

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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July 2016

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IBA July Activities

July 19, 7 pm. IBA Membership Meeting at The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden 909 Robert D. Ray Drive

Topics: Presentation/discussion topics

Chat and Chop!

Show prep and mossing of a tree

Display of bonsai/companion plant/scroll

Bonsai styles of the world (will concentrate on tropical and sub-tropical species)

Tree of the month

EIBA June Activities

July 14, 6:30 pm. Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road

Topics: July mtg prep, Chris Burr Memorial, Bruce more Show, Picnic wrap up.

July 21, Noon. Club Meeting at home of John Denny

Topic: Display – Matching Trees and Pots, also Preparing Trees for Bruce more Show

2016 Bonsai Show at Iowa State Fair

The Bonsai Show at the State Fair this year will be August 14. The entry date was July 1, so hope you are already entered. There are two classes – Novice and Open Classes. Those helping set up should be there at 6 am and the judging will begin at 8 am. The public will be let in to view the exhibit at 10 am. The judge for this year's show is Loren Buxton from Nebraska. Mr. Buxton, 38, began his bonsai collection at age 19. He started the Nebraska Bonsai Society based in Lincoln/Omaha. If you can, please help or attend the exhibit. It is a great opportunity to show the public what bonsai is and how beautiful it can be. Plus, the IBA might pick up some new members!

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Defoliation of Trident Maples

John Denny

Here are two photos of a Trident maple by Harry Harrington, before and after defoliation. Defoliation increases ramification and results in smaller leaves growing back. It can also cause more intense fall coloration, too.



Make sure to only defoliate healthy trees. And defoliate early enough in summer that the tree has time to fully recover prior to cold weather. Cut the leaf petioles with scissors, but not so close that you might damage buds. The petioles left will eventually fall off on their own.



Water Quality and Bonsai

John Denny

The first eight years I did bonsai I lived in Cedar Rapids and watered my trees with city water. All was well. Then, I moved two miles to Fairfax and the past two and a half years I have watered with Fairfax water. Fairfax water is harder and higher in PH. I was a bit worried over this transition, but year one went well. Year two, however, I have noticed some trees with issues that could be related to water quality. In particular one of my Tridents has become quite pale and a couple of others seem to be managing life a bit under the weather, too. Normally, Tridents have done very well for me. So, let's talk about water quality.

First off, if you can water with rain water, do it! Rain water is soft (meaning it has lower levels of hard minerals), it has a pH in the best range for bonsai plants, and it has not been chemically treated by the city. But, most people do not collect rain water. If you have 25 or more trees, then collecting rain water gets to be an engineering challenge to collect the volume you need to water that many trees daily.

PH stands for power of hydrogen, which is a measurement of the hydrogen ion concentration. The total pH scale ranges from 1 to 14, with 7 considered to be neutral. A pH less than 7 is said to be acidic and solutions with a pH greater than 7 are basic or alkaline. A pH of 8.0 is ten times more acidic than a pH of 7.0 as the scale is logarithmic.

Ideal pH range for plants is generally 6.0 to 6.6, though you can grow most plants in pH of 7.0. Below the ideal range your bonsai can suffer toxicity and above the ideal range you can suffer mineral deficiencies. At pH above 7.5 trees can begin to have trouble absorbing nutrients, particularly phosphorus. pH can vary greatly seasonally and is generally highest in summer, when we are using the most water and doing the most fertilizing.

Enough chemistry. So, how do we measure pH? First, you may not have to if your municipal water source checks it and will share that info with you. If you cannot get access to their pH data, then visit a pet store that sells fish and aquariums. They will also sell a pH testing kit for a few bucks. That kit will do many, many measurements. Go in with a couple fellow bonsai friends and share the cost (\$5). The test is simple. Place water to the line in a glass test tube that comes with the kit, add three drops of test solution, cap, shake, and then



compare the color of the water in the tube with a series of color samples supplied with the kit. It is easy.

If your results are in the ideal range, great! If you are low, I would be very surprised. Generally, in Iowa, we will be too high. Perhaps up to 8.0 or 8.2. This is too high. Now the rub comes. How does one reduce the level of pH. One way is to add a bit of muriatic acid to a container of water. It does not take much. I won't go into calculation details here, but make sure you know what you are doing and that your math is perfect. No mistakes as they can be fatal to your trees. Either make a batch and use it to water or those with a lot of trees will make a batch of concentrated low pH water and then siphon it into the hose as you water with your regular water. Test it before you use it.

Another alternative is to blend your water with Reverse Osmosis Water (RO water). Reverse Osmosis is a process that takes the minerals out your water and lowers the pH somewhat, too. You can buy RO water from the Pet Store or you can purchase a Reverse Osmosis system yourself (don't buy a cheap one, though). I am currently experimenting with blending RO water 50/50 with my local water. My hardness level will be lowered by 50% which is good in my case and the pH is a bit lower, though not as low as I expected, since the RO water is not buffered. The challenge is any change will take a year or more to show its effect in my trees, so I must be patient.

I mentioned water Hardness. Michael Hagedorn has a blog article on the topic and I will copy most of it for you below.

“Do you have a film of white buildup on your pots or leaves? Pale, yellowish, and lackluster growth on the bonsai? If so, you may have very hard water, and that can be a limiting factor for plant health. ready to dry for a year or two.

Above 150 ppm (parts per million) of hardness (Ca + Mg), we get beyond the zone where container plants may be maintained in good health. Over time the roots of containerized trees begin to be coated by the same minerals that coat the outsides of the pots, usually calcium and magnesium...which is essentially liquid

limestone. Imagine that: Coating our roots with rock. (Which is less cool than it sounds, really.)

Hard water is a common problem in arid areas of low rainfall, but it can happen in many other places, too. What's the problem, then?

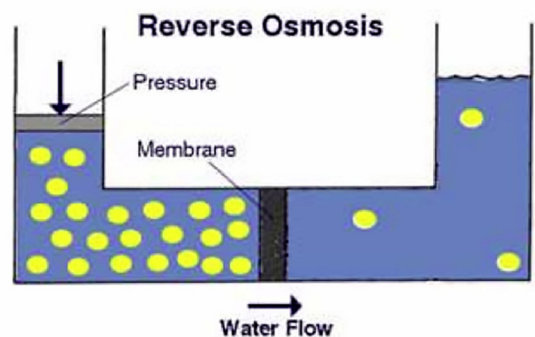
- In extreme cases, very hard water may limit the root's ability to draw in water (an osmotic issue)
- Even moderately hard water can pose limits on the uptake of nutrients (If you fertilize with hard water, the combined total salts ppm is often very high, with attendant nutrient deficiencies)

These are serious issues that limit the health and growth of bonsai. And although there are some semi-effective ideas like flushing your soil out occasionally, there are really only two effective solutions to this problem:

- Collect and use rainwater for your bonsai
- Set up a reverse osmosis (RO) system
- Do not use a water softener, which introduces sodium into your water

The first is great if you get enough rainfall. In some areas even the rain might be suspect, but it's often better than what comes out of our pipes or wells. Collection tanks may be set up, and then pumped or gravity fed into a hose for watering. Years ago I set up a gravity fed rainwater tank when I lived up in the mountains of Arizona, and I've fond memories of it as my most efficient and low-cost watering system.

Reverse osmosis systems will cost something to set up, and also to run (needing electricity and a loss of water in its functioning), but they do work very well. We get very high quality water out of these units which can almost magically change the health of bonsai in areas of very bad water quality, including a very acceptable PH. (Which is a double plus, as hard water is generally accompanied by high PH.)



Creating a Hornbeam Grove

John Denny

I have grown five K. hornbeams from seedlings for a couple of years and this spring Gary Wood and I put them into a small forest or grove. Attached are photos. We began by prepping the trees, washing to bare roots, then trimming roots. We played with the trees looking for varying combinations of trees so they seemed to flow and complement each other. We slowly wired them in, adjusted them again, and tightened the wires. We added soil and tamped it down. The grove has leafed out and looks great! This was an easy project and did not cost much either. If you need a bonsai project, this is a good one. Give it a try.

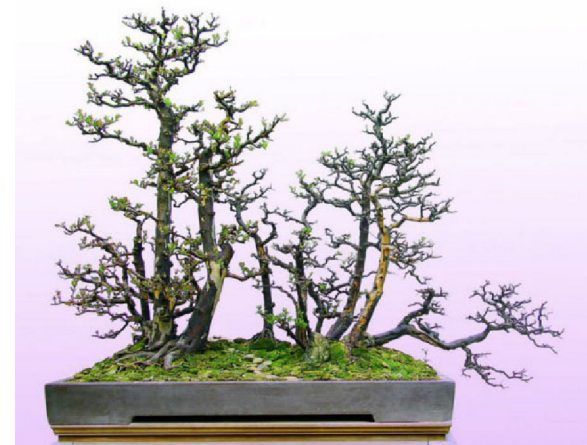


Forest Planting Photos

John Denny

I like forest plantings. Here are four photos of four very different styles of forests. This is one of the reasons I like forest plantings – they can be so very different in style

and feel. It allows your artistry to shine. Compare and contrast these forests. Which do you prefer? Do you know why? Which is your least favorite? Again, why? Viewing photos like this is very helpful in learning styles, artistry, strengths and weaknesses in your work. These photos are from Stone Lantern's Bonsai Blog. Top photo is a lovely Trident maple. The second photo is a mixed forest. The last photo is from Robert Stevens' website.



Helene Magruder has some beautiful large azaleas and they were in full bloom this May and June. Helene does a great job preparing these trees for full bloom. Enjoy!



Timely Tips

July has rolled in with a bang! Not just fireworks, but with heat, storms, rain, wind. How are your trees doing? We can have a cold beer on a hot windy day, but what do you give your trees? In times of heat stress, like temps above 90F, we may have to water in the morning to prepare our trees for the heat of the day, and then a light watering in the late afternoon. Make the morning watering a thorough watering. Water all your trees twice through so you make sure to get each soil particle wet. Water from two different angles on each tree to make sure and wet the rain shadow caused by large trunks. In the afternoon, water the foliage and wet the soil about a half inch deep. If you have trees that like more water you can water more fully.

Our trees are still photosynthesizing and creating energy for the trees to use as needed. During spring, the energy mainly goes to creating fresh green foliage. That process has slowed by now. Energy is beginning to go to hardening and maturing the foliage – turning green twigs to brown and adding thickness to limbs and twigs. In fall, most of the energy will go to creating more and more

roots which is very important to the health of the tree.

Keep an eye out for insects and diseases. Look at your trees closely. Do you see leaf edges with damage? Pinholes, discoloration, mite damage? If so, it might be time to spray. For junipers, a daily hard spray of water on the foliage will help keep mites down. Also, keep the weeds at bay. If you fertilize a lot, you are also fertilizing the weeds, so stay after them. It is time to repot Tropical trees if you have not done so. Don't wait too long, as you want their roots to have time to recover from the stress of repotting before they have to come inside.

If you like to defoliate, hopefully, you have done so already. Defoliating too late in summer is stressful to the tree as it does not have as much summer left to recover with new growth and doing all the other things a tree has to do in late summer and early fall. Wait until next year and get the job done earlier in the summer. With shows coming up in August and September, try to keep your leaves in good shape if you can. I hope to see many of your trees in those shows looking great!