

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
JANUARY 2015

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www.iabonsai.org

www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com

IBA JANUARY Activities

January 20, 7:00 PM, IBA Meeting
Des Moines Botanical Garden

Program: Making soil. Members will mix soil. It will be bagged and sold to members at cost.

Project Tree – members are asked to choose a tree from their collection to bring to club meetings and work on during the year and show at the Fall Show.

Gold Star project – members earn points for participating in a variety of activities. Awards will be given at the end of the year for the member with the most points and the runner-up. Members will be on their honor to keep track of their points.

At a meeting of the Board of Directors January 17, the 2015 officers of the IBA were elected. They are as follows.

Michael Harmon, President – skwm12@gmail.com
Charles Johnson, Secretary – johnsonc12@mchsi.com
David Lowman, Vice President – lowman@netins.net
Cat, Nelson, Board Member – centaura@earthlink.net
Tim Peterson, Treasurer – tapeterson10@gmail.com
David Richmond, Board Member –
david.richmond@simpson.edu

EIBA JANUARY Activities

January 11, 2015 2–4 pm “Art of Bonsai” by John Clemens
At Iowa City Public Library Meeting Room A

February 19, 2015 7 pm Club Meeting at Pierson’s Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd

Topics: Pay dues, hand out club soil, discuss 2015 Calendar events, discuss taking trees out of winter storage.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

IBA and EIBA Calendars	1
Timely Tips	2
Winter Planning Thoughts for Junipers	2
Gary Wood: Major Restyling of DMBG Juniper	3
Even a Short Move Can Be Challenging	8

February 21, 2015 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Winter Gardening Fair at Kirkwood CC.

John Clemens of EIBA will present “Practical Bonsai”.



Yes, it's a Procumbens nana wired by Bjorn Bjorholm. Nor your basic mall bonsai!

Timely Tips

How are those New Year's Resolutions coming along? It makes sense to review the past year and contemplate what you would like to improve upon during the next. I especially do this regarding my bonsai hobby. I ask myself two basic questions. First, what aspects of bonsai do I want to improve and focus upon this coming year? Usually, it is clear to me what areas of improvement would help my trees the most. If not, the second question is, what went wrong or poorly over the past year or two? Typically, one can pinpoint problems like "I watered too irregularly" or "my trees got sick" or "my trees look messy, unshapely". Basis your answers, it should be easy to set objectives for the New Year or least select a couple of focus areas.

As a beginner with a dozen trees, I invited an experienced club member over to look at my collection. He immediately commented, "Your trees need more sun and more fertilizer." So, the next year my resolutions were simple - more sun, more fertilizer. My trees improved significantly. The following year I decided my main resolution would be to "learn more about bonsai from quality people". I attended Brussel's Rendezvous where I took workshops from a couple of excellent teachers. My eyes were opened to a new level of bonsai.

The next year I attended a "Seasonal" taught by Michael Hagedorn. We spent three days repotting trees. I learned a great deal about soil, roots, repotting and that hardest of all topic to master - watering. The following year my resolutions, therefore, were to "improve my watering technique", "switch over to better soils for all my trees residing in pots", and "repot all my trees using much improved repotting techniques". These three objectives were serious improvements to my trees. They found much better long term homes in good soil, were root pruned properly, tied in solidly, and watered much more consistently. Since, Gary Wood has helped me with objectives of improving disease management, better technique like wiring and better styling.

I suggest you take time to conjure up some bonsai resolutions. Write them down and follow up on them. Your trees will show the results!

Winter Bonsai Planning Thoughts for Junipers

Ivan Hanthorn

During January and February it is typical to do a lot of targeted reading and planning for certain bonsai trees in our collection, among which for many of us in the Midwest are junipers. They are fairly tough, they take the weather in stride. Ultimate lowans. Yet as common as they are—who doesn't have at least one shimpaku?—we often fail to really know them and nurture them well.

Most of what I know about junipers I learned from Gary Wood and Michael Hagedorn. Michael's three major precepts were don't repot too early in the spring, they can wait awhile; repot one side of the tree one year and the other side the following year to avoid shocking the tree; and completely relearn how to prune a bonsai tree, particularly tip shaping. Previous death of one or more juniper bonsai in training should be indication enough that we are breaking one or more of these basic rules.

The new approach to pinching for which Michael Hagedorn has been a principal prophet is the most critical, so we wish to plant this idea firmly in your prefrontal cortex as you get prepared to work on your juniper bonsais in the upcoming months. The following comes from Michael's business website: Crataegus Bonsai.

Never Pinch Junipers!

August 26, 2012 by Michael Hagedorn, Crataegus Bonsai

Basically, we don't pinch junipers. We cut new long extensions with scissors...and I know that will raise some eyebrows. I think the idea of pinching junipers with fingers started long ago in translated Japanese articles written by those who did not specialize in or have much experience in junipers. And then we bought into the idea of pinching because it seemed like a way to have fun with our junipers. But pinching, especially over-pinching where every growing tip is removed, has been killing junipers for decades.

Gary Wood: Major Restyling of DM Botanical Garden Juniper

By John Denny

Back in November, Gary Wood performed a major restyling of a Garden Juniper belonging to the Des Moines Botanical Garden. The tree is 59 years old basis DMBG records. Observing the tree showed it had a long straight section of deadwood with a live vein alongside it. Junipers are known for movement of their trunks and limbs, so a straight section is a drawback to this tree. Also, the tree had two major masses of foliage that were not working together. Each distracted the observer's eye from the overall image of the tree. Gary felt he could remedy both issues with one change. It was a major change and utilized several techniques not commonly seen at the club level.

Gary began by sawing between the deadwood and live vein. Then he used a Dremel to open up the space between the deadwood and live vein. Gary made a spline with heavy wire and wrapped the live vein with raffia. Then he wrapped it with heavy wire. Finally, he attached a piece of rebar to the section he wanted to move and then carefully moved the branch to its new position. Follow along as Gary works his magic....



Initial photo of tree with straight deadwood and separated foliage masses.



Separating the deadwood and live vein. Both sections are now moveable.



Both sections have been wrapped with raffia to protect the tree, then wired with heavy wire in preparation for major bending.



Gary using rebar as a lever to help make the heavy bend which will move the foliage masses closer together.



Notice the new angle of the rebar which shows how far this section was moved! Remember the original section of trunk was immovable prior to splitting.



The tree looks much more harmonious. Wiring will shape the foliage. This juniper has a fine future!

Hagedorn on Junipers (cont. from page 2)

There's a lot of misinformation out there about junipers. For starters, needle and scale junipers are maintained totally differently. It's essential to know what you've got so you can train it properly. This really needs to be addressed. There are far too many weakened and dead junipers out there because of a misunderstanding of how we handle their growth—in fact, I doubt I'm far off from suggesting that 'pinching' is the number one killer of juniper bonsai.

Junipers build energy from their tips. If we don't let them grow we're going to weaken them—and the more finger pinching we do, the more they weaken. That goes for both scale and needle junipers. But please take a look at these photos and read the captions—



This Kishu shimpaku has no need of any kind of foliage restraint. Its growth is so slow and contained that it barely changes in size in one year's time. Eventually the tree will outgrow itself and then some longer branches will need to be removed, and shorter ones will replace them.



This juniper is also a scale juniper like the Kishu above, and it has two strong shoots that have started to grow beyond the foliage pad. Unless you want a longer branch, basic juniper maintenance is to take your scissors and cut off these two extensions. **Nothing else needs removal.** If we pinched the remaining slowly growing tips, the tree would panic and weaken. Always leave many growing tips on scale junipers—you can cut shoots off, but don't touch the tips of those shoots that remain. Read that again. And the selective strong shoot removal is only done a couple times a year, no more. Now we'll talk about needle junipers, which is totally different.



This is a needle juniper, *Juniperus rigida*. We treat Foemina the same way. Unlike the scale junipers, the needle junipers will create long shoots from every growing tip, not just a couple. We need to let **all the tips** grow out on these trees to **at least** this long. Longer is often better to develop the energy of the tree. Then we come in, usually in early summer, with scissors and cut almost the entire new shoot off. On refined trees you're maybe leaving 1/16" or a bit more—That's it! I know it's shocking, but a tree growing in good soil with lots of roots and strong shoot growth over the entire tree will burst out with many more shoots. Then you get great ramification. If you let the tree grow out like this as you should, there is literally no way you'd be able to do it with fingers, by pinching. The shoot is partially hardened off by then. Both kinds of junipers need sharp scissors, but the growth habits of the two are totally different. Just identify which you have, and apply the appropriate technique and your junipers will flourish. One tip: the needle junipers love water and fertilizer. In the spring they can use as much water as a maple. #

Internship Available at National Bonsai and Penjing Museum

The intern will be trained by the curator in the care and maintenance of the bonsai collection. The length of the internship is 3–6 months with potential for an extension. See web site for details.

http://www.usna.usda.gov/Education/Intern_2015_Bonsai.html

Changing Micro-climates or Even a Short Move Can Have Challenges

By Cat Nelson

When we think about changing climates, we tend to think about mountain to desert or north to south or some other such extreme; at least that was the main associations I had when I thought of it at all. So my recent move of a little over 300 miles due west of my previous location didn't register on my radar as an extreme change in climate. I had given climate some thought in a vague, hope-to-be-happier with the new weather patterns sort of way; I was leaving an area of winter-long lake effect cloud cover and was looking forward to more sunny days. I knew from a gardening point of view that I was moving from zone 6b to zone 5a, not a huge transition and still milder than the zone 4 MN I grew up in. In fact I hoped the colder temps would mean more snow and less ice.

Things didn't go smoothly or as planned with my move, and the more I had to change my plans and roll with the punches, the more I fell onto auto-pilot with the care of my bonsai (always a bad idea). Thankfully it was summer, when my whole collection was outdoors. I had automated systems set up for watering my bonsai while I was traveling in the past, and I was relying on them heavily as my time, attention and collection was stretched between three states. Getting a house ready for sale, buying a new house, starting a new job, moving one car load at a time, downsizing my Mother into an apartment (620 / 820 miles away, depending on which house of mine I was traveling from) – I was lucky to know what state I was in let alone how my bonsai were doing.

At my new house I was excited about my future growing area – there was a whole section of the yard that was in full sun for most of the day (my previous yard was getting shadier and shadier). I did run into the problem that I could not use the same type of sprinkler that my trees and I were accustomed to; I had to buy a different style. The sprinkler I was accustomed to was at the old house – first watering the trees that remained there, and then watering the grass seed I put down to revive the backyard.

Some of the challenges of the new location included: the fact that while the trees were slowly migrating to IA, their benches were still back in IN; the full-shade area was in a different part of the yard, not able to be watered by the same sprinkler; I didn't know the patterns of the new sprinkler to know where to place things for optimal watering and I had to keep the trees contained in one area, to be out of the way of the person mowing the yard (something I couldn't do with my lawnmower in IN); and there wasn't a part-shade area near either of the full-shade or full-sun areas.

While I believe my new growing area will be better in the long run for my trees, the transition started to take its toll late in the summer. Seasoned bonsai practitioners will tell you to not rely on sprinklers and water each tree individually for a reason; a rule that I respect, though have a hard time following with the types of schedules my job throws at me. Normally I combine the two – the sprinkler does a mass watering early in the morning, and then I do touch-up watering and individual inspections in the evening. Being distracted from the later is where I didn't see the effects of the new climate until I started to notice distress.

The first difference in the new climate was the sun; the trees were getting more of it for longer. This was upping their water needs and I had to set the sprinkler to water twice a day when I left for

extended periods. The second element took me longer to discover, and to learn its effects. Wind. Wind was my new test; I had dealt with wind at my previous house, the closely spaced housing in the neighborhood meant that my driveway often acted like a wind tunnel. But that's where its affect ended – the backyard was small and tightly enclosed by hedges, so was rarely bothered.

The first signs of distress were browning leaves on some Japanese maples, which I first attributed to them getting too much sun. I had been creative in trying to hide smaller, part-sun trees in the shadows of taller, full-sun items – but without benches to work with or much flexibility, it was a make-do arrangement. What took me a while to learn was that the wind was so strong, it was stronger than the sprinkler. It was by chance that I saw what was happening – the wind would blow and there were areas that were not getting watered at all.

Then winter rushed onto the scene, and I had to consider my new wintering quarters rather than solve the wind issue. At the old house, the tropicals had gone under lights in the basement, the semi-hardy would go into the root cellar and the hardiest would go in bins on the north side of the house. At the new house, I had two porches – one that I hoped to turn into a mini-greenhouse for the tropicals and an unheated one that I hoped to keep cool for the semi-hardy items.

Winter has only begun, and so far the rear porch has been performing admirably – staying in the 30's with humidity in the 60% range. I never had issues storing evergreen trees in a pitch-black root cellar, though I look forward to seeing if having some light makes any difference in my azaleas. The lower humidity levels will need monitoring – the root cellar would stay at 90%+ humidity, which meant one watering would last for weeks.

The front porch has been a challenge – on bright, sunny days it warms up and I've gotten daytime highs into the 80's. The amount of light the trees are getting in addition to their fluorescents is fantastic, but I'm being challenged by the nighttime lows. I've sealed everything to the best of my hasty ability, and am working on various strategies to 'leak' heat from the house into the space at night and added a space heater to the mix. So far the lowest temp I've recorded out there was 46F – that was when the outdoor lows hit the single digits, so I think I'm going to be okay.

Now that life has calmed down, I'm moved, my Mother is moved, and I have time to plan for next year I have a lot of thinking to do. There were aspects of my new climate that I had anticipated, and others that have taken me by surprise and will have to be dealt with. The wind issue still needs to be addressed, outdoor benches need to be planned out and built, winter quarters need to be monitored and ideas for improvements for next year made. And I have yet to see what spring is like in my new climate, to see what surprises it has in store for me. Even such a short move can make huge differences in how to care for trees! #

MABA Convention 2015

In July of 2015, all bonsai roads will lead to Indianapolis, Indiana! The Indianapolis Bonsai Club will host the 2015 MABA convention at the Clarion Hotel on the northwest side of the city. Suthin Sukosolvisit is the headliner of the conference. Check the MABA web site for details. <http://www.maba2015.com/>