

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
APRIL 2014

Volume 31, Issue 4



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IBA APRIL Activities

April 15, 7 PM, IBA MEETING
Des Moines Botanical Garden

Topics: Larry Totton will replot a collected mulberry and a nursery grown tree or two. We should be able to see a difference in root structure and wiring-in techniques. He hopes to lead a spirited round table discussion during the demonstration. That means show up with questions and spirit.

April 19-20, SPRING SHOW
Des Moines Botanical Garden, 10am-4pm each day

In coordination with the Botanical Garden celebration of Earth Day. Larry Totton is coordinating the show.

EIBA APRIL Activities

April 10, 6:30 Board Meeting at Nothing But Noodles

Agenda includes lava purchase, April mtg planning, discuss picnic, Mother's Day and Bruce more Show.

April 17, 6:00 Club Meeting at Chris Burr residence.

Note early time to allow longer outdoor light.
Topics include Mother's Day Show discussion, digging trees from winter storage and Shaping Your Tree with pruning and wiring.

May 11, 9 am - 4 pm Mother's Day Flower Show at Noelridge Park.

Members please think about showing a tree or just come out to view the show!

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"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." Michael Hagedorn of Cratageus Bonsai.

Timely Tips

By now most of us have finished repotting. Please remember after care is very important to the success of your repotting work.

Recall the usual caveats – keep your freshly potted trees in partial shade, out of wind (spring is very windy), water them enough but not too much, do not fertilize for a few weeks. Gradually introduce your trees to sun, wind, fertilizer, etc.

There is controversy over the use of Turface or oil dry in soil mixes. I saw first-hand how well roots grew in pumice/akadama soils in Oregon. Some of that great root growth is Oregon conditions, some is soil based. Below are two Michael Hagedorn photos at repotting time to show the difference in root growth.



"Pine roots after 5 years in oil-dry. This is why I don't use oil-dry." MH



"Pine after 3 years in pumice. This is why I use pumice. The root ball is this tight all the way through." MH

IBA Spring Show

By Ivan Hanthorn

The annual spring bonsai show will again be held in conjunction with the Earth Day event at the Des Moines Botanical Garden on April 19, and 20. IBA and EIBA members are admitted free and encouraged to bring a few trees for display as well as something to work on while the visitors observe. We have twice the space as last year in the Swartz and Walsh rooms combined.

There will also be a table for "Funsai", bonsai with kid appeal. This is bonsai material planted in a fun, maybe even cartoonish container. Bring one if you want to be a part of the fun.

There will be a few haiku poems posted to blend our show in with the Garden's Earth Day event. Add one to your arrangement if you wish.

An earlier activity in the building keeps us from entering until 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, and they would like us to have our carrying-in done by 9:30 a.m. We then have another hour to arrange the displays with the official opening at 11:00 a.m.

You may also drop off plants to the Walsh room on Friday afternoon by 4 p.m. Our show will end at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday [Easter].

Larry Totton's cell is 515-422-1937. E-mail at tottonia@aol.com. Bring a tree, new or ancient.

When you're dying of thirst it's too late to think about digging a well.

Japanese Proverb

Bonsai Smart: Air Layering – a Valuable Bonsai Tool

By John Denny

We all want to make our trees better. For some of us that means watering and fertilizing so our trees look healthier and more handsome. Others will prune, wire and shape their trees to make them more attractive. But sometimes we need more aggressive techniques to improve our trees. Two related techniques that have really helped improve a number of my trees are air layering and its twin, ground layering.

This article is about an air layer project with Gary Wood on a Hinoki cypress that had seen better days. Hinoki have a tendency to lose inner foliage on lower branches. The top remained healthy and strong, so Gary suggested we air layer the tree, which we did a year ago. This consisted of cutting a ring of bark and cambium around the top of the tree just below the upper portion of the tree that we wished to save. The cut should be roughly half an inch top to bottom. Poke holes in the bark just above the cut area and dab with rooting hormone. This is where new roots will grow. Place a flat plastic “plate” around the tree just below the poked holes. This will give a surface for the roots to grow on so they grow radially, not downward. Fashion a plastic pot around the trunk to hold the plate and soil. Place wet sphagnum moss around the cut area on the trunk, and then fill the pot with soil. A year later in March of this year, we opened the pot (see photo 1). Notice how well the roots grew. Photo 2 shows the tree’s top after it was cut from the original tree and the roots after soil was removed. The roots are radial and all at the same level and they completely encircle the new tree.



Photo 1

Photo 2

In photo 3 you can see the bottom of the roots and how flat they are and also how there are no

roots directly under the trunk. This allows the tree to sit extraordinarily flat in the pot (photo 4). By the way, this pot was made by Bill Ball, an EIBA member who has made a large number of very good bonsai pots. Now I have a very healthy and good looking small Hinoki with a good thick trunk and excellent radial roots. The old tree did not have a good future, but the new tree does. Give this a try if you have a tree where you think the top of a tree can make a high quality shohin sized tree.



Photo 3

Photo 4

The related technique called “ground layering” is basically the same technique, except it is applied to the area just above the old roots. So you grow a new set of roots right above the old ones. This is a great technique if you have a decent tree, but it has nasty rough, crossing visible roots. Many elm bonsai I see have this issue. Ground layering allows you to get rid of the old roots and replace them with good radial roots. This also acts to reduce the height of the tree by 2–4 inches, which can make the trunk seem relatively thicker and older, an extra bonus. I have used this technique on several trees and have improved the value of each of them. I have ground layered tridents, Jpn maples, hornbeams, boxwoods, and elms.

Both of these techniques can make significant improvements to your trees. Be Bonsai Smart. Put them in your arsenal of bonsai tools.

Bonsai Record Keeping

By Ivan Hanthorn

As one plays with those amazingly still healthy roots on the trees you neglected for too long until finally getting repotted, it slowly comes to you that this is just the sort of thing that should be recorded because one's self assurance that everything can be remembered has proved to be a very faulty self-assessment. The culturally embedded idea that "of the writing of books there is no end" is biblical in origin, but it really is not quite true. It is the keeping of records that has no end of need. The oldest true writing we have so far discovered in our constantly revising knowledge of our collective history is of record nature—business transactions, where memory was just not good enough.

What is absolutely essential to know and to remember about one's bonsai? For starters, last date of repotting. That date sets the schedule for future work on the bonsai. Soil formula follows, as the drainage depends on the soil composition, and therefore the watering pattern depends on this too. Which pot the tree is now in logically follows, as this tells one not only the soil volume but a whole lot more. Is the pot a training pot, developed resident pot, or show pot? What is the material composition of the pot? Why does this matter? Breathability and state of tree development essentially and all the implicit consequences are told by this information. For example a porcelain show pot, perhaps antique, suggests that the tree may now look great but that the long term care of the tree may be a challenge because of the totally air tight container, which means that the tree will probably need watering a bit less than if in more familiar pots.

And so it goes. I have collected some examples of records kept by club members. I now request you to send me examples of what you currently

are using and let me know your opinions of pros and cons of your record form as well as the software and platforms you use. Some of these will be shared with all next issue. More importantly, write up a list of data that need to be on this record or records that one should keep regarding a bonsai over time. We will compare notes next time. My email address is: ivanhanthorn@hotmail.com.

Cedars – Pick Your Favorite Color



Blue Atlas Cedar (Cedrus atlantica - one of the handfuls of true Cedars)



Green Atlas cedar. Both photos from Bonsai Bark.

Tree of the Month: Engelmann Spruce (*Picea Englemannii*)

By John Denny

Most of us are familiar with Black Hills Spruce which is a white spruce. Another good spruce for bonsai is the Engelmann spruce. Engelmann are found in the western US, especially in the NW. It is a long lived tree, slow growing, and used for lumber and Christmas trees.

As bonsai, Engelmann spruce can be collected as yamadori or grown at tree nurseries. Collected trees can have a lot of dead branching to remove and may have disease issues to address. Once this is done, focus on growing strong roots. When you have strong roots, you may begin styling. Branches of spruce generally are lowered when wired and may require rewiring to hold them in place permanently.

Spruce like moisture, but do not like water logged roots. Good, porous bonsai soil helps in this regard. Morning sun is best, light shade in summer afternoons helps. Prune in late fall, wire late fall or in winter.

Below is a tree I helped work on in 2008 with Michael Hagedorn in Oregon. It was quite root-bound. We spent the morning carefully removing the packed soil from half of the root ball. Instead of placing the spruce back into a pot, we created a kokedama, where a muck wall was created, the tree and soil placed inside the muck wall, and moss was pinned to the outside of the muck. Very natural looking, I think. The tree was styled the following year, allowed to grow, and restyled this year which is the photo on the right. Very nice Engelmann spruce.



Spotlight on Andy Smith – Bonsai Renaissance Man



You all have seen the beer commercial for “the most interesting man on earth”, right? Well, if I had a vote for “most interesting man”, I might choose Andy Smith. Andy lives in the Black Hills of South Dakota. He and his wife are foresters. Andy loves the outdoors and has a feel for it like few other people I have met. Andy began noticing small trees growing on rocky outcroppings and when he determined their ages, he was shocked at how old they were. Well, one thing led to another. Andy became interested in bonsai and began collecting, transplanting, growing and selling some wonderful bonsai raw material. In fact, Andy is known throughout the bonsai world as one of the top couple of collectors of yamadori. Andy collects Ponderosa pine, Rocky Mountain junipers, lodge pole and limber pines, spruce, and other interesting trees. He travelled to Denver to learn more about bonsai from Harold Sasaki. Andy has become an expert in his own right with styling his collected trees. If you want to learn more about Andy and his collected trees for sale, check out his web site: www.goldenarrowbonsai.com

But, Andy Smith is more than a bonsai guy or a forester. He came to Cedar Rapids with his trees for a workshop and stayed with us for a night. I found him fascinating as a person, – a mélange of ideas, opinions, and interests. He was kind, humble, both thoughtful and thought provoking, energetic, very humorous and fun, and had a deep spirit about him. If you have met him or watched him on his DVDs, you will know what I mean.

A couple of personal Andy Smith stories from when he visited CR. We went to breakfast and spent time talking workshop details and getting to know each other. We drove to my place. As we got out of the car, Andy noticed I had some damaged limbs at the top of a river birch in my front yard, the result of an ice storm. Andy said “I can fix that” and just shimmied up to the teetering top of the tree where he pulled a folding saw out of his pocket (talk about always prepared!) and began lopping off damaged branches. He was done in no time. Andy came inside and noticed I had some books on Buddhism. He shared his thoughts and asked if there was a Zen center in town. I said yes and we were immediately off to sit zazen meditation. We then raced to the workshop. The workshop was a great success. People ended up with some excellent Ponderosas and Rocky Mountain junipers and we all learned a lot from Andy.

Lastly, I just ran across an interview with Andy Smith posted on Bonsai Bark. If you love bonsai, nature, environmentalism, philosophy, etc. it is an entertaining read and will contribute to your thinking on all those subjects. And once you have read the article, you will have a better understanding of why I would vote Andy Smith as the “world’s most interesting man”. bonsaibark.com/2014/04/12/what-you-do-to-the-land-you-do-to-yourself-an-indepth-discussion-with-andy-smith-on-collecting-wild-bonsai/