

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
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www.iabonsai.org

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IBA AUGUST Activities

*Sunday, August 16, 9am–7pm, State Fair Bonsai Show
Agricultural Building, State Fair Grounds, Des Moines
Set up at 7:00am. Even if not exhibiting club members
are asked to assist with show set up at 7am and take
down at 7pm.*

*Tuesday, August 18, 7:00pm, IBA Meeting
Botany Lab, Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, 909
Robert D. Ray Drive
Program: Chat and Chop, bring your project tree or any
other and learn the correct way to wire.*

EIBA AUGUST Activities

August 14 – 16. Chicago Bonsai Show. View bonsai show, bonsai demos and lectures, CBG bonsai collection, many bonsai vendors, numerous CBG gardens.

August 16 EIBA Mtg at Pleasant Valley Nursery Iowa City. Meet at 2 pm to search for bonsai material. This trip replaces our August meeting. No regular August meeting.

August 22 Brucemore Show 9:00 am. EIBA will have a booth again this year to display trees. *If you would like to show a tree, let Bill Englert know.*

September 5 – 7. Japanese Festival at Missouri Botanic Garden. View 14 acre Japanese garden, Chinese garden, bonsai collection, many vendors.

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Trident maple forest by Kenji Oshima, Taikan Bonsai Exhibition.



*The main tree in this display by Mario Komsta is a Japanese red pin (*Pinus densiflora*: Akamatsu in Japanese) and the secondary tree is .*

Timely Tips

Here we are in the Dog Days of August. Tree growth has slowed considerably from spring and early summer. This time of year we battle heat and tree dehydration. When temps get over 90F, water in the morning thoroughly and then give a light misting in late afternoon when you come home from work. Make sure to read the article on Summer Heat in this issue for more ideas on keeping your trees cool. Remember if it is hot enough for the tree owner to have a good cold beer on a very hot day that same tree owner should be doing a similar cooling favor for his bonsai trees!

This time of year leaves begin to look less pristine as they begin to show damage from a multitude of possible issues. Shriveled leaves, dry leaves, yellow leaves, faded foliage color, holes in leaves, unsightly spots, etc. can all show up in August.

Your job is two-fold. First, you must observe well enough to actually notice the changes. Second, you must figure out what the damage is from and determine if you need to do something to correct the problem before it gets worse and affects the health of the tree.

If the leaves show holes and chewed edges, you likely have insect activity in which case you can spray an insecticide. If you have faded color on junipers, you may have mites and will want to spray a miticide once a week for two or three weeks. If your leaves are yellowed, it can be from weather and stress and your trees are simply dropping the weakest leaves. Help your tree with good hydration practices. If your tree has brown/black spots on the leaves they most likely need spraying with a fungicide. Pick off the damaged leaves to remove as much of the source as you can, then spray.

Weeds like this time of year, so keep pulling them. Dig deep to get the oxalis which grows like it is on steroids in my bonsai garden.

You might also fertilize with an organic fertilizer like fish emulsion to make sure your trees are getting enough micro nutrients this time of year, as well.

Chinese Elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*)

[Editors note: Chinese elms are of interest lately to us; in reading around the internet on this long-time bonsai favorite we encountered this first rate article in the Columbus Bonsai Society newsletter of April 2002 (ColumbusBonsai.org). It is succinct and very good but the really attractive aspect of the article is the very frank and honest appraisal of the now common Chinese import bonsai stock that has all but smothered out the availability of better shaped pre-bonsai elm stock. One often has to cut off a great portion of Chinese material to get rid of those damned S shapes. God help those looking for decent affordable Chinese elm material to work with.]

Chinese Elm has a wide climate range, being native to northern China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea, the Chinese or Lacebark Elm generally has a broad, vase-like shape (Broom style) with pendulous branches. In warmer regions it may be evergreen, never shedding its leaves, and can reach heights of 60 feet. The small, leathery, dark green leaves are smooth and shiny on top and have small blunt teeth. The fruit mature in fall much later than most other elms.

The bark of this elm can have different textures depending on the variety. It can be rough barked, smooth barked, or exfoliating to show orange or tan under-bark. Varieties commonly used as bonsai include the dwarfs Yatsubusa and Catlin, and varieties Hokkaido, Seiju, Cork Bark, Korean Weeping, and Semper Virens.

Growth care for the Chinese Elm seems to be full sun and high light levels for indoors. Chinese Elms prefer full sun when outdoors or bright light when indoors. The smaller leafed varieties, like Seiju, must have full sun or they will not thrive. Use caution when moving from indoors to outdoors. Two or three weeks in shade when going outside will prevent sunburn. Do not leave Chinese Elm in the shade or densely ramified specimens may start to lose interior branches through die back. Too much shade will also lead to larger leaves and longer internodes. If summer temperatures are way too hot then some shade may benefit some individual trees. You probably should not put them where the air conditioner will blow on them. Just shading the not may help by keeping the (cont. p 8)

Summer Heat

John Denny

It is summer and although this is not the hottest summer we have had, it is worth discussing how high heat can affect your trees. I was reading Dave Bogan's notes in the American Bonsai Society e-newsletter and ran across some interesting data. Dave has measured pot temps to see just how hot the soil and roots get in various parts of his pots. First, let's note that Dave lives in southern Indiana where he may see a bit more heat than here in Iowa.

Here is Dave's temperature data:

Temperatures were taken using a soil thermometer for accuracy but a food thermometer will work also. Results taken on July 14th . Full sun area received full sun all day. Shade areas are under 30% shade cloth.

Outside Temperature = 91 degrees (Trees watered day before). Temperature checked @ 11:00 a.m.

*Tree #1 20 x 4" pot. **Full Sun Center** of soil area = 88 degrees **Edge of Pot** = 100 degrees*

*Tree #2 10 x 3" pot **Full Sun Center** of soil area = 94 degrees **Edge of pot** = 104 degrees*

*Tree #3 19 x 4" pot 30% **Shade Center** of soil area = 84 degrees **Edge of pot** = 84 degrees*

*Tree #4 8 x 3" pot 30% **Shade Center** of soil area = 85 degrees **Edge of pot** = 85 degrees*

Outside Temperature 97 degrees. (Trees were watered 1 hour 30 min. prior to checking temperature), checked @ 3:00 p.m.

*Tree #1 20 x 4" pot. **Full Sun Center** of soil area = 95 degrees **Edge of Pot** = 108 degrees*

*Tree #2 10 x 3" pot **Full Sun Center** of soil area = 96 degrees **Edge of pot** = 106 degrees*

*Tree #3 19 x 4" pot 30% **Shade Center** of soil area = 85 degrees **Edge of pot** = 85 degrees*

*Tree #4 8 x 3" pot 30% **Shade Center** of soil area = 85 degrees **Edge of pot** = 86 degrees*

It is clear from Dave's small study that pots sitting in full sun can see temps at the edge of a large pot run as much as 13 degrees F higher than the outside air temperature. You know it is hot out, but your roots really know it's hot!

Also, notice from the data how much 30% shade cloth can drop the temps of your soil, which has to help your tree's roots on hot sunny days. Shade cloth is not too expensive when you consider the value of some of our trees.

So, what to do to help our trees? Bogan says make sure your soils are well draining to help get fresh air and cool water flowing to every area of your soil and roots. Michael Hagedorn splits the high air temperature situation into two scenarios. First, is when you have a short term high temp spike in a cooler climate and second is when you live in an area where high heat is constant for the entire summer. Below is Michael's advice.

"Sudden, rare spikes in cooler climates: Simply relocate your trees temporarily. Don't bring them inside, but on the ground is a good start, under benches maybe, in light shade. Try to avoid full shade. Place them close together, but still retaining ease of watering. Plants near other plants cool one another with transpiration. Placing bonsai on grass is going to be a lot cooler than on a sidewalk.

Hot weather areas: These areas need site modification. Shade cloth over your growing area is a great option, reducing the ambient and radiant heat. Try 30% shade cloth for general use. Plant more vegetation around your benches, and reduce gravel or concrete areas. Put up fogger/misters that use very little water for cooling down during the heat of the day. Another, less attractive but very effective option is protecting individual pots with either towels or aluminum foil. Yet another is the same as cold weather protection, sinking your pots in bark or gravel. Gravel holds heat, though, so bark or something similar is better protection and is less likely to damage pots. Simply turning your trees so that the lowest branches shield the pot in the late afternoon can be significant. Be aware that entire site modification is much more effective than shielding individual pots."

On days over 90F, Michael also recommends the practice of watering normally in the morning and in late afternoon or very early evening, water very lightly with a fine mist or spray, just wetting the foliage and top half inch of hot soil. Trees in high heat have slowed their growth and activity way down, so they do not need a lot of water for active growth. But they do need hydration and cooling. The extra water spray helps a lot.

The next time you are outside sweating and complaining of the heat, please give a thought to your bonsai tree's root system and how hot those roots must be. Help them out with one of the strategies just discussed. Your trees will thank you!

Preparing Your Bonsai for Display

By Helene Magruder

Show time is upon us, several of our members are planning to display their trees at the State Fair and the Fall Show is coming up in October. Many people are hesitant to display their trees thinking they aren't very experienced or their trees aren't good enough. Get over it! Recently a good friend gave me a bit of wisdom about displaying my trees, he said to think of it as sharing them with others. I like that, thinking that way makes me a lot more comfortable displaying my trees. I hope it will encourage many of you to bring your trees to shows to share them.

Preparing your trees for a show is important. Take a little time and make them look their best. Trees should look healthy, go over the tree and remove any dead needles or leaves. Clean the soil surface of any debris or weeds. Your trees should be clean too. If you have a tree with rough bark you can't do a lot of scrubbing but you can remove any moss growing on the trunk or surface roots by dabbing a 50-50 mix of vinegar and water. In a few days the moss will die and you can gently scrape it off. Moss can cause the bark to decay so it is a good idea to remove it anyway. A tree with smooth bark can be scrubbed with a toothbrush and water. Many junipers can be shown with the bark either rough or gently brushed smooth showing the red bark underneath. That is a matter of personal preference.

If there is deadwood on the tree it should be cleaned with that handy toothbrush (actually I use a tiny power washer) and treated with lime sulphur, a job best done outdoors. Some people like it to look like white paint but I like to mix it 50-50 with water. You can add a drop of black India ink so it isn't so bright white. I find it is absorbed best if the deadwood is wet. This also helps preserve the deadwood.

Clean the bonsai pot thoroughly. It is really off-putting to see a bonsai displayed in a dirty pot. Remove water marks, you can try Lime Away or vinegar but I haven't had a lot of success with them. A plastic dish scrubber works pretty well. I use a tool cleaner which has some abrasive embedded in a rubbery block. It works like a charm and doesn't scratch glazed pots if used carefully. I've been told a bit of Baby Oil will soften the lime and it can be gently scraped off. Unglazed pots can be wiped with a bit of oil, Baby Oil works. Be sure to wipe it off well. Give the pot a polish with a lint free cloth, it will bring the pot to life. Never leave a greasy layer of oil on the pot, not only does it look terrible but it might slip right out of your hands.

The final touch in preparing your tree to show is to apply moss to the soil surface. In past years it was the custom to apply patches of moss here and there on the surface. I have attended several shows recently and current fashion seems to dictate that the entire soil surface be covered with moss. This requires finding a patch of good moss and keeping the location secret. Remove as much soil from the underside of the moss before applying it. Scrape off a thin layer of soil so the moss is level with the edge of the pot. I sprinkle a bit of sphagnum moss rubbed through a sieve on the surface to help keep the moss hydrated. Apply the moss like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to the entire surface and press firmly into place. Keep a spray bottle of water handy as the moss tends to shrink if it dries out. Seems like a lot of trouble and is not required in most shows but it really sets off the tree and looks very professional.

Don't forget the accent plant, it should be clean and neat. Choose one that compliments your tree, if possible it should reflect the season or where the tree naturally grows.

I hope all of you will share your bonsai at our shows.

Bonsai Rules Syndrome 2—Odd Number in Grouping Bonsai

by Robert Steven

[Editor's note: On his Facebook page Robert Steven has been running a fascinating analysis of bonsai "rules" which provokes readers to reassess the value and foundation of these rules. This excerpt concerns one of those "rules." This has been noticed; this commentary on odd numbers for a group has gone bonsai viral.]

In any visual art, we are always suggested to make an asymmetrical composition because this is considered as the best to give a dynamic flow and less boring. Then someone put this principle into bonsai with simple analogy of odd number, assuming odd number will automatically create asymmetrical composition because there will be more trees on one side and less on the other side. Then people are using this as the rule and spread the teaching for grouping bonsai and consider even number grouping bonsai is wrong.

The important point is the conceptual skill to form asymmetrical balance and not the number. Odd number can form boring symmetrical composition and even number can easily create. The most important is to master the three aspects in designing grouping bonsai: composition, dimension and perspective; and there are simple tips to make good composition, dimension and perspective.

First step is to form the composition, then improve the dimensional layout, and finally refine the perspective aspect. I will not go into too many details, but will give simple technical tips on each aspect as follows:

Composition Composition is the formation and positioning of the tree(s) from the front view (picture-plain); the objective is to make a rough "sketch" of design and the design should be a beautiful, natural scenery, not a man-made garden prototype!

Before starting, we should imagine as there is a plain painting canvas on which we are going to paint a beautiful landscape according to our imagination; this will give better guidance to form the composition.

There are a few important tips in setting composition e.g.:

Focal Point. Focal point is the main dominant viewing point, the centerpiece of the composition. The focus can be a single tree as well as a group of trees, normally it is the biggest or tallest.

Asymmetrical Balance. Better not to position the focal point at the center of the container but off-center to one side to avoid a symmetrical composition, because symmetrical composition is considered boring. The best composition has asymmetrical balance, because this is considered as more dynamic and less boring.

Trees Distance. Always avoid the same distance of each tree or each group of trees to obtain a dynamic flow and harmonious composition; the same distance between trees will give a monotonous feeling and less emphasis on the focal point. The distance in composition is the distance which is seen from the front in a two-dimensional image, and not the "real" distance on bird's-eye view.

Land Contour. Good composition is not only by the trees' arrangement, but also by the land contour. Up and down land contour and the shapes also play important roles to good composition design.

Void Space. (Void space is often called negative space.) Sometimes we tend to fill every space, and in fact crowded composition will decrease the beauty. So we should always remember to **create sufficient void spaces, because empty space is also one of the composition elements.**

Not all trees should face to the same direction; they can be facing to one direction or face-to-face, but avoid the contradicting direction. Not all the trees should be the same style or shape, but they can be different according to the natural phenomena of the design; and this, of course, requires sufficient skill to play around on the composition flow and creative imagination.

Dimension. Dimension is the layout and arrangement of the trees on the container surface; the objective is to create the depth of the design. The arrangement will also affect the perspective we will work on. The placement of focal point to the back side will create wider image on the front and allow us to create foreground; and the placement of focal point to the front will allow us to draw deeper perspective to create farer background. The front side should form a concave shape to create wider image effect to the whole composition.

There are a few important tips on the dimensional arrangement:

- Avoid the forming of a straight line on the tree's arrangement. It is advisable to form an irregular zigzag configuration.
- Avoid the same distance of each tree or each group of trees.

Perspective. Perspective is our viewing perception on the overall dimensional aspect from front view; the objective is to create illusion of perspective depth to the overall design. Due to the limited space of the container, so the perspective aspect becomes very important to create a wider distance image; and the illusion can be camouflaged by the sizes and the height of the trees and the land contour as well as by other elements e.g. moss, grass, rocks and even the trees direction and branches arrangement.

Despite your design imagination, if you follow the above simple tips, believe me, the grouping of bonsai you will create will not be too bad; next is simply refining the details and tuning your creativity! Last but not least...this concept is not only for grouping bonsai, but the same principles also works for raft-style bonsai, connecting-root, clump, even multiple-trunk and Water-Land (Shuihan) Penjing.



This dramatic mixed forest is from the Museum del Bonsai Marshall.

Chinese Elm (cont. from p 2)

soil temperature lower, or you could plunge the pot in mulch or a growing bed. Hot temperatures may cause a growth check.

If you plant them directly in the ground, Chinese Elms grow quickly and can increase trunk caliper and height in a short time. You can use this to produce very stocky specimens by alternately growing and sacrificing the apex over a few years. One need only be concerned with the trunk during this time as branches may be formed later after the tree is planted in a bonsai pot. In a bonsai pot, their trunks will not thicken very quickly, but the shoot growth can be remarkable if well-fed.

Chinese Elms will grow in nearly any soil medium and their roots should stay moist, but they will get root rot if they are continually wet. An open, granular medium which allows for good drainage is best. The more inert grit used in the soil means that much more attention to the moisture levels. Our club mix should do well for these trees.

These elms may be repotted in either Spring or Fall, but Spring is always best. If you do repot in Fall, you should have a place ready for it inside that Winter. At a spring repot, do so just before the new buds open when one can be quite ruthless in cutting back the roots, especially the big ones. Elm roots can thicken up quickly and it is therefore wise to repot at least every other year. Repotting every year may be necessary in some cases. You can wash the root pad clean so that you can see everything that is in the root structure and make your cut selections with a clear plan.

When pruning the roots, use cutters that are very sharp. The roots of Chinese Elms are pulpy and can be crushed if care is not used. Crushed roots can lead to root rot. When cutting away very large roots, it is usually advisable to then clean up the initial cut with a sharp grafting knife so that the wound edges are smooth and clean.

Imported Chinese Elms often have really bad structure of the surface roots. I don't know if this is a cultural esthetic or if the exporters just think Americans don't give a rat's ass about nebari, and send us the rejects. You will often find these trees with ugly, tangled masses of ropy roots well above the soil. This is a common trait with imported elms and one to be avoided. If a nice nebari is not present, it can be manufactured by air layering or ground layering; an operation that is quite easy with elms. If you don't have a reverse taper problem you can always try starting the root cuttings from these as a way of increasing your stock.

Water daily throughout the growing season. If the tree is maintained in a warm climate or indoors where it acts like a tropical, this will be year round. If the leaves have dropped, water sparingly but do not allow soil to become completely dry. DUHH! Start daily watering again at first signs of new growth.

Chinese Elms should be fed monthly or every two weeks (more or less depending on the organic component of your soil) from the time the first spring leaves harden off through early Autumn. When new leaf buds are in abundance, and in the spring for outdoor trees, fertilize every two weeks. A good water soluble all-purpose fertilizer is fine, slow release fertilizer tablets are also acceptable and can be used to supplement regular feedings. Keith Scott recommends a dilute weekly application from mid-May to October for our climate in Zone 4 or 5. More developed trees should be fed less to keep the twig ramification in balance. Keep track of the moisture uptake for the tree. If the soil begins to take longer to dry out in hot weather, cut back on the fertilization. It probably means the tree is having a growth check.

Chinese Elms may be maintained outdoors year round in zone six or above, however, some sources say they will tolerate temperatures down to 20 degrees F. The fleshy roots can be damaged if they are allowed to get too cold or have to endure a regular freezing and thawing cycle. If the tree gets too cold for too long, loss of some of the fine ramification may result. In any case, in Columbus this means some serious winter protection or greenhouse care. In Winter, they may keep some or all of their leaves. If this is the case, be sure to keep them in good light to avoid losing their finer shoots. It has been suggested that even if they are bare, shade may contribute to shoot dieback. If the tree is not completely dormant there is some photosynthesis in the twig bark so this could be credible.

Shaping may be done with clip and grow or by wiring. Prune all new growth to two or three leaves. Remove undesired new growth completely. Either method will work well as they bud profusely and, once wired, will hold their shape in a short time. Although wiring may be used to train Chinese Elms, the clip and grow method is preferred due to the fast growth rate. If you do wire the branches, keep close tabs on the growth of the branch as Chinese Elms can thicken quickly, causing the wire to begin to cut in less than a few weeks. It is best to wire shoots just as they harden off if you know what you want at this point. Wiring after leaf drop is often effective as you can easily see what you are wiring and growth will have slowed to nothing at this point. If you wire in late fall, you will need to bring it in for the Winter. Be sure to remove the wire just before the new buds break in the Spring or whenever it starts to move indoors.

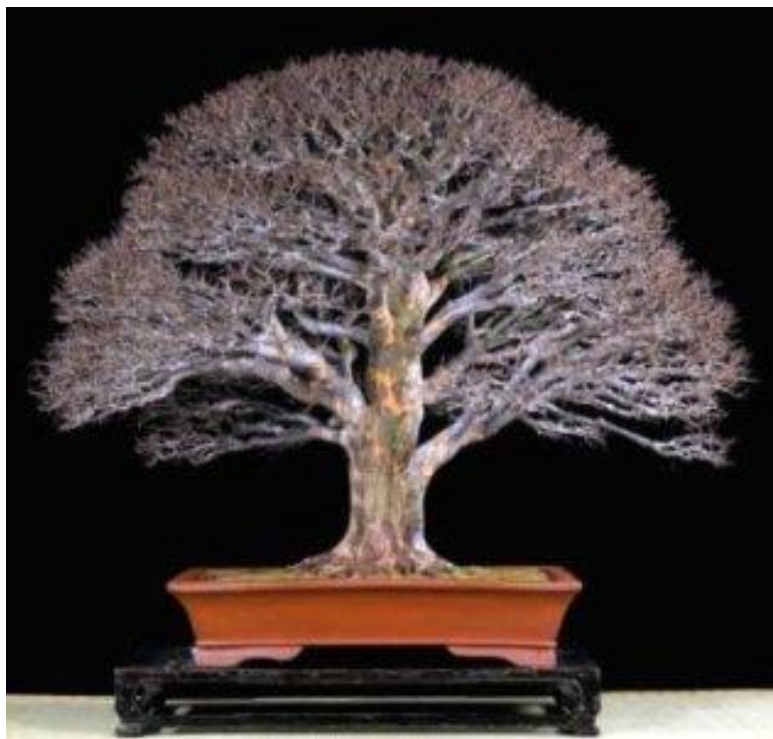
Chinese Elms have an alternating leaf pattern and naturally short internodes making nearly any styling aim possible. The trunk form on a smooth barked Chinese Elm bonsai will look convincing with both a tall, thin upright form and a more compact form. The rough barked varieties often look best with larger trunk diameters to account for the coarser bark texture. Like most deciduous trees, it is often grown for its Winter silhouette which can be stunning, so keep this in mind as you do your styling.

Chinese Elms are mostly pest free, but are subject to black spot fungus. This usually occurs when the tree is kept constantly too moist or in times of a wet Spring. Any of the several common fungicides will work, but those with an oil base may burn the leaves, so use sparingly and keep the tree somewhat shaded. Root rot is another water issue. Keith Scott says Chinese Elms are a magnet for leaf cutters, red spider mite, and aphids. They will attract the beetles that carry Dutch Elm Disease, but don't seem susceptible to that. These pests will usually attack only in times of stress for the tree. Aphids are attracted to new, soft growth and scale insects may be found on woody branches and shoots. Either may be removed by hand or one may use a mixture of vegetable oil and dish soap mixed with water, sprayed onto the tree to remove the pests. Chinese Elms seem to dislike systemic insecticides and may drop their leaves. The leaves will be replaced shortly in most cases. Hmm – wonder if white flies like them?

If you want to increase your stock, elms grow extremely well from seed, but will grow well from hard wood cuttings as well as root cuttings. (Editor note: Photos follow on next page.)



Chinese elm forests



Upright broom style Chinese elm.