

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
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IBA SEPTEMBER Activities

SEPTEMBER 17, 7 PM, IBA MEETING

Des Moines campus of Simpson College

Topics: *How to set-up a show*. Presenter: Alan Magruder.

Proper display technique and concepts. A well designed show displays both bonsai and companion at their best.

OCTOBER 5-6, ANNUAL FALL BONSAI SHOW

Reiman Gardens, Ames

9 am-4:30 pm, Saturday-Sunday

Back gate opens at 7 am Saturday for participant access and setup before doors open to public at 9 am. Set up on Friday from 1-4:30 pm. Exhibitors may bring their bonsais through the back door entrance Friday afternoon rather than Saturday early morning if they choose. IBA and EIBA members can enter the show free of charge.

Be selecting your bonsai for the show and be ready to notify Alan Magruder of the number of trees you are showing and the exhibition space needed. We have the same space as last year. Shohin is the show highlight, and we want to show off smaller bonsai (Shohin, chuhin, mame) as opposed to the usual steroidal biggies. However, other styles may be exhibited as well. Remember that suiseki may be exhibited in full presentation format.

EIBA SEPTEMBER Activities

September 14, 10 am, Soil Making Day at Jim Venneman's storage facility in Marion.

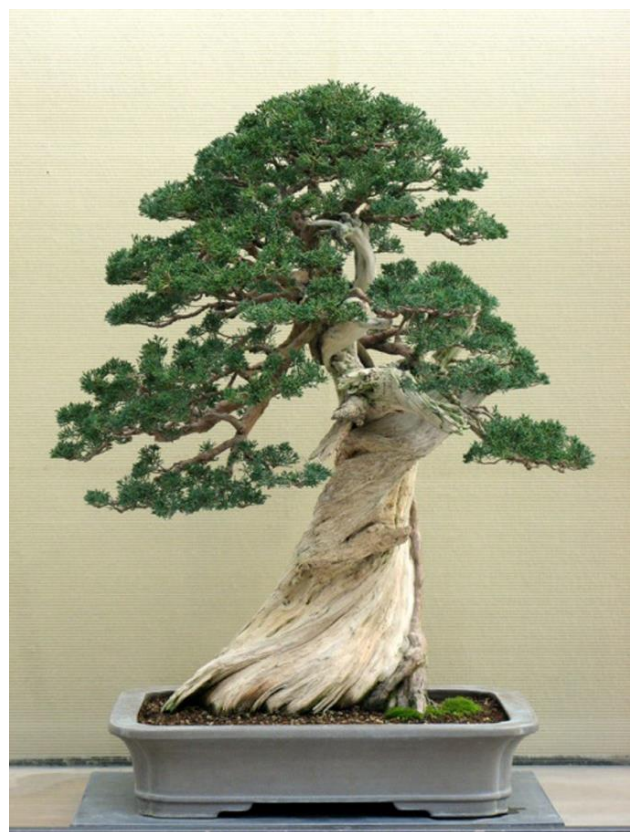
Bring 5 gallon buckets, dust mask, and a strong back. Free pizza served for lunch.

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September 19 No club meeting.

September 21, Nursery Tour for preBonsai Material. *Come find your next great tree!*



It is a juniper. Can you tell what kind? This tree is part of the Weyerhaeuser Collection in Washington state. It was worked on by Michael Hagedorn of Portland. It is a collected Sierra juniper. Photo taken from Bonsai Bark blog.

Timely Tips

What a brutally hot finish to August! I watered daily and misted at least once again later in the day. It looks like my trees made it through alright. Hope yours did as well.

My trees have slowed their growth to a crawl, but the doggone weeds have continued to grow like – well, like weeds. I have a few more pots to clear of weeds this week.

Fall is on its way. That means nice colors are coming. It also means less watering. Fall is funny, though. We can have real extremes in temperatures. Temps can still climb to summer like numbers. It can also be windy, which can pull a lot of moisture from your soil. Best to stick your finger in each pot to get a sense of whether you have to water that day. Deeper pots hold water much better than shallow pots, so make sure you water the shallow ones more often than the deep ones.

Another factor that changes in fall is fertilizing. Begin to lighten up on fertilizer. Too much nitrogen can lead to strong foliage growth late in the season. This growth may not have time to harden off before winter and you may lose limbs. Instead, use low nitrogen fertilizer. I have a fertilizer that is 0-10-10. I apply it beginning mid-September. This allows roots and future blooms to strengthen, but does not generate unwanted green growth.

Something to consider this fall is to keep your camera handy. A tree in fall color can be stunning. However, the optimum color may only last a couple of days. If you are on the look-out for each tree's perfect autumn color, snap a photo or two. Not every fall gives us great leaf color. If this is a good year, grab that camera. Plus, it is always fun to have photos of your trees that you can look back and see just how much the tree has developed under your care.

A couple additional Fall suggestions: take a hike in a wooded area and appreciate the trees and finally get yourself to the IBA Fall Show. It is a highlight on my calendar. I will see you there!

Bill Valvanis on Selecting Pots

By John Denny

Selecting good pots for your trees is not the easiest thing to do. I always start by determining how big of a pot I need. (Nothing worse than buying that special pot online in December, then finding out the pot is too small at repotting time in March.) There are many formulae for helping you decide. I have used the rule of thumb to select a pot with a length that is 2/3 the width of the tree's foliage. So, a 12" pot would serve an 18" tree. It has worked pretty well for me.

Bill Valvanis, who recently celebrated his 50th year involved in bonsai and who has authored the long running magazine, *International Bonsai*, penned a nice article entitled, *Selecting Containers for Bonsai*. He begins the discussion by offering his formula for sizing a pot. Tree height = container length + container depth. So, for a 12" tall tree, you could select a pot 10" in length and 2" in depth. Or you could select one 9" by 3". Or you could even try 11" in length by 1" in depth. In Bill's experience the proportions work well.

As usual, there are many exceptions. Flowering (think Azalea) and fruiting trees require deeper pots due to extra moisture needs. Developed bonsai are usually placed in slightly shallower pots, while undeveloped bonsai belong in larger pots to allow the tree to grow and develop faster. A literati style would require a smaller pot than the Valvanis formula would suggest also.

Let's talk shape and design of the pot next. Consider the movement of the trunk of your tree. Generally, a tree with little movement belongs in a straight sided pot like a rectangle. If your tree's trunk has movement as many junipers have, then a curved pot like an oval or round pot works best. Ovals work well for a fairly wide variety of trees and are good choices for beginner trees.

Color comes next in consideration. Unglazed containers work best for trees that do not change color with the season and need a quiet feel. Unglazed pots work well for junipers and pines. Glazed containers do best with deciduous trees. We will talk more about selecting pots in December's issue.

Bonsai Bench Anxiety

By Ivan Hanthorn

Bonsai benches are a necessity to keep bonsai in good physical health by keeping them off the ground away from squirrels, rabbits, and other vermin that think they might be tasty. Benches also keep the little trees out of harm's way by presenting a hard object that careless humans usually don't want to run into. Furthermore, benches highlight the presence of bonsai visually, reminding lackadaisical owners that the bonsai need watering often and feeding occasionally. When at the right height wiring may also be easily noticeable on the bonsai, which again is a reminder to the trainer that the wire needs to be kept track of before major injury results to the tree. So benches are a good thing, not just for inventory control and storage but in many, many ways. However, just the right bench—well, that can be a challenge. One can get by for some time with bricks and boards, plastic benches from the nearest big box store, reimagined discarded shipping containers, and other adapted materials. There is always the hope that railings on the edge of decks and other garden structures will be adequate at the beginning but they are inevitably in the wrong light for the majority of one's trees and the space soon runs out. So, eventually, one must think of building a bench, or benches. But what design fits your needs, your skills, and your budget? This can be a difficulty for the indecisive.

George Buehler addressed this need rather well in his book *Bonsai: Your Guide to Creating Stands and Benches* (Haskill Creek Publishing, Spokane, Washington, 2009). The summary statement on the cover says all that is necessary: Includes construction plans and techniques for making your own attractive and inexpensive stands and benches. I was certain that the book would finally end my long dithering over what might be just the right bench for me. It did not. There are some very functional and attractive plans and photographs in the book. But I wasn't smitten by any. Of all the stands and benches I have seen, those that have most stood out in my memory as attractive minimalism in their functional design are those that Alan and Helene Magruder have in their bonsai garden, particularly those wooden stand tops on wire bases that are the "movable" stands in their bonsai furniture. The slant cut profile of the board ends can easily suggest an East Asian aesthetic. This profile can be used on not only the bench boards proper but on protruding support beams underneath the bench boards.

I took the end cut profile idea from Alan and then developed a basic bench design that I have used for various sizes and heights of bonsai benches. I particularly like putting this design on posts to minimize understructure, so that the visual mass that attracts the eye is the floating island of bonsai. However, legs on a moveable bench are also easily applied to this bench top.

I have never really diagrammed this structure. Photos will have to do. These photos are not attractive. I just took them today in the middle of ugly early fall heat, when the plants are in disarray and not showy. The photos are simply for providing an idea of the basic structural design.

(cont. on p 4)

Bonsai Bench Anxiety (cont. from p 3)

This is a bonsai bench that currently works for me. It may not possess the engineered or fine carpentry qualities that some well-made bench designs have. It's simply something I do with minimum tools and simple materials that meets my needs so far and reflects I am sure my own sense of aesthetics in the garden. Materials are deck screws and 2" x 2", 2" x 4", and 4" x 4" treated lumber; tools are a pencil, a tape measure, a drill, a flip driver, and a saw. A square wouldn't hurt.

I am putting these thoughts and these photos in this newsletter to challenge all of you to reply with your thoughts on and experiences with bonsai benches and to also ask you to submit photographs of benches you built or had built for you that you think work well for their function and that are pleasing to you in their appearance.



New 12' x 22" bench under construction; bottom.

Leg attachment for first permanent bench. Depends on long deck screws and balance on the bench. An improved design used in next iterations.

Bonsai Bench Anxiety



First bench, permanent on two legs.



Bench design employed for smaller permanent stand.



Bench design for portable four-legged table

Fall IBA Show

By Ivan Hanthorn

Preparations for the annual Fall Bonsai Show at the Reiman Gardens in Ames are now underway. Our programming ideas have expanded in the last couple of weeks. This may be the best and most programmed activity at a fall show yet. Dave Lowman will be presenting a workshop on bonsai design in the afternoon of the first day of the show, October 6. The workshop will require pre-registration and will be conducted in a separate building from the main building in which our show is always held. Information on Dave's workshop is on the Reiman Gardens web site. On both Saturday and Sunday of the show we will also have two different presentations, each held once each day in the Garden Room within the show area.

Helene and Alan Magruder are going to share with us and the public their thoughts and perceptions on two very interesting aspects of bonsai, each topic on which they have considerable knowledge. As the Fall Show highlight this year is Shohin, it is quite natural that Helene will present a program on "What is Shohin?" Alan and Helene together will utilize some previously prepared judging sheets in our inventory that were on their way to discard as part of a program on "How to Evaluate Bonsai." This program may involve a bit of walking about the show to look at examples of particular points. Each will be presented on each day of the show, so that an enthusiast will be able to attend Dave's bonsai design workshop and attend both presentations by Helene and Alan if they come both days.

Members of the IBA and the EIBA may enter Reiman Gardens free of charge, even if not exhibiting. Please politely identify yourself as a member of the IBA (don't confuse them with two different club names). Membership names will be on a list at the front desk. Therefore, make sure your dues are paid and membership current with your club treasurer before the fall show. More details to follow in meetings and emails.



It's very small and it's made of wire, yet it's clear that it's a deciduous tree in fall color. This photo from [Ken To's home page](#)



A tiny semi-cascade juniper.



A beautiful willow by Ken Tow.