

*IBA News & Muse*  
*Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter*  
*JULY 2015*

Volume 32, Issue 7



[www.iabonsai.org](http://www.iabonsai.org)

## IBA JULY Activities

**Tuesday, July 16, 7:00pm, IBA Meeting**  
**Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, 909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

**Program:** Show Preparation, learn how to prepare your tree for show. Show Display, learn how to display your tree properly. Bring a companion plant.

## EIBA JULY Activities

*Thursday, July 16, 7 pm, Club Meeting at Bill Englert home. Bills address is 116 Summit Ave. SE. Take the first left as you come into town from the east. 1.5 blocks down is his home, gray ranch, across from the car wash. You will need to go to the end of the block and come around to the back for parking in the grass lot.*

*Topics: Displaying Your Bonsai in Preparation for Brucemore Show. Also, cutting an air layer and repotting it will be demonstrated.*

**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.

**August 22 Brucemore Show 8:30 am.**

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

[www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com](http://www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com)

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*This spectacular Hawthorn bonsai belongs to Hans Van Meer. He doesn't say what the variety is but the flower looks like a Common hawthorn\* (Crataegus monogyna). The pot is by Brian Albriant. From Bonsai Bark blog.*

## Timely Tips

uly is here, but we have yet to see the typical high temperatures that usually are associated with July and August. In fact, July has started out on the very cool side. This is allowing my trees to continue growing quite actively. Once the temps begin pushing 85–90F, the growth will slow significantly.

When the heat comes, be sure to water adequately. If you have typical porous bonsai soils, you will be watering daily. Each time you water make sure you water thoroughly. Don't just wet the surface. You want every particle of soil to be wetted. You can accomplish this by watering each tree twice. As the Japanese say, "On bonsai, it rains twice." I water my trees from one direction, then I go through my trees for a second watering immediately after the first, but I water from the opposite side of the pot. This makes sure enough water jets into the soil. It also means I catch the back side of each tree. If you only water from one side, the soil behind the trunk will not get enough water. Watering from two angles avoids this rain shadow problem and the roots in that zone will remain healthier. On days above 90F, I water in the morning, then around 4 o'clock I will spray the foliage to help the trees with the heat. Trees in small pots with little soil will be watered twice daily on hot days.

Also, with the heat comes some additional challenges such as spider mites and black spot. Spider mites have been after my junipers this year. I spray for them using MiteX and/or Othene. You will have to spray two or three times about seven days apart so you catch the newly hatched mites that were in the egg when you last sprayed. I also hit the juniper foliage with hard water spray daily to help physically keep the mites off the plants.

As for black spot, I have used various sprays as I rotate them. This year I am back to using copper sulfate on elms, quinces, beeches, crab apples, Zelkovas.

Keep an eye on your trees everyday looking for any changes in foliage color. Identify your problems early and treat them right away. You will have healthier and more attractive bonsai if you do!

## BENCHES, BENCHES, BENCHES

Ivan Hanthorn

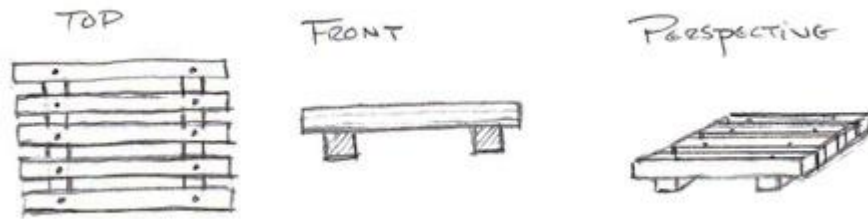
Every year I begin the outdoor phase of bonsai activity without enough bench space or with inadequate bench fixtures that need to be repaired or replaced or some other aspect of insufficient bench space for the number of bonsai and related plant material crying for a home. But I don't address that fact first, which would be the logical thing to do. I put it off until "I have time", which does not always arrive. Benches are just not the first thing I want to think about when the weather is finally right for the trees to emerge from their winter caverns into the brightness of the world.

Benches have been discussed before in this newsletter. There are books and net sites on the subject, with nice photos and diagrams. Availing those resources, however, would reflect a thoughtful, planned response to a known need. There are occasions when need just bites you. Like this time of the year with nagging siting problems now snarling at you. Since you should not be doing much to your bonsai this time of year except watering and weeding, you finally have the time to make a few improvements for the benches or their substitutes used on some of your prized collection.

Building a really good bench will, even if one loves carpentry projects and has all the right tools, take some space, time, and money. (Of which, in my universe, there is never enough of.) The following brief description on simple benches is perfect for someone presently wanting or needing simple, quick, and cheap. It appeared in the July issue of [The Dallas Bonsai Newsletter](#). The very first described table top stand can be placed on an upended cinder block for a quick pedestal. A version of this favored by Zoe Nady skips building the table and using a tile. Either way, quick pedestal.

### Table top display stand

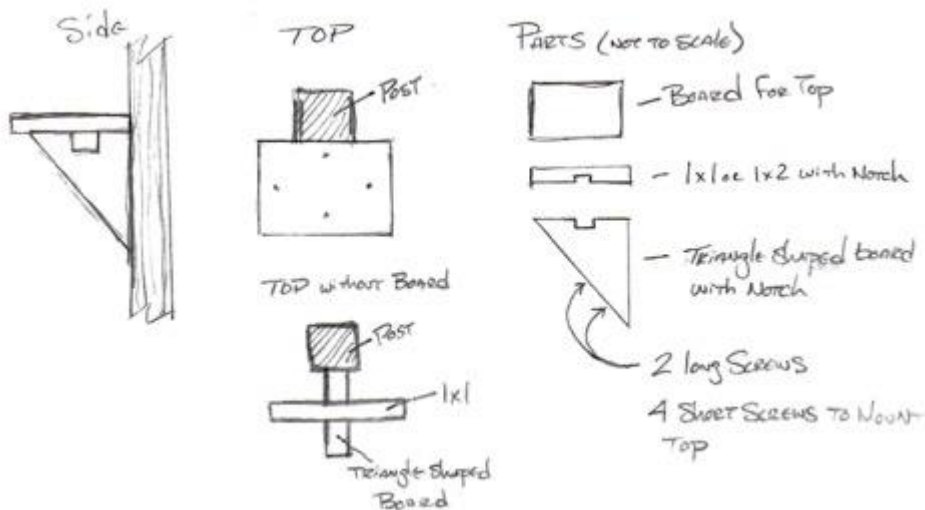
When I have a bonsai on a table, I like to dry the table off after I water. I found that by putting a couple 1x1 pieces of wood together with a couple small screws, you can make an attractive display stand and make it easy for the table to dry off.



You can make this any length and width that you want and it looks very attractive. You can take pine and stain it teak or oak. It's very attractive and depending upon how you treat it, it could be all-weather proof for 2 - 3 years.

### Fence-Post Stand

What do you do when you have a hilly, fenced backyard? Either develop a standalone bench from a 4x4 post sticking vertically out of the ground, or use the fence. It may not be very oriental looking, but you can make a very nice stand out of a triangle shaped piece of wood, a short 1x1, a small rectangular board, 2 long screws and 4 short screws.

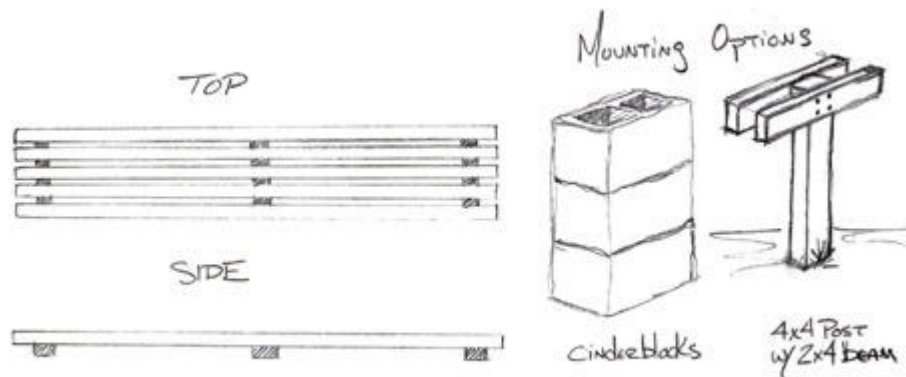


This stand will require you to turn your plant depending upon which direction it is facing, but that's actually a good thing and, it's really attractive to see all the bonsai on the fence posts.

### Benches

If you take the design idea from the table top stand above, you can easily scale it up to create long benches. These benches are not only attractive, they are easy to build. The only issue is figuring out how you will mount them. Here are two options:

1. You can use cinderblocks. Just stack them on each other and as long as they are sitting firmly on the ground, they will not move.
2. You can bury a 4x4 post sticking up vertically out of the ground and use a pair of 2x4's to make a "T", then you can mount the top deck you made to those. If you place the 4x4 "T's" close enough together, you could hold hundreds and hundreds of pounds this way. If you need more support in the "T", you can make triangle pieces which go between the two 2x4's and mount them to both the 2x4's and the 4x4 post.
- 3.



If you have animals, like cats, you know how they like to get up on stuff and knock everything off. The great thing about these designs is you can take wire and wire your plant to the stand and thus secure it down so it won't move.

Well there you have it; A couple ideas to get your mind thinking about ways to display your outdoor bonsai. This way, you can do more than just water.

## Pot Buzz

Ivan Hanthorn

In late fall I stack many of my unused pots in an orderly fashion on a bench in the yard near the house. The reasoning for this derives from an old Japanese idea that it is this weathering that gives the pot a patina of age, which is much more impressive than the shiny newness of a recently made bonsai pot. The pots are placed top down in this arrangement so that snow does not collect in the pot and lead to ice, which in expanding can break a good pot. In spring, the plan is to turn all the pots over but that does not always happen promptly. That can be a painful mistake.

Little pot size spaces with a roof over the top are inviting housing for any number of life forms. Around my house, that inquiring and curious group often includes wasps. There is nothing quite like



turning over a pot you have decided to use only to confront a wasp looking directly at you.

I lost a really nice pot this spring when I picked it up and immediately flipped it over, whereupon I saw the rear end of a really big hornet (the venom of which I am extremely allergic to) turning to her left with the most interesting footwork. I instinctively knew that when she finished her turn she would launch directly at the disturber of her previously quiet morning. So I threw the pot—really high, hoping the wasp would also go high and forget me. What goes up must come down. And so it was with the recently airborne bonsai pot. It should have landed on the grass; I wasn't worried. Until I saw where the falling bonsai pot would land—directly on a pot that I had already removed from the pot stack and placed on the grass. Breaking bonsai pots is a sound that always unhinges me. The aesthetic loss can be grievous. The always present thought process of remembering the cost of the pot can hurt the most.

So, remember that bonsai pots are useful for more than holding a bonsai. Time management and location can save one from a hostile encounter. Turn over any outdoor bonsai pots as soon as winter weather is past, before the spring surge in nest building by our outdoor neighbors.

## BONSAI SUMMER

Ivan Hanthorn

A recent day was the coldest such July day in the history of weather records in Iowa. But it's Iowa, weather always changing. Normally this is the month when the heat can get one down, as it does with any plant in a pot. So the principal concern this month is watering. On hot days more than once. Below is a reminder from the bonsai past that watering is always a basic concern.



Toshikata (1866-1908), *In the Garden*

## Tree of the Month: Boxwoods (*Buxus*)

John Denny

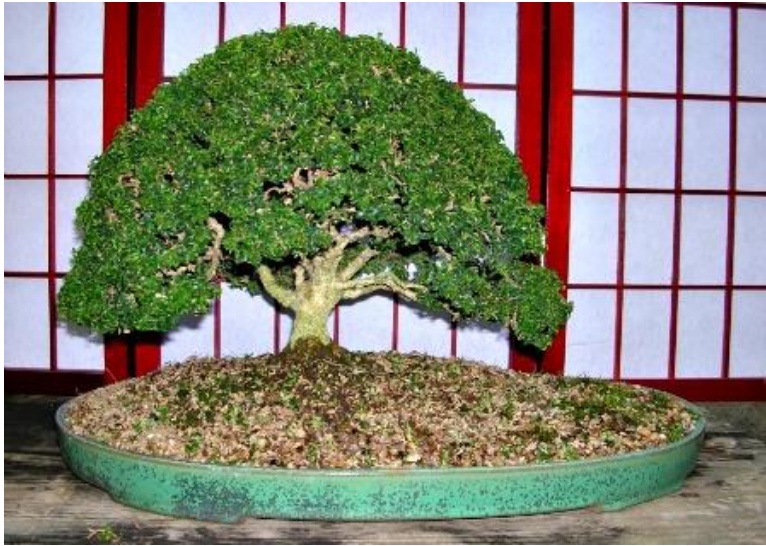
Boxwoods can make great bonsai. Often thought of as a good species for beginners, they can also make excellent specimens in the hands of top bonsai experts. What are the basic advantages of boxwood? Small leaves for one. Trunks with bark that has a nice aged look for another. They take to different stylings easily. Another reason boxwoods are a favorite is you can find older ones in landscape removal projects – larger, older, and cheap trees. Urban yamadori, if you will.

There are several varieties of *Buxus*, which can be a bit confusing for bonsai hobbyists. Let's see if we can sort things out. I have information below from two major sources. One source is Bonsai4me. The other is from a site BonsaiMary.com. *Buxus* are broad leaf evergreen shrubs and include European, Chinese and Korean boxwoods. They are understory trees and can flourish in shadier locations. The two *Buxus* species that are commonly seen as bonsai are *Buxus microphylla*/Japanese Box and *Buxus sempervirens*/Common Box. Outwardly both of these species are very similar. The main difference between the two species is their vigor; Japanese Box being less vigorous and slower growing than Common Box.

The *Buxus harlandii* is just one favorite. It is especially known for the impressive deep crevices in the bark, which adds to its appearance of age. Photos below show a) craggy bark of *harlandii*, b) cascade style, c) informal upright.



The boxwood referred to as Kingsville is called *Buxus microphylla* var. "kingsville". It is also known as "compacta". There are several similar looking types, such as the Morris midget. All of these small leaf varieties make good bonsai. The bark on Kingsville is usually smooth and often almost white in color.



*Kingsville on left is by Rodney Clemons. Kingsville on right shows thick trunk with typical branching of boxwoods.*

Boxwoods can be slow growers, especially Kingsville. They have dense roots that require a good deal of water. Keep them well watered. Boxes also bud back easily, which is one reason they are often recommended for beginners. My Kingsvilles throw lots of buds in branch crotches, low on branches close to the trunk and in other unwanted places. Keep those locations cleaned of buds so the tree looks like a tree rather than a shrub.

Boxwood have many good characteristics that are useful for bonsai. Dark green leaves that reduce well, naturally short internodes and they can take hard pruning that prompts prolific back budding. Boxwood also have shallow, fibrous root systems that often produce powerful surface roots and nebari.

The bark of Boxwood looks mature at an early age but is thin and easily damaged so care must be taken when heavy pruning or wiring. As the bark becomes dirty very easily, accumulated dirt and algae should be cleaned using water and an old toothbrush.

Well-fed Boxwood are fast growers but are very slow to thicken trunks. Field grown Boxwood can have trunks of as little 3" after 20 or even 30 years. For this reason it is important to source older stock to use for bonsai. Old hedges and garden material are an excellent source of suitable material. Collect Boxwood in March and April removing all ground soil (bare-rooting).

Boxwood can be air layered successfully, and are best started in April. Cuttings can be taken from Autumn to early Spring. Use cuttings of at least 4" length for greater success. I have successfully ground layered a 2.5 inch caliper boxwood to rid it of gnarly uneven and overgrown nebari with very nice results. The new roots were radial and all growing from the trunk at the same level. Those new roots will become excellent nebari soon.

Small wounds on Buxus heal well but larger wounds, particularly on older parts of the tree, are very slow to heal and are better used as deadwood features. . Good wound healing techniques help greatly on boxwoods. As Buxus wood is very hard, intricate carving and jinining can be carried out without fear of deterioration

There is discussion on whether to keep boxwoods in dappled shade or give them lots of sun. Too much shade means less growth. Too much sun can burn leaves. Remember they are an understory tree. I keep my boxwoods in full morning sun followed by afternoon shade. This seems to be a good arrangement

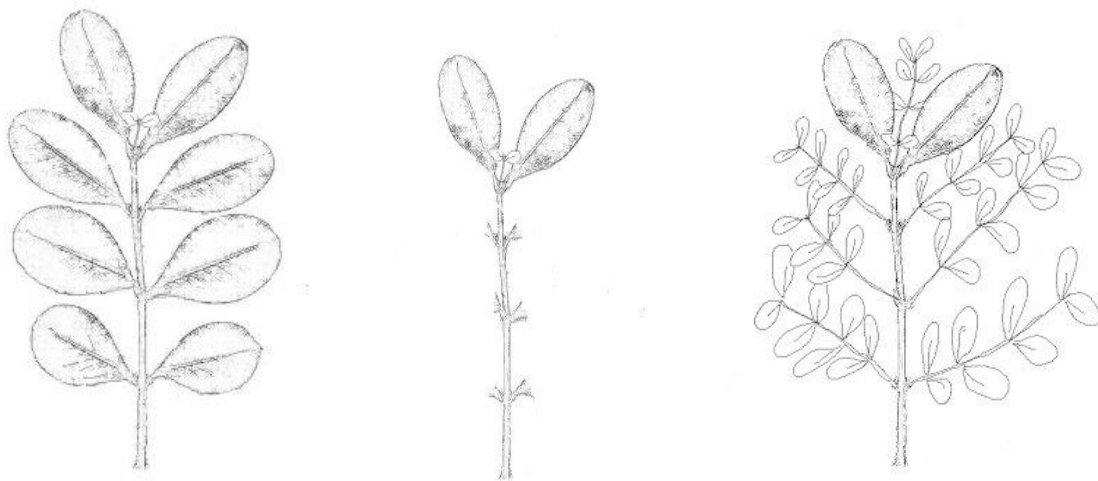


Boxwood are hardy to only around  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$  (25F to us in Iowa). My boxwoods come inside at this temperature for the winter. Foliage can become yellow or bronzed after frosts during the winter but it will green up again during spring.

Repot every other year and keeping developed bonsai slightly root bound is okay, as more frequent repotting can result in larger leaves as the tree becomes especially vigorous.

Boxwoods regularly need thinning of the foliage mass to allow light into the inner branches to stop them becoming bare and to prompt back budding. Regular pruning helps to increase ramification and reduce leaf size as well. However, it is also important to allow some free growth to ensure the overall vigor of the bonsai is maintained. Free, unrestricted extension of the first flush of growth can be allowed in spring (around April/May depending on your climate) to strengthen the tree, followed by strict pinching and pruning for the rest of the year to refine the foliage.

Healthy Boxwood respond well to partial defoliation as new buds swell through the growing season.



Remove all but the last leaf pairs on a shoot as the new buds swell at the shoot tips. New shoots will then emerge from the leaf axils at the points where you have removed the leaves. (See above.) The result of the leaf thinning is that there will be a greater number of shoots, all with smaller leaves. The foliage can be thinned from early June onwards as new buds swell and begin to extend.

Once new buds have extended but before they start to harden, wire can be used to shape new branching while they are still pliable. Once older shoots harden they are impossible to wire properly without snapping as they become very brittle. Wire the new shoots loosely (air-wiring) and check often to make sure that the wire does not cut into the soft new bark.

If you do not have a boxwood, look for them at nurseries as pre bonsai. Keep an eye out for landscape tear outs to find older ones. Also, smaller boxes are sold regularly by bonsai sellers. They are great trees. Grab one or two and have some fun!



## ARTISAN'S CUP

Ivan Hanthorn

Word is getting around about the upcoming Artisan's Cup bonsai show. Perhaps anyone who has ever bought a bonsai has gotten a series of emails lately about Artisan's Cup. Lest some of you have not been gifted with these emails or deleted them unread, I will attempt a brief summery.

I wrote an article about this upcoming exhibition that became longer than intended. Then I realized it was critical and negative and might offend some of our readers, particularly fans of Ryan Neil. Therefore, this is not that article.

### JUST THE FACTS

The Artisan's Cup will be held at the Portland Art Museum in Portland, Oregon, Friday, September 25 – Sunday, September 27, 2015. The judges for this invitation only show are David Degroot, Colin Lewis, Boon Manakitivipar, Walter Pall, and Peter Warren. Artisan's Cup has been designed and developed by Ryan Neil. It will be the first really splashy event that highlights the new "Portland Bonsai Village", an idea which originated with Michael Hagedorn after his return from his Japanese bonsai apprenticeship. "The goal of The Artisans Cup is to celebrate and accurately represent the bonsai movement in North America in all of its shapes, sizes, and skill levels. Our focus on the American bonsai movement is primarily based on location (bonsai that is being done in America) rather than a particular style."

The program schedule is now available online ([www.theartisanscup.com/blog](http://www.theartisanscup.com/blog)). Everything has a fee; prices are on the schedule. If one takes advantage of all the bonsai tours available (which do sound very inviting) the cost will not be insignificant.

### OUTCOMES

"Well, there's the prizes. First, second, and third prizes are \$10,000, \$5,000, and \$3,000 respectively: Nothing to sneeze at. But there is far more at stake than money or placement. Bonsai in the United States has been hungry for a venue and show that presents bonsai as a respected art form. The Artisans Cup is that event. It promises to offer the ultimate proving ground for serious practitioners to show their best and carve a unique niche in the art canon for bonsai in the United States."

"The time has come for American Bonsai. A steadily growing subset of the millennia-old art form, American Bonsai honors tradition while pushing the artistic boundaries of what is possible. The Artisans Cup is the leading expression of American Bonsai, showcasing the highest level of craftsmanship and skill in an experimental environment that will engage and inspire."

I have not included the critique that I originally wrote but I will say that to me the ad campaign for this upcoming bonsai event is a classic example of a supercilious proclamation with the unintentional result of possible offense to the widest possible audience. Hubris, hutzpah, presumption, arrogance, and audacity are just a few of the descriptive terms that come to mind. The message of the advertising language is that for elitists who are bothered by the inadequacies of the hoi polloi, this is just the ticket. To be clear, this will no doubt be a really great bonsai show. But the very apparent elitist views of the organizers cloud an appreciation of the event planned.

## Companion Plant Photos

John Denny

I love good photos of companion plants. There is such variety of plants, flowers, foliage, pots, combinations of plants, etc. And they make for great photography subjects. Here are several from the garden of Tony Tickle.





## Kokufu ten Photos



*Japanese five Needle Pine*



*Shohin Japanese grey bark elm, Zelkova serrata. Can you believe the twigging???*