

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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IBA November Activities

November 15, 6:30 PM, IBA Membership Meeting at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden. 909 Robert D. Ray Drive Topics: Holiday Party and Auction.

EIBA November Activities

November 10, 6:30 PM, Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Dr. Topics: Upcoming Gary Wood Workshop, Planning Club Schedule and Topics.

November 17, 6:00 PM, IBA Holiday Party at Leonardo's.

See you in February, third Tuesday!

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How to Make a Bonsai Wire Caddy *Bonsai Society of Southwest Florida*

We made bonsai wire caddies last year. Here is the article we published:

List of Materials:

- ¼" diameter threaded rod approximately 20" long or as long as you require
- Eight (8) ½" plywood disks 7" diameter. The first or bottom disk can be larger – your choice.
- PVC spacers 2 3/8" diameter cut into lengths of approximately 2 1/2". If your wire is thicker then cut to longer lengths but make sure your treaded rod is also longer.
- One (1) 6" diameter lazy Susan from a home improvement center like Lowes or Home Depot.
- Two (2) threaded T nuts.
- Handle can be fabricated from wood or you can buy one from the hardware department of the home improvement center.



How To Make a Bonsai Wire Caddy - continued

Fabrication and Assembly:

- Fabricate the ½” plywood disks with a routed channel in which to fit the PVC spacers.
- Cut your PVC into desired lengths and glue them into the channels of the spacers.
- Screw on the nail clip to one end of the threaded rod and hammer into the first plywood disk. This is the base of the caddy.
- Screw on the Lazy Susan to the bottom of the base disk.
- Slide on the Plywood disks with PVC spacers onto the rod.
- Screw on the top disk with your handle.

Total cost for material is approximately \$30 depending upon your selection of the wood disks and Lazy Susan. Our plywood disks are “cabinet grade” plywood with a pre-finished surface. Luckily, we have a cabinet maker as a member of our club and he set up jigs for producing them in batches of 12. Many thanks to Craig Brown and his skills as a real carpenter...!

Amazing Bonsai Photos

Wonderful nebari holding this powerful tree to the ground. Great branch structure. And, of course, beautifully colored leaves. This tree is by German Gomez.



A Bougainvillea from Wigert's Nursery in Florida. Amazing power combined with brilliant color.



A tree we don't see every day – a Persimmon loaded with fruit. Photo by Harry Harrington taken at European Bonsai San show held in Burgundy.



What Kind of Bonsai Collector Are You?

John Denny

Do you prefer to specialize in specific types of bonsai for your collection? Or are you a “Give me one of everything, please” person?

Me? I like a smorgasbord, so give me one of each species and each size and each style. The next person may love azaleas and that is all they want. Every other species just gets in the way of their true love – beautiful azaleas! This is one of the great things about bonsai as a hobby. You can go about it any way you like.

Some people like to just do what they do best or only own what they like best. Perhaps you are new to bonsai and you only want the easiest trees to work on. Or, perhaps you hate to lose a tree so you only collect the most hardy bonsai species. Good strategies both. What areas can someone specialize? Well, I have



known Iowa collectors who will only own maples and elms, as they feel pines and junipers and flowering trees are too tricky. They have maples and elms growing in their yards and are comfortable with them. Someone else might specialize in collected mountain trees like Ponderosa pine, Rocky Mountain junipers, and various spruces. That can actually lead to a varied collection as native trees can be shaped in all manner of contortions. One could favor flowering trees, or tropical trees. Some collectors wish to focus only on classic bonsai trees like black pine, Japanese maple, and shimpaku junipers. That makes sense as there is more knowledge, experience, and examples of these trees that can lead to your success with these species.

What are some of the reasons for specializing? A little bit of good knowledge can benefit your while collection. And you will gain experience much faster on azaleas if that is all you work on. You will learn how to water your trees more accurately by limiting the varieties. You will make fewer mistakes if you have fewer varieties. Another bonus is you can find nurseries or collectors who specialize in your species. Andy Smith and Randy Knight are two of the best collectors of RMJ and Ponderosa. Stay connected to them and you have access to the best material available. If you want a narrow leaf ficus, go to Wigert’s nursery in Florida.



Find your experts who sell or who work on your species and stick with them. Another reason some folks limit themselves to a few or even one species is they can spend less cash, require less winter storage, etc. Few of us have unlimited resources, right?

On the flip side, most bonsai hobbyists can see beauty in nearly every species of bonsai and after seeing a great photo of a new species they do not own, they begin keeping an eye out for a specimen they can buy. Sometimes we have a friend who owns a great tree and we suffer from “bonsai envy”. I once heard a guy at Brussels Nursery say, “Gotta have me one of them. Just gotta. Just cuz.” Man just seems to have a collecting gene. Don’t we know people who collect political buttons, coins, stamps, tractor seats, cookie jars, old cars, juke boxes, and just plain junk? Some of us just can’t help it. It starts with trees, then pots, then viewing stones, then companion plants. I guess it is better than collecting wives, parking tickets, and beer bottles from the 80s.

So, what are the benefits of collecting a wide range of material? For some, they only collect trees that were free, nearly free, or someone else gave up on. So, they own a hodgepodge and are proud to tell you what they paid for a tree which they see as an inherent part of the tree’s beauty. That’s fine. It’s all part of the joy. Most would say owning a wide variety of trees keeps them from getting bored, or that it speeds up their learning working on many types or styles of trees. It also spreads the seasonal work out a bit. If all you own are azaleas, there are certain times of the year where you will be very busy. Variety spreads out the work. It



also spreads out the beauty. There is always something “blooming” or showing off in the bonsai yard if you have several species, whether it is the beautiful pink tinged early spring growth of Japanese maples or the May azalea flowers or the early summer lush growth of junipers and most deciduous trees. And who can say no to the beautiful fall colors. And finally we have the stark, austere, but hauntingly attractive winter silhouettes of deciduous trees. Always something to view and to work on year round if you have a wide ranging collection.

Collect it all if you can. If you cannot, then think about how you can focus your collection around ease of care, cold hardiness, or what grows best in your area. Choose what you find most attractive whether it be greenery, flowers, deadwood or whatever. The older I get, the more I think maybe I should simplify and specialize in what works and looks best for me. Naw. That would make too much sense!

In the end be who you want to be and collect what you want to collect.

How To Make Bonsai Muck

John Denny

Muck is a clay based soil substance that can be used many ways in assembling bonsai projects like forests, kokadomas, root over rock plantings, etc. This short article will not go into detail on how to use the muck in your specific project, but will introduce a formula and method for storing muck.

There are many, many recipes for muck. Basically, you mix clay with long fiber sphagnum moss that has been cut into shorter piece lengths. The ratio of these two ingredients can vary, but based on volume try three parts spag moss to 7 parts clay. Now, some people add “extras” like akadama dust, fine sand, fertilizer, corn starch, gravel particulates, etc. But you don’t have to.

Now you add water a little at a time, mixing your gooeey mass, adding more water until you get the texture of your muck to that of pie dough. Now you can use it to build soil dams, stick trees to rock, or other tasks as you create you bonsai masterpiece.

One of the questions commonly asked is where do you get your clay? Many folks have access to clay in their own yard or neighborhood. Or find a river bank to source it, or a new home construction site. Or you can find modelers clay at a hobby store or you can buy potters clay, which is cheap if you know a potter.



of “Bonsai Sausage”. The reason I did this is the way I handle it. My muck recipe is no different than the majority (50% earth clay, 35% chopped sphagnum moss and 15 % fine sand).

Any time you prepare muck it’s always a big mess. So what I do is make up a big supply at one time. After I have mixed it to the right consistency (Like pie dough) by adding water (contains Peter’s 20-20-20) slowly, I then roll it into rolls about 2” thick and about 16” long then I place each roll on plastic saran wrap/cling wrap about 22” long and then I roll it up tightly and I tie the ends together and ending up with rings that look like either bologna sausage or polish sausage rings; hence the name “Bonsai Sausage”.

Here is a short discussion I found on the site of American Bonsai Society.

by Dennis Howke

As to muck for bonsai I’ve tagged mine with the name

I take these rings and place them in a container and store them in the freezer. So a day or two before I’m going to do forest planting on a slab or a rock planting I take how many rings I figure I’m going to need from the freezer and let them thaw out and then they are ready to

Timely Tips

Is this really November? Or did we mess up Daylight Savings and “fall back” into September. It sure feels like September with warm day time temps and modest night time temps. Normally, our trees are going through a hardening off phase getting ready for winter. That process may be delayed this year.

Another thing that seems different about Fall, at least in my bonsai yard, is that many of my deciduous trees that normally show nice fall color have not done so. Instead their leaves simply turned brownish and most have fallen. We did not have our normal cold snap of frosty nights to help with that show of color. I have a few nicely colored trees – a tall hornbeam which is beautifully yellow with orange tinges, Zelkovas that are deep red, as are my Japanese maples, and of course the reliable burning bush bonsai is beginning its spectacular glow.

Leave your trees out until they get a few nights in the high 20s. They should be hardened off and ready for winter. Spray them before you bring them in. Also, if your deciduous trees are still hanging onto their leaves, cut them off. Trees like beech and hornbeams like to hang onto their leaves all winter. They can harbor pests and disease, so removing them is helpful. If you pull them instead of cutting them, do not pull too hard

or you may tear off or damage buds. On some trees, like the beech, you can gently pull the leave backwards towards the trunk and they will come off more easily. It’s a nice little trick.

Once you have your trees safely tucked away, you will have to work out your watering schedule. As always it is a balance between not too much and not too little. Remember dry and cold is a real problem for trees. But, make sure you do not keep them waterlogged either.

During winter, what else can you do regarding bonsai? Well, how about sharpening your tools for next year? Or making an organizer for your wire – find plans on the internet. You can always do some learning. There are many excellent books you can buy. Look for them at ABS (American Bonsai Society) or StoneLantern.com has a large selection. Another way to learn is YouTube. Look for videos by Bjorn Bjorholm. Bjorn is an excellent teacher and videographer. Also, check out the many good bonsai bloggers. I like Crataegus Bonsai which is Michael Hagedorn. Go to his site and read as many of his bonsai lessons as you can. He also has links to other good bonsai sites. I plan to make some tea this winter and check out a few of those sites that are new to me. Never quit learning, right?

Enjoy the winter and I will catch you on the other side!