

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
JUNE 2013

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www.iabonsai.org

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IBA JUNE Activities

June 18, Meeting, 7:00 pm, Des Moines Botanical Garden
Black Pine culture, Helene Magruder.

July 1. Deadline for State Fair Bonsai Show entries.

This can be done online. You can enter as many trees as you wish, with up to ten trees for the basic entry fee. Google 2013 Iowa State Fair/ Competition/ Categories/ Premium Books for entry forms. Bonsai is under Floriculture.

EIBA JUNE Activities

June 13, 6:00 Board Meeting. Nothing But Noodles restaurant Meeting Room.

June 22, Noon, Club Picnic, Guthridge Park, Green Pavillion

Dave Lowman will be at the picnic selling bonsai trees and supplies. He will also lead a workshop.

No Club Meeting in June. See you in July!

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A very interesting trunk on this pine. Overall, a very nice tree by Mario Komsta, a Polish artist, who now lives and works in Spain.

*An eye for an eye only ends up
making the whole world blind.*

Mahatma Gandhi

Timely Tips

Things are growing this time of year, so much that we need to begin managing growth of our new foliage. In our area, it is time to decandle pines (black and red pines mainly). We decandle in order to balance apical dominance with lower growth on the tree, to shorten needles, to create ramification, and to shorten the length of shoots. You can find good information on decandling on Jonas Dupuich's blog on Bonsai Tonight. Search "decandling".

Deciduous trees are growing rapidly as well. I enjoy Michael Hagedorn's writing and will quote him on growth management this time of year. "We can divide the bonsai year up into significant periods of activity and equally significant periods of wine and tea drinking in anticipation of periods of activity. Right now, in many temperate parts of the northern hemisphere, we're just ending a period of bonsai inactivity. Let's call this period of inactivity between the start of growth in late winter and the hardening off of leaves in late spring our 'Spring Break'.

If we cut shoots and leaves too early, just as it begins growing, we often dampen the energy of the tree too much.

If you approach your tree at the right time—and that has as much to do with the date on the calendar as how strong or young the tree is—then your results with bonsai will improve dramatically.

Essentially, it comes down to this:

- End of repotting to hardening off of leaves: Sharpen scissors
- Month when leaves begin to harden off: Use scissors"

Of course, there are exceptions, but Michael's approach is quite straightforward. His point is, timing is everything. I would add, if your tree is young and still needs trunk girth or main branch thickening, let those areas run. Otherwise you can pinch emerging leaves or when shoots get 6–8 leaves, cut back to just a couple. This will create ramification, shorten internodes, develop taper and create smaller leaves – all good things!

Bonsai – A Heartbreaker

By John Denny

The hobby of bonsai is a wonderful hobby, full of interest and beauty. But, like all things we love, bonsai can break your heart. Heartbreak is painful. It needs to be shared, in order to get through it. I'll do some sharing.

I have been fortunate enough to still have my very first bonsai. However, I have talked to others who have said how painful it was to lose their original bonsai – painful, like losing your first love. Fortunately, there are others to take the place of your first tree.

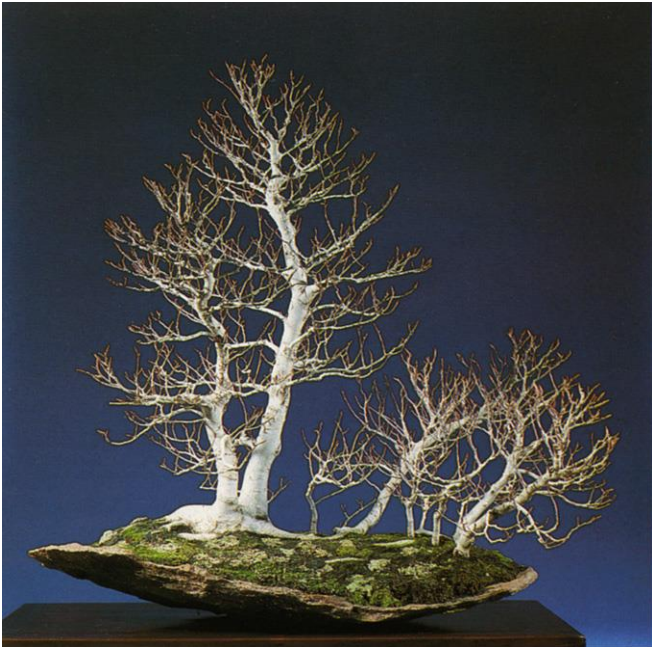
I did lose my first good workshop effort. I went to Brussel's Rendezvous and created a very nice Trident maple forest. For a rookie, it was an excellent outcome. So good, in fact, when an experienced fellow club member saw it, he said, "You did this? YOU did this?" I was so pleased to say, "Yeah, I did this!" It is a good thing I have pictures, because that fall, I hardened the trees off too deeply before bringing them in. The forest never leafed out. That was my first tough loss. I couldn't stand to throw the trees away. I still have the forest in its nice pot on a shelf in my shed. Buddhism teaches us not to become attached to things. I would make a lousy Buddhist.

Each year, as my trees come out of hibernation, I watch with joy as each individual tree shows signs of life. But, as April becomes May, there are always a few trees not yet showing activity. Are they still going to leaf out? I watch for signs each day. Some species leaf out late. Some are late because they have been repotted recently.

(cont. on p 4)

Japanese Beech (*Fagus crenata*) By

John Denny



*Japanese beech forest on a curved slab.
From [Bonsai Today](#) issue 24.*



Beech (and other deciduous trees) are appreciated for their bare-boned winter look, when you see the whole trunk and all the branches all the way out to the finest twigs. From [Bonsai Today](#) issue 10.

Japanese beech (*Fagus crenata*), with their striking white bark, strong trunks (often with excellent nebari) and beautiful smallish leaves, are a favorite of many bonsai artists, especially in Japan. Unfortunately, they aren't that easy to find here in North America and our native beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), is too rangy and large-leafed to make for very good bonsai .

The European beech, *Fagus sylvatica*, which you can find more easily in the U. S., is a much better bet. I have grown European beech seedlings for 4 years and this year assembled them into a nice beech forest which I think will have a good future.

You can tell the two major bonsai species apart as the bark is grey in the European beech and silvery in the Japanese species; but remains smooth even on very old specimens of both species. Leaves are arranged alternatively; the European species has ovate, wavy-edged leaves to 10cm which are pale green in Spring appearing as late as May. (In this late year, I was worried that my beech were going to leaf out at all!) The fall foliage turns yellow to copper and commonly remains on the tree throughout the winter protecting the following years leaf-buds.

Beech can grow well in semi shade or full sun, though be careful in high temps or high wind when leaf burn can occur. Beech need a long warm summer to be successful. Short or cold summers can hurt their vigor. Fertilize young trees early beginning with leaf set. Mature, refined trees require little fertilization until leaves harden off. Repot every couple of years using normal deciduous soils.

Ramification can be a bit challenging, but work to pinch off the growth tip after the first one or two leaves open. This shortens internodes, increases ramification and makes smaller leaves. When wiring, be very careful not to let the wire cut into the trunk or main branches as healing will take a long time and the smooth bark can be easily marred.

Beech are slow growers, so it is rare to see large trunked beech bonsai. Therefore, many beech trees are made into clump style or forests, which is what I did. As my beech forest matures, look for a photo in the future!

(cont. from p 2)

Bonsai – A Heartbreaker

by John Denny

It can be agonizing to see the days go by and the odds of my tree never leafing out rising, until finally I lose hope. Losing hope is a sinking feeling. I don't like it one bit. Especially if the tree is a good tree or I have had it for a long time or put a lot of work into it or it has great potential. This is why I grow seedlings. They always seem to do well and I get excited over their growth. And if one dies, well, it was just a seedling and I have several others left.

Have you lost an expensive tree? I talked to a bonsai professional who told me his first good tree was a \$3000 azalea. He lost it. Just hearing his story made me feel like I had been punched in the gut. And it wasn't even my tree! Colin Lewis, when he came to our club for a workshop, recalled how he lost nearly his entire collection of trees when he moved from England to Boston. Losing a collection must require serious grief therapy or possibly total sedation.

One of the saddest stories I have heard was while I was at Brussels, working on the above mentioned Trident maple forest. A very old gentleman came up behind me, said something kind about my semi completed forest, and then said he would have to do another Trident forest. I asked, "Did something happen to yours?" He replied he was from New Orleans and when Katrina hit, he had to evacuate. His automated watering system did not work in his absence as his area lost electrical power for a couple weeks. He lost his lifelong collection. He was too old to recreate a collection. Wow. My losses are nothing compared to that.

This spring a good friend, Chris, suffered some heartbreak. During a storm, a neighbor's very large oak tree snapped and crashed onto his recently rebuilt bonsai bench, smashing it. The large oak branches broke several of Chris's pots which he had made himself. Chris scrambled to repot those trees and hopes he has saved them. Ouch. Can't you feel his pain? Nothing he did wrong, just plain bad luck. Chris is a persevering kind of fellow and will get through his tough break.

You know, these stories of heartbreak, I think, is why we have bonsai clubs. We can share our highs and lows. Our fellow club members listen to us. They have all been there. They know the pain. Bonsai friends are among the best friends. We feel like we belong. We are home.

The heartbreak of bonsai is enough to drive many from the hobby. Yet, for most of us, the joys far outweigh the occasional loss. There is so much positive about bonsai as a hobby that it pulls us back from the ledge when we have a setback. For me, bonsai brings hope. Hope that my trees each year, will leaf out and grow healthier, stronger, more beautiful. They help me stay connected to the universe. We need hope. We need a sense of connection to something larger than ourselves.

We need bonsai in our lives.

Brussel's Rendezvous Review

By John Denny

Brussels Nursery in Olive Branch, Mississippi, holds an annual bonsai event every Memorial weekend called Brussels Rendezvous. It is three days spent in workshops with bonsai experts, demonstrations by those same experts, and eating. Did I mention eating? Southern hospitality is woven throughout the weekend.

Brussels Nursery is strictly a bonsai nursery. It has grown dramatically in recent years. The greenhouses are very large and placed in an L shape. The long side of the L has 16 greenhouses and the short side must have another 6 or 8 more. It is a massive amount of square footage and it is crammed with bonsai. Brussels sells a vast number of lower end bonsai. But, they also have many wonderful specimen trees some with price tags approaching 10 grand. You say you want a Trident maple? Choose from hundreds – shohin to monsters you cannot lift. When I first attended Brussels I walked the greenhouses. Then I noticed employees using bicycles and golf carts. Now the customers borrow the golf carts to get around to find trees.

This year Rendezvous featured 6 artists. The two regulars who are invited every year are Marc Noelanders of Belgium and Kathy Shaner from the US. This year included Michael Levin of Boston, Ed Trout of Florida who focuses on tropical species, Rodney Clemmons a boxwood expert, and Owen Reiech of Tennessee who is apprenticing in Japan.

John Powell, who trained in Japan as a gardener and now designs, installs, and maintains Japanese gardens in the U. S. was also a guest artist and created several Japanese themed garden projects on the grounds during the weekend. Each year, John makes beautiful additions to the grounds.

I took a few notes from the workshops and bonsai styling demonstrations and I will share some highlights. Friday, I spent the entire day standing in front of a very large Blue Alps juniper, which is a needle juniper. Come prepared with gloves if you ever tackle one of these. They are prickly and my fingertips were not happy. My mentor for this tree was Marc Noelanders, who is very well known for his work on Blue Alps. Unlike most workshops where you draw lots to determine who gets which workshop tree, Marc led us out to a field of Blue Alps and we were allowed to select our own – from dozens. You really have bend down and fight your way through the dense foliage to see the trunk movement. Looking for good branches was challenging, too, as there were so danged many branches!

Back at the work table with my tree, Marc had us clean old needles (ouch, ouch, ouch again) and weak branches from the mass of shrubbery. Next we cleaned a heavy load of moss from the trunk. He told us to use half strength vinegar on the trunk once back home and scrub with a toothbrush to remove the final layer of moss. We then dug around the trunk looking for nebari. These trees were sunk in very large nursery pots and the nebari on my tree was quite deep and hard to get at. I will find out more at repotting time next spring.

Marc came buy and reviewed my tree, looking for branches he could use and ones he could not. In general, he

looked for thinner branches up top which were still bendable. Any branches too large to bend were sawed off and I was told to jin them out. I worked on jin for a long time and still did not finish it all. I prepared two larger branches Marc had chosen to keep with raffia. I wired with double wires of the largest aluminum wire and Marc came by and bent the branches. Good thing he is a big strong guy! I wired up the top branches and bent them as instructed. I still had work left but it was 4:30 and time to quit. I am quite happy with the tree. It was a great learning experience. I learned a lot about how to create deadwood. An experienced artist like Marc makes creating attractive deadwood look effortless. It wasn't easy for me, but with several teaching tips from the pro, it became much easier and my results looked more natural.

Kathy Shaner did her demo on a larger Hinoki cypress. Hinokis have a reputation for not budding back easily. Kathy said you have to tell the tree what to do and it will bud back. She then said you cannot just whisper instructions to your Hinoki, you have to shout those instructions. And do the same the following year. Then it will back bud. Most people pinch Hinoki tips. Shaner said in spring and later summer you have pinch back hard - go back behind the new growth and actually pinch some old growth. This will create back budding on Hinoki. She also says you have to take out extra branches up top where Hinoki get dense. This lets in more light, which also increases back budding. Shaner styled her Hinoki with the end fronds of the branches "dripping" down so the tree looks soft. Hinoki branches, when wired, do not hold their new position well and require repeated wiring. A tip is to lightly bend the branch back and forth a few times to create stress points in the branch. The minor damage this causes results in the branch adding more lignin than if you simply wired the branch without prebending. Hinoki branches do crack, so be careful.

I covered much of Marc Noelanders approach to Blue Alps earlier, but here are a couple of additional ideas. Marc says selecting the correct front of the tree is about 60% of getting a good looking tree. If you do not get the best front initially, you will have many problems in the future. Look for movement, nebari, and key branches when finding the front. Movement is key in junipers. Marc also talked about how, in a demo he was doing everything in 3 hours. But if he was working on this same tree, he would spread the work out over two or three years. This is much less stressful on the tree.

Owen Reiech was taking a break from his apprenticeship in Japan. He was talkative and funny. He said whenever he was working on a tree and his Japanese master walked by, the master would say, "Make it look cool!" Owen suggested we all check out the bonsai video series by Bjorn Bjorholm who apprenticed at the same nursery as Owen. I can attest, the videos are short, well done, and very instructive. Check out his blog and videos at <http://bjorvalabonsaistudio.com/>

Brussels Nursery is a wonderful experience. On their website is a short video of last year's Rendezvous which will give you a visual flavor of what Rendezvous is like. Check out <http://www.brusselsbonsai.com/annual-rendezvous-video.cfm>



View from entrance to Brussels Bonsai Nursery. Beautifully landscaped.



Bonsai as far as the eye can see. Then turn left and find more!



Very large beautiful white pine specimen.