

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
JUNE 2014

Volume 31, Issue 6



www.iabonsai.org

www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com

IBA JUNE Activities

June 17, 7 PM, IBA MEETING

Des Moines Botanical Garden

Topic: Shitakusa and Kusamono. Presenter: Ivan Hanthorn.

This will be a workshop on the topic of companion plants for bonsai, often called accent plants. The traditional form is a single plant in a small pot, shitakusa. More complex plantings, often larger, are kusamono. Small they can serve as a companion plant; larger they can stand on their own in a presentation. Bring a very shallow pot, 1-5 small plants, fine wire, and some small caliber bonsai soil (shohin soil). The only tools you will need are scissors, chop stick, and perhaps a tweezer. If you want to make a kusamono, bring larger or more plants and a larger but still shallow pot. Contact Dasu Bonsai to order specific plants or pots for this workshop if you need some items. Dave Lowman will have good companion pots for this exercise available for sale.

Succulents, grasses, small flowering plants, ferns, miniature hostas, and various mosses are all good for this application. Do use plants that have similar environmental needs. Bring as much moss as you can gather. A good kusamono is a moss hog.

JULY 1: ENTRY DEADLINE FOR THE IOWA STATE FAIR BONSAI SHOW

It is easily done online, although if you wish you can still use snail mail to post a real bank check. Regardless, the deadline is the deadline. Go to the State Fair website for all necessary information: www/iowastatefair.org. Click on Competition, then Categories/Premium Books, then Floriculture under Sections. Bonsai, a category of Floriculture is on page 6, Division 205. Read the special rules and the class identification information. The entry form is back at Categories/Premium Books under Required Reading.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

IBA and EIBA Calendars	1
Timely Tips	2
Maple Technique	2
Grafting	3
Peter Tea Interview	5
Shitakusa and Kusamono	7
Bonsai Smart: Layering by David DeGroot	8

It's all very easy.

You do not need to know exactly which trees you are submitting, although that would be good because by now you should be grooming those you wish to show. BE SURE to also get your admission pass and your vehicle parking permits at the same time you are registering your bonsai. Otherwise, you will not be able to approach the Agriculture Building to unload your trees. Although one of our members did once do a long hike from parking over the hill with a small shohin bonsai to get to the building, it is an experience not to want to duplicate.

EIBA JUNE Activities

No Board Mtg or Regular Club Mtg this month.

June 28, Noon EIBA SUMMER PICNIC
Guthridge Park, Green Pavillion in Hiawatha

Dave Lowman will be a vendor at this picnic, so come see his bonsai trees, tools, pots, books, wire, etc. Let Dave know ahead of time if there is anything specific you would like him to bring along.

Bring a dish to pass. Meat to grill and soda will be provided.

Timely Tips

The spring winds have died down and the temperatures have risen. Summer is here. Trees are growing hard. Finally. Since it was such a tough winter and cold damp spring our trees may not be as strong as usual at this time of year. We need to do all we can to get them healthy and strong again.

Now is a good time to spray for fungus issues such as black spot on elms or needle cast on pines. Also, begin checking your trees for insect activity. If your junipers are looking poorly, they may be suffering from attack of red spider mites. These are sucking insects which can cause extensive damage or even death. Because the mites themselves are so small, you usually recognize their presence by the damage they have already done. You can check for the critters by holding a white piece of paper or cloth under the foliage and tapping the branches. If you see small dots of red which move, you need to treat for red spider mites. Juniper foliage shows damage by first fading to a dull, mottled green which turns to yellow then to brown quite quickly. Mite damage will affect an entire branch or more, including the growing tips, which distinguishes it from the natural browning of inner foliage. Treat spider mites with any of a number of insecticides, including malathion, kelthane and isotox, by spraying twice, several days apart, using two different effective insecticides.

Another item to check for is wire biting into branches. Branches are growing rapidly this time of year, so it can happen quickly. You may be able to remove only some of the wire or you may need to remove all of the wire on a tree.

Fertilization is important now. Let single flush pines grow their new needles out first, then begin fertilizing. Red and black pines should be given a rest from fertilization after candling, then hit them hard beginning late summer through fall. Deciduous trees can be fertilized every couple of weeks now. All trees considered pre bonsai can be fertilized hard. With finished bonsai, be a little less aggressive in fertilization.

Maple Technique

By John Denny

Often the inner branches of maples die back. The cause generally is lack of light reaching into those inner branches. Use the following techniques in late spring early summer on your developed maples to prevent this dieback.

Japanese maples have a paired leaf pattern. As the leaves harden off, remove one leaf from each pair with sharp scissors cutting the petiole in half. This will let in light and air your tree needs. Rather than defoliate the entire maple, just remove leaves from the outer layer, leaving weaker interior leaves. This technique is not as harsh as total defoliation and will not induce a second flush of growth.

Trident maples require a different technique. In May, cut the elongated shoots back to the first pair of leaves. In June or July perform a defoliation. Only do this on healthy trees as defoliation can weaken a tree. There are several means of defoliation – full defoliation, a single branch only, or removal of outer leaves only as with Japanese maples. The latter is generally best and is least harmful.

If done correctly, these leaf removal techniques will result in new and smaller leaves growing back in 2 to 3 weeks. And the inner portions of your tree will be healthier and stronger from the additional light and air circulation.

Timing of these techniques varies with your location and the annual weather variations. Try not to wait too long prior to leaf removal or inner portions of your maples may have already suffered from lack of light.

Although these techniques can be tedious and time consuming, especially on larger trees, they are the backbone of good healthy strong maple bonsai trees.

Scion Grafting for Bonsai

By Ivan Hanthorn

Spring continuing into early Summer is a good time for grafting new foliage onto bonsai using scions of the foliage type you desire. June is considered by some to be the best scion grafting time throughout the Northern Hemisphere temperate zone. There are many types of grafting, but only three of use for bonsai. Scion grafting, also termed veneer grafting, is the flashy one that seems to involve a bit of magic. The more pedestrian but still useful techniques for changing a tree's form are approach grafting and thread grafting. Both are best done earlier in the year, particularly thread grafting. Scion grafting is quite simply the taking of a piece of end branch material from one tree and attaching it by insertion into a cleft cut into a recipient tree, which can be either the tree from which the donor graft material was taken or a different tree that is the same species or even one not of the same species but in the same genus. Most commonly done with junipers, scion grafting can also be done successfully with pines and commonly used deciduous material. It is a method that literally allows changing the foliage on a tree that has good form but not such great foliage, or rearranging the foliage of a bonsai by means of grafting rather than hard pruning.

This technique has been written about extensively, so the purpose of this short piece is not to once again take you through the steps of the process but rather to note some options and considerations before undertaking the procedure. There are three basic methods of attaching the scion to the host branch and keeping the scion graft sealed. The first is the very traditional method of cutting the cleft on a slant facing toward the tip of the branch, prepping the graft piece by cutting the insertion wedge shape with cuts using a sharp knife, and sealing the site with tape and wax. This basic method is well illustrated by the YouTube video *Juniper Foliage Grafting Parts I & II* by Bonsai Artist Charles M., in which Shimpaku juniper foliage is grafted onto a prostrate juniper. (Charles M. has a website of particular interest to beginners and those wanting to practice bonsai inexpensively, Kuromatsubonsai.com.)



Prepared scion

Graft inserted but not yet sealed or wrapped

In this video Charles M. uses a traditional sealing wax. A later method used by many now puts the graft into a miniature greenhouse. After wrapping the graft with grafting tape a grafting envelope or a folded piece of plastic is placed around the graft and the portion of branch bearing the graft and wrapping with more grafting tape. A flexible, stretchable grafting tape wound tight obviates the need for the traditional sealing wax. Small ball of damp sphagnum moss placed in this temporary enclosure greatly contributes to success. To best ensure success with this method, place a piece of duct tape on the top of the plastic bag to prevent sunburn to the tender tissue beneath. In a few weeks snip off a small area of the bag to allow ventilation; enlarge the opening progressively as the graft

shows signs of strength and growth. I learned this method from Michael Hagedorn; he still is an advocate of this approach to grafting. Check out his bonsai bog, crataegus.com for some graft photos and an interesting story of grafting as a scale infestation solver technique.

The newest rage is the cocoon method, for which Ryan Neil seems to be the poster boy. This method exploits the qualities of the latest grafting tape available for bonsai use—a flexible stretchable breathable paper backed plastic paraffin wax film that evolved out of scientific and medical laboratory use. Do the basic graft and then wrap everything in a cocoon of the paraffin translucent tape. Voila—instant translucent breathing moisture retaining greenhouse! Neil's YouTube video on grafting (Ryan Neil on Grafting") is the current viral reality demonstration on this cocoon method. (This was published November 27, 2012, on the Capital Bonsai Blog (capitalbonsai.wordpress.com), which is the personal bonsai blog of Aarin Packard, Assistant Curator of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum; interesting blog itself which is worth perusing.) View the Neil grafting video a couple of times and cocooning all makes sense. N.B., a small ball of damp sphagnum moss can also be added to this method, just as in the bag method.

The tape is the most critical piece of material needed for the cocoon graft. It is commonly referred to by a brand name, *Parafilm*. At one time not that long ago, it was difficult to find and rather expensive. Now that horticulturalists have proven to be a ready market for grafting usage, Parafilm is available in various sizes and prices from many online sources, including Amazon.

One other procedural note that really is important. Having the right tool always facilitates a satisfactory undertaking of a procedure. For grafting, the knife is the only real tool unless you use scissors for tape preparation. Not just any knife, but a *sharp knife*. The sharper the knife the better. Gary Wood teaches that unless the blade is sharp enough that you can dry shave the hair on your forearm the blade is not yet sharp enough. Flat sharpened blades (sharpened only on one side, with the other side truly flat) are the easiest blades to get truly sharp. This is the common design of Japanese grafting knives as well as European and Japanese book and paperknives. (I am a retired paper conservator. We used such flat sharpened blades to carve the side of a piece of paper to put on just the angle of bevel we needed. Think about the minute perfection possible with a knife this sharp—shaping something as thin as a sheet of paper with a knife.) Good grafting knives can be expensive. If you have a good wood working knife it may well do, but sharpen, sharpen, sharpen. Another option is a new draft knife blade, such as Exacto. Sharp enough to draw blood, which is always a way to tell sharpness, it will do but not be as sharp and as guidable as a Japanese blade. The last option which is a very good one is to use the same blades that surgeons use on us when we “go under the knife”—scalpel blades. Every survivor of an undergrad science laboratory class remembers the “Bard-Parker” blades and handles. The trade marked brand is a generic for this kind of blade. Available in science supply sources.

A last caution: with blades this sharp you will not feel a cut. Be conscious of where the blade is and is going. Cuts from really sharp blades often produce blood long before the pain sensation. So keep some Band-Aid's or a first aid kit available as a precaution when you do undertake some serious grafting. I was once so into a grafting job in a bonsai study group setting that it was only when others asked me about the blood streaming down my arm that I realized I had nicked myself with the grafting knife. Blood does wash off the tools but it is a strange ornamentation for the bonsai.

Interview With Peter Tea

By Jeremiah Lee of Yenling Bonsai (as published on Bonsai Bark)

I recently caught up with Peter and was able to ask him several more questions I had and he was kind enough to answer. I thought I would share these, so here are the 28 questions and answers below. Thank you Mr. Tea!

1. What do you think you will learn or focus on in 2013 as opposed to what you've learned and focused on in 2012?

A. 2012 was a overload of new Bonsai information for me. It reinforced what I've learned in the past, yet also got me to rethink my approach and philosophy in Bonsai. For 2013, I plan to continue honing the skills I've learned in the past, and be more focused on more varieties and better recognizing the little things that make each species used in Bonsai interesting and unique.

2. What do you think Bonsai in the US will be like 20 years from now?

A. The US is such a large country and Bonsai levels vary greatly. I see a huge leap in quality and enthusiasm as I'm continuing my apprenticeship today. There are young and talented bonsai professionals hitting the bonsai scene and I can only see a upswing in Bonsai and a new higher standard in American Bonsai.



: An old Black pine at Aichi-en bonsai nursery, after Peter Tea worked on it for three days.

3. *Name 1 or 2 non bonsai related lessons Mr. Tanaka has taught you during your apprenticeship?*

A. It's okay to have fun too.

8. *If Akadama ran out in the US. What mixes would you start experimenting with?*

A. Akadama is an interesting soil because it evolves with the root system. At first, it holds only so much water, then as the tree grows more roots and the akadama starts to break down, it holds even more water for all the new roots. I'm not sure what other types of material I can find that will do similar things other than firing some clay myself. If I couldn't come up with a substitute, I would probably use porous type stones in the mix only such as lava, pumice, etc.

12. *If any, what types of US natives would you like to work with or experiment with?*

A. We are fortunate in the United States with all the great native species to choose from. I like the native junipers and pines, but what I would really love to experiment with are Coast live Oaks and Valley Oaks. Done well, they have such a good feeling to them.

16. *What's the best way for people in the US to obtain top notch material?*

A. I believe that learning from a skilled and qualified professional will help us all in first recognizing what good material is. Then at that point, it's a matter of growing, collecting or importing trees. Personally I think growing and collecting are the best way to get nice material. Importing works for me as well but is much more limited with all the restrictions.

26. *What type of liquid fertilizer if any is used at Aichien and how often is it applied?*

A. We don't use liquid fertilizer at Aichien. We use ground up [rapeseed](#) and put them in tea bags. We apply them to different trees during different times of the year.

[Visit Yenling Bonsai for the entire interview](#)



This photo of Peter working on a Black pine at Aichi-en appears with the interview [on Yenling Bonsai](#).

SHITAKUSA AND KUSAMONO

By Ivan Hanthorn

The internet is now so full of bonsai material that it is fun to just go exploring. Wikipedia can sometimes provide a useful precis on a topic of interest. So it is with kusamono and shitakusa, the entry for which I have lifted complete for you to enjoy below. This is the topic of the next meeting of the IBA, so heads up.

Kusamono (literally "grass thing") and shitakusa (literally "undergrass") are a potted collection of plants designed to either be viewed in accompaniment with bonsai or alone. Normally the term *kusamono* is used when the planting is displayed as the center of attention, while the term *shitakusa* is used for plantings that accompany bonsai displays. In contrast to underplantings (which are potted in with the bonsai), kusamono and shitakusa are displayed separately in special pots, driftwood, or even stones.

Plants used are typically moss, grass, lichen, small flowers, bamboo, or bulbs that may heighten the beauty or reflect a certain season. While traditionally in Japan plants gathered from mountains contributed to the bulk of companion plantings, modern use has extended to more creative and artistic design.



A kusamono made of plants from Connecticut during the summer.

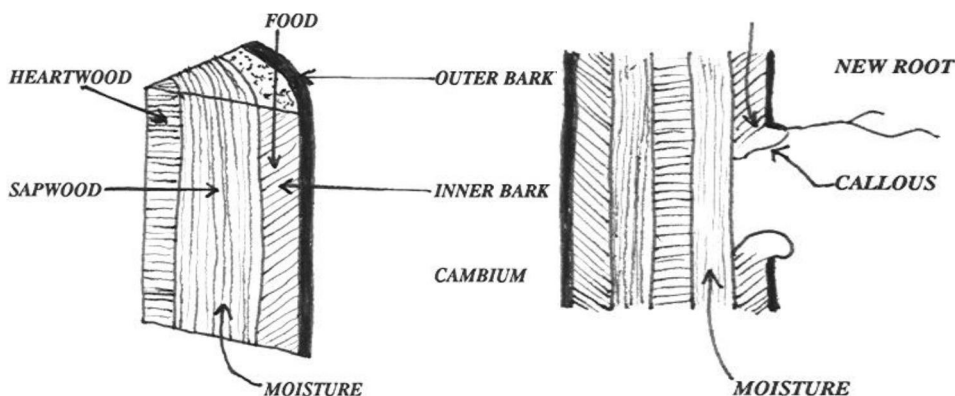


A shitakusa of miniature hosta (front left) as part of a formal bonsai display

Bonsai Smart: Layering

By David De Groot, Curator of Weyerhaeuser Bonsai Collection

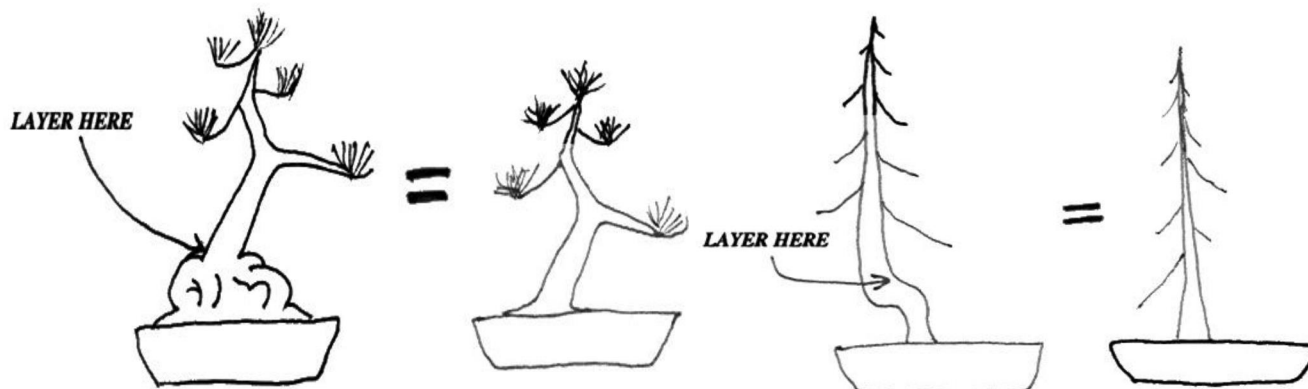
There are various methods of layering or causing roots to form on a trunk or branch, while it is still attached to the parent plant. All methods involve injuring the inner bark providing a medium at the point of injury into which new roots may grow. The reason why layerings may succeed here and cuttings fail is that cuttings depend upon their ability to draw moisture from their planting medium, whereas layers receive moisture directly from the parent plant. Layering takes advantage of tree physiology in the following way: Moisture and nutrients flow upward from the roots to the leaves through living tissue in the sapwood. Some portion of this sapwood must remain intact for the layer to succeed. The water and nutrients are converted to food in the leaves, and this food moves down through the inner bark. The food is either used for growth by the cambium or is stored in the root system. It is this downward flow of food which must be interrupted in order to force new root growth.



There are several types of layering. Some, such as mound layering and tip layering, are used primarily for propagation, but two types, ground layering and air layering, are used by bonsai growers to effect design changes. With either type layering the normal size of the material used ranges from about the size of a pencil to an inch.

GROUND LAYERING

Purposes: to be used when an otherwise good tree has a serious flaw, such as an ugly curve at the base of the trunk or poor rootage. *Time of year:* Ground layering should be done in the spring and left for at least a year. Even deciduous material should have a year's development before separation from the old root system, as the new roots of ground layers are usually more traumatized at repotting time than are the new roots of air layers.



Types of wound: A diagonal cut is used for smaller material. The cut is usually on a downward slant and nearly to the center. The cut must be propped open with a bit of wood, stone or shell, so that it cannot callous over.

Advantage: This type of wound is quite safe . . . there is little likelihood of losing the layer. *Disadvantages:* This cut promotes one-sided root development, at least in the first years. Also, there is at least an even chance that the part to be layered will not put out roots, but merely transfer the flow of food to the undamaged side of the trunk. Conifers, in particular, are prone to do this.

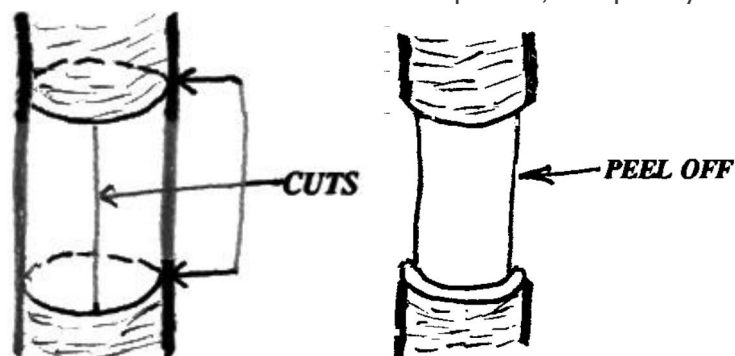


GIRDLING WIRE

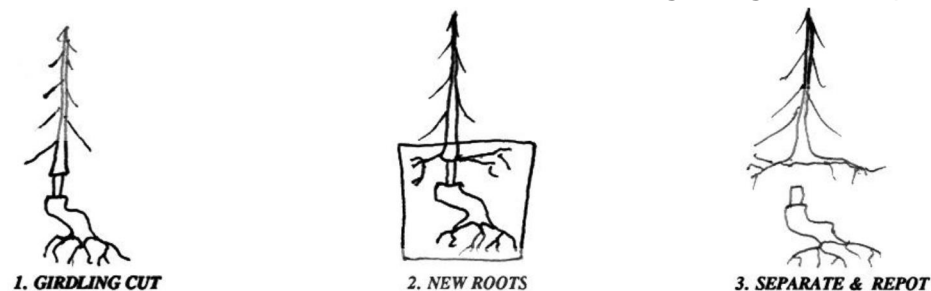
A wire is wrapped about the trunk or branch and twisted until it bites into the bark. If the wire is not tight enough, its effectiveness will be delayed until the trunk swells. *Advantages:* Very simple and reasonably safe. This is the girdling method most used for layering conifers. *Disadvantage:* Trees are usually slower to form roots with this method than with the others.

BARK REMOVAL

Two cuts are made down to the sapwood, completely around the trunk. The distance between



cuts should be about equal to the diameter of larger material and at least twice the diameter of smaller material. This is important, for if the cuts are too close together, callous tissue may simply close the wound, and the layer will not work. Make a vertical cut between the two girdling cuts and peel off the strip of bark. *Advantages:*



1. GIRDLING CUT

2. NEW ROOTS

3. SEPARATE & REPOT

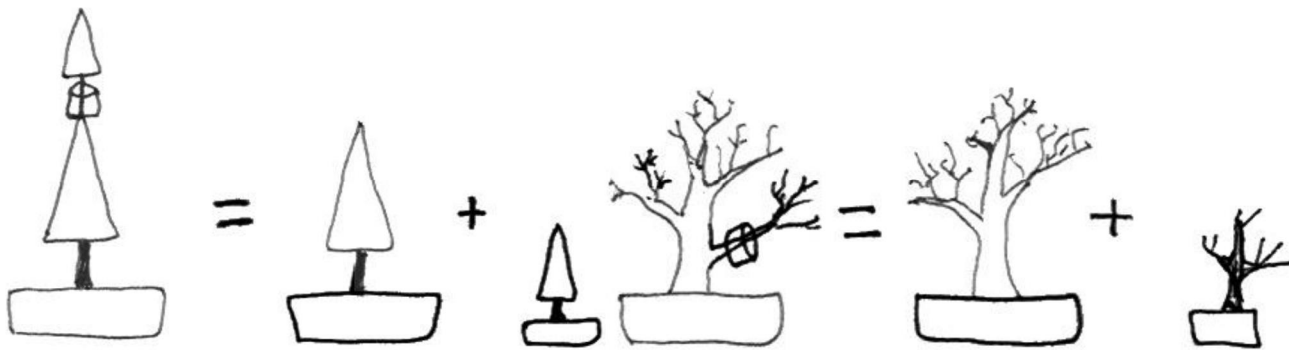
Effective; produces fast results. *Disadvantages:* A little more risky than other methods, and slightly more complicated to do. *Procedure:* Locate the spot where you want the new root system. The new roots will emerge above the point at which you interrupt the inner bark, so make the wound $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch below the point at which you want the roots to form. If there is a node or dormant bud nearby, keep it above the wound, as roots will be quick to form there.

Make the desired wound. The diagonal cut must be propped open. Cuts should be dusted with rooting hormone. The tree must be placed in a deep container so that sufficient rooting medium can be added to bury the wound two to three inches deep. The rooting medium should be pure sand, half sand/half peat, or finely sifted hadite.

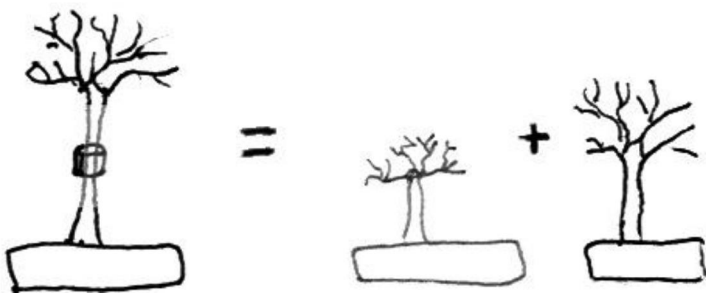
All trees to be ground layered must be firmly staked, so tree movement does not damage new roots. Give normal care after layering. The following spring, if new roots are visible, give a hard top pruning, then cut just below the new root system and follow normal repotting procedure.

AIR-LAYERING

Purposes: For obtaining a new tree from the apex of a large tree: or from a well-shaped branch of a large tree:



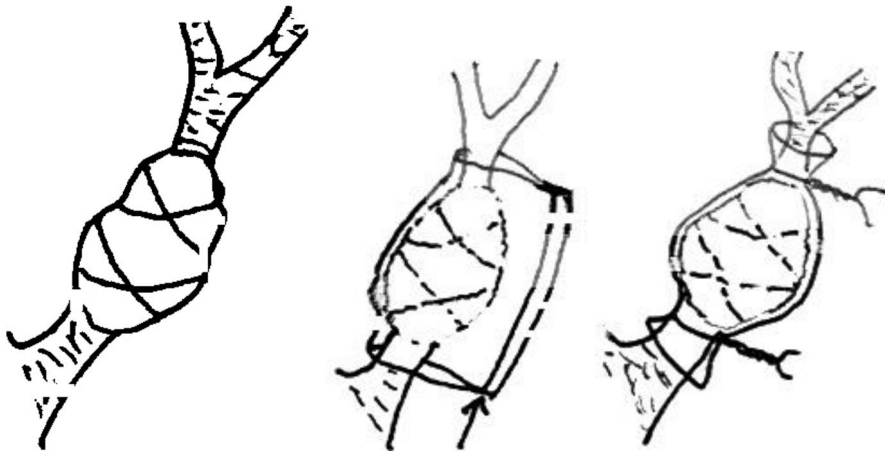
or for reducing the height of a too leggy tree.



Time of Year: Usually springtime. Some growers air-layer even before bud break to start a callous forming as early as possible, but most prefer to wait until the tree has leafed out. September air layering is sometimes used on deciduous trees and broadleaf evergreens for removal the following spring, but unless protection is given to such trees, there is danger of winter cold damage to the new roots. Conifers are sometimes air-layered in fall for removal a year from the following spring, but these should be given winter protection for the first year also.

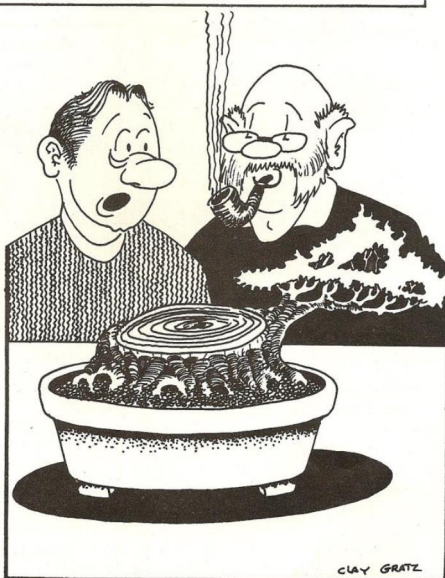
Types of Wound: Same as for ground layering. *Procedure:* Locate the position of the new root system and make the Desired wound. A diagonal cut can be kept open with a bit of damp sphagnum moss. Dust cuts

with rooting hormone. Wet some sphagnum moss and squeeze it in your hands until it is moist, but not wet. Wrap this handful of moss around the wounded area and secure with a few winds of string. The moss should be in close contact with any cut tissue. Take a piece of clear plastic film (so the roots will be visible through it), and wrap the bundle of moss, folding the seam over two or three times. Secure the plastic wrap at the top and bottom with twist ties or electrical tape. *Deciduous air-layers*, which will be separated in a few months' time, are usually taped securely top and bottom to keep them moisture proof and then not disturbed. Air layers which must be kept for many months, as with conifers, use twist ties at the top, so they can be opened for watering. At the bottom use a twist tie or tape with a few small cuts in the plastic so that the excess water can flow out when the moss is moistened. Excess water can be fatal to an air-layer, and the top is secured as much to keep rain out as to keep moisture in.



1. String over sphagnum 2. Fold plastic wrap 3. Close top and bottom

When several good sized roots are visible inside the plastic wrap, the air-layer is ready for removal. Air layers should be removed with shears, if possible, to avoid jarring the root ball. Remember that top pruning at the time of separation is very important, and give protection from sun and wind for three to four weeks afterward.



"GONNA BE A DANDY WHEN THAT CUT HEALS UP."