season in bullet points. “[Water] needs will rise during hot summer weather due to increased stomal transpiration,” he writes. “But if the weather gets too hot the tree may suddenly go into summer dormancy, close its stomata, stop using water...” I stopped reading. Could it be... My mind ran back over the growing seasons. The key to a problem, perhaps. Summer dormancy. Its effect on my deciduous trees, especially the smaller ones. Iowa has greater extremes of temperature than practically anywhere else on the planet. As I continued to read, the relevance or possible relevance of summer dormancy continued to come up, here and there, and I know that I will be paying close attention throughout this next growing season and adapting my watering and fertilizing practices accordingly. (But see *The Myth of Summer Dormancy*, by Ross Clark (American Bonsai Society Newsletter, July 2020).

It is not possible to convey the wealth of information to be gleaned from this little book in the scope of this review. The thoughtful reader will pick up a multitude of practical tidbits that can be applied to our bonsai practice without loss of time. Two of my favorites occur in Michael's discussion of Wiring. Since I am primarily concerned with the development of deciduous trees, the use of "inline wires – wires that run the length of a branch and are wrapped in place with nursery tape and then bent" in order to avoid spiral scarring was of particular interest. (p. 230). And then there was this quote, which I read with heartfelt chagrin:

"Younger trees will outgrow light scarring, for the most part. Deep scarring can last even into the maturity of nearly any deciduous tree, which is why all wiring on deciduous trees should be done with an eye on the calendar, so it is taken off in a timely fashion. Marking the pots of wired deciduous trees is wise, maybe with an annoying bright fluorescent flag - or perhaps a photocopy of this book's cover - so they are not forgotten." (p 230).

Why didn't I think of that. I am almost pathologically afraid of leaving wire on deciduous trees during the growing season because, it seems that no matter how hard I try, some wire gets missed somewhere, with disastrous effects.

This has gone on long enough, but let me just say that in the second section of the book, Aesthetics, I was particularly interested in what Michael had to say about bar branches (p 275 et seq.) because I am working with a native species that just grows that way. It just does. But it has so much else to recommend it for use in the art of bonsai that I don't want to abandon it.

This is a book you should own and read many times.

Susan Daufeldt

"Doing it right will take you a long time; doing it wrong takes forever." Gary D. Wood

Name that Tree

Answer: Black Cherry, an Iowa native. Usefulness as Bonsai: Unproven. Interesting Aspects: Fabulous bark. Difficulties: Does not seem to respond well to severe pruning or root work. Has anyone worked with these trees? If you have, please let us know what your experience has been.

Email me at: scaufeldt@icloud.com.

Articles in this newsletter are the intellectual property of the authors. If information or ideas are excerpted, paraphrased or duplicated in any way, proper credit must be given to the originator. Authors of articles published here also are expected to respect intellectual property rights and to give credit to sources they use. Neither the Iowa Bonsai Association nor the Eastern Iowa Bonsai Association are responsible or liable for opinions expressed or advice given by contributors in this newsletter. The Publication Staff welcomes letters to the Editor, but reserves the right to determine whether or not publication of any and all content is appropriate and timely.