

# Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

https://sites.google.com/site/cedarrapidsbonsai/



June 2017

Volume 48, Issue 6

## IBA June Activities

### **June 17, 9:00 AM, Open Study Group and Presentation at 11:30 AM**

*We'll be working on the Terrace, weather permitting.*

### **IBA Meetings at The Greater, Des Moines Botanical Garden. 909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

**Topics:** 11:30 Presentations: *Defoliation by Scott Allen, Formal Display by Larry Totton and De-candling Black Pine by Ron Heinen*

## EIBA June Activities

### **June 8, 6:30 PM, EIBA Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road**

**Topics:** *Picnic prep, July Club mtg. prep.*

### **June 24, Noon to 4:00 PM, Annual Picnic, Guthridge Park Green Pavillion**

**Topic:** *Dave Lowman will be vending, so come pick up trees, pots, tools, books. Enjoy camaraderie with fellow bonsai friends. Hamburgers and brats and soft drinks will be provided by the club. Bring a dessert or something to share.*

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**MABA holds the 2017 Convention in Indianapolis, see info on the top of Page 2.**

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**Iowa State Fair Bonsai Show, August 13th.**

**ENTER BY, JULY 1**

**(LATE ENTRIES ACCEPTED UNTIL JULY 8 – MUST PAY A LATE FEE).**

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## IBA Offers New Awards At The State Fair

The Iowa Bonsai Association will be offering two awards for the Iowa State Fair Bonsai show The George Roupp Award \$100 and the Helen Fagan Award \$50. These awards are in addition to what the Iowa State Fair pays and we hope it will encourage more people to show. Also remember that Todd Schlafer will be doing an all day program at the Greater Des Moines Botanical Gardens the day before the State Fair Bonsai show. This is a GREAT opportunity for those living outside Des Moines to come in for a weekend and catch Todd at the GDMBG and also participate in the ISF Bonsai show.

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## Helene Magruder Wins President's Award at ABS/Florida Show

Helene Magruder of the Iowa Bonsai Association was announced the winner of the biggest prize at June's American Bonsai Society Show and Exhibition held in Florida. Helene won the President's Award with her beautiful Kokane White Pine. It is truly an outstanding

bonsai. Congratulations to Helene and thanks for putting Iowa on the bonsai map!



Helene Magruder's Kokane White Pine

**MID-AMERICA BONSAI ALLIANCE**  
**2017 CONVENTION**

**July 7 - 8 2017**

Featuring **Matt Reel**

Bill Valavanis	
Mary Madison	
Jim Doyle	
Brian Ciskowski	Exhibit
Mark Fields	Demos
Alan Magruder	
Ken Huth	Workshops
Paul Weishaar	
Michael Ryan Bell	Vendors
Andy Smith	
Scott Yelich	
Carl Wooldridge	Seminars

Clarion Hotel  
Waterfront Plaza and Conference Center  
2930 Waterfront Parkway W Drive  
Indianapolis, Indiana

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

Host: Indianapolis Bonsai Club

## Ryan Neil Lectures Free at Portlandbonsai.org John Denny

Portland Bonsai is offering a series of video lectures done by Ryan Neil, perhaps the top bonsai artist in the US. Ryan is a great bonsai artist, but also an excellent

teacher. He apprenticed for five years under Kimura, the world's best artist according to many. Ryan is not only knowledgeable, but also very entertaining and professional. They have three videos up on their website now with four more to come.

The most exciting part of this project is its availability to everyone via the public portion of BSOP's website, PortlandBonsai.org. I mean everyone. No login, no password – just look for Mirai Videos on the main menu and select any of the programs recorded to date. Anyone with an interest or curiosity about the art of bonsai can access, with no fee, these remarkable videos via our website...Yes, you read that right...FREE Ryan Neil bonsai instruction.

I would urge everyone in IBA and EIBA to check this out! <https://www.portlandbonsai.org/>

## Bonsai Ficus Trees - An Introduction From website [bonsaimary.com](http://bonsaimary.com)

It's not uncommon to have more than one bonsai Ficus variety included in a personal collection. Although they are the same genus, different varieties can vary greatly. It is often referred to as the "banyan tree" bonsai. Many types of Ficus have aerial roots.

The roots may hang from branches. Some species grow aerial roots primarily close on the trunk, still others have none. One thing most figs have in common is a white to yellowish latex (which can be very sticky while working with them.)

All referred to as figs, most are not considered edible for humans. The Mediterranean Ficus carica is the only one raised for its "fruit." Although in the same family as others, it's deciduous, and is not a tropical. It is rarely used as bonsai. One of



*Bonsai Ficus Around the World*  
*Ficus benjamina* by Bradley Barlow  
Queensland, Australia

*Bonsai Ficus Trees - An Introduction - continued*

the most common figs used for bonsai is the *F. benjamina*. For those who want to do-it-yourself, it is often readily available in garden centers as a “house plant.” It also grows easily from cuttings. As most figs do, *benjamina* tolerates many of the novice mistakes.

One thing that makes them a little different from other fig varieties is, they do not like to have all of their leaves removed at once. Doing so can cause branches to die.

Many times, bonsai artists have other creative outlets!

In addition to Brad Barlow’s award winning bonsai (one of which is shown above) he has created a realistic ‘tree making technique’ that results in what he calls “Virtual Bonsai” that you can never kill.



Another Aussie favorite is the native Port Jackson fig - *F. rubiginosa*. Dorothy Koreshoff styled this bonsai *Ficus* from a 1949 cutting. This semi-cascade style is unique for a fig, but it in this case, it works.

Photo by Roger Hnatiuk at the November 2006  
<https://www.anbg.gov.au/bonsai/bonsai-anbg-2006.html>



**Bonsai from Indonesia - artist unknown**

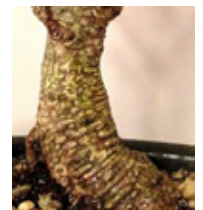
Sometimes I receive photos from other people without sources, if you see your bonsai on any page of this site, or recognize someone’s, please let me know.



*Ficus nerifolia* by Ernie Fernandez  
Bonita Springs, Florida

*F. nerifolia*, more recently named *Ficus salicaria*, is especially popular because of its naturally small leaves. It is most often designed as a canopy shaped bonsai. This grouping is a beautifully unique interpretation. The bark on this bonsai *Ficus* tree can vary in color from light brown to a reddish color. When reddish, the color can be slightly emphasized for exhibit with a very light coating of cooking oil.

<http://www.bonsaimary.com/Ficus-bonsai.html>



*Bonsai retusa*  
“Tiger Bark”

So named because of the thin, almost white, stripes on the bark. The bark is very textured. Created by artist Norberto Rodriguez Arroyo of Puerto Rico.

The *Ficus* species shown here are just a few of the many available as good *Ficus* bonsai subjects.

**Ficus Bonsai Care**

**Light** - Just because figs tolerant poorly lit areas doesn’t mean they like it! A sunny spot is best, and don’t forget to keep it warm. Cooler weather slows growth.

**Water** - Allow to dry a little between waterings. Never keep soaking wet. Indoors, mist frequently.

<http://www.bonsaimary.com/watering-bonsai.html>



**Trimming** - Because this plant grows quickly, you will need to trim new growth more often than many other plants.

**Root Pruning** - Many bonsai hobbyists don't trim Ficus roots often enough and eventually may use a saw to eliminate the mass (mess) created.



When necessary, the roots of most types of Ficus tolerate this radical power saw pruning and proceed to fill the pot again.

In the tropics, bonsai Ficus trees may need re-potting two times a year. In other areas, check them once a year. If grown indoors, pruning roots may be every two years.

**Wire** - Young branches are very flexible. If you use wire to change or move branches, be cautious. Fast growth can create unsightly damage very quickly. (Especially in warm climates.)

**Indoors** - A warm, bright location is most important. For growers who must keep their bonsai Ficus trees indoors, aerial root development is unlikely. However, some greenhouses do provide enough humidity. A summer outdoors will help maintain good health.

### Ficus Bonsai Trees - Characteristics -

Ficus bonsai trees are members of the large Moraceae family of plants. With over 1,500 species, the family is so diverse they can be creeping vines, shrubs or huge forest trees.

These beautiful trees are considered exotic by many plant collectors. They are often chosen as specimens in tropical conservatories.

Features these collectors find attractive are also advantageous to those creating miniature versions of this tropical tree.

There are many reasons Ficus make good bonsai.

### Favorable Characteristics

Features others find attractive are also advantageous to those creating miniature versions of this tropical tree. There are many reasons Ficus make good bonsai.

- **Spreading Roots** - Mature fig trees have roots that 'hug' the ground, often spreading long distances from the main trunk.



Figs manage to thrive in a variety of unique conditions, and easily adapt to bonsai pots and slabs. Shallow containers actually encourage the roots to spread as they cannot go deep. As the roots spread the trunk also spreads. The Japanese word for this feature is nebari.

- **Interesting, Heavy Trunks** - Most Ficus species evolve huge trunks in nature. Some are straight, some curved, others fluted.

Some species have light colored smooth bark, others are textured and some more colorful. One that has especially beautiful bark with white striations is the Ficus Golden Gate.

- **Fast Growth** - In their native habitats, these trees grow quickly. Sidewalks, fences, and walls have been destroyed.



Temple in India enveloped by old Banyan Tree

Deserted homes have been swallowed up by their rampant growth. Ancient temples have been found completely covered by the invasive roots.

On the good side of this fast growth feature, you can develop quality Ficus bonsai trees in a matter of two or three years.

- **Small Leaves** - Not all fig trees have small leaves. Some are twelve inches or more across. Although leaf reduction is possible through defoliation, it is an ongoing project.



*Ficus Burt d.  
by Steve Moore*

*The small leaf Ficus burt davii shown here grows in Indiana and spends its winters indoors.*

Many other types of Ficus bonsai trees have small leaves and most make excellent bonsai choices.

Why not try some of the best small leaf figs? Ficus benjamina variations, Ficus microphylla and Ficus nerifolia are just a few.

- **Directional Pruning** - A close look at a Ficus branch will show how the leaves are simple and alternating in their growth pattern. Because of their rapid growth, this branch structure is ideal for directional pruning.
- **Flowers?** - Yes, figs do have flowers.



However, despite the invalid pictures shown on the internet, it's unlikely you will ever see them.

They are strangely located within the fig. The figs are fertilized by certain wasps. Curious about all

this? There is a greatly detailed description on this link: <http://www.backyardnature.net/n/w/fig.htm>

- **Fruit** - (Technically not fruit in the true botanical sense.) Small and often colorful, figs grow on short stems, without stems and also in



clusters depending upon the species.

Some figs actually grow directly off the trunk and branches. (Similar to jaboticaba, Myrciaria cauliflora.) Fig colors vary from species to species.



*F. benghalensis* - commonly called the banyan tree - has cherry red figs when ripe. Unfortunately, this tree also has very large leaves, which makes it difficult for bonsai.

*F. altissima* which resembles the banyan in every other way has bright yellow fruit.

The "fruit" on tropical figs are not considered desirable for human consumption but are very popular with birds and monkeys.

Other figs have brown or reddish brown fruit, still others are vibrant orange.

In Ficus bonsai trees, the fruit is always to scale. On small trees they may look like cherries or apples, while on larger plants they resemble berries.

- **Aerial roots** - Some Ficus bonsai trees drop aerial roots from lateral branches just as they do in nature.



*Old banyan tree -  
Miami, FL*

Also known as 'prop' roots or buttress roots, they often give extra support to massive spreading "arms" of the banyan tree. Some species grow aerial roots primarily off the trunk, still others have none.

Occasionally, when the original trunk dies, aerial roots keep the tree alive. In the Calcutta Botanical Garden in India, one huge fig tree occupies over three acres; the aerial roots number beyond 3,000.

Aerial roots on bonsai are valued because they help these trees resemble old banyans.

### **An Unfavorable Attribute**

One thing you may consider negative, is the sticky latex produced by these trees. On the Bonsai Tips page is a resolution for preventing some of the undesirable results.

<http://www.bonsaimary.com/bonsai-tree-tips.html>

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## **Decandling Pines-Best Explanation Anywhere**

*John Denny*

June is the month for candle management on pines. There is a lot of information out there in the bonsai world. Much of it very confusing. Jonas Dupuich, who runs Bonsai Tonight website, wrote an article last year and it is excellent, photos and all. This is the single best source of information on pine decandling. Many bonsai hobbyists do not keep pines because they find candle management confusing. If you read this article you will learn so much, you will feel comfortable buying a pine for your bonsai collection. Black pines are known as the king of bonsai, so give one a try.

This is a long article, so I plan to spread it over two or three newsletters. If you want it all now you can go to: <https://bonsaitonight.com/2016/07/22/decandling-black-pine-bonsai-overview/>

## **Decandling black Pine Bonsai An In - Depth Guide**

*Jonas Dupuich*

Now that decandling season is coming to a close, I thought I'd share an overview of the process taken from previous posts. Let's begin with the obvious question: What is Decandling?

There is a lot to say about decandling pine bonsai. There are as many approaches to decandling as there are bonsai professionals, and many of these approaches have merit. As we wrap up this year's decandling season, I'd like make a few comments on the topic in as straightforward a fashion as possible.

My starting point for this information is many years' study with Boon Manakitivipart and conversations with Japanese bonsai professionals including Daisaku Nomoto, Akio Kondo and Junichiro Tanaka. Connecting the various approaches used by this group are a few common threads, and it is with these threads that I'll begin.

### **A Definition**

Decandling refers to a set of cultivation techniques that focus on the removal of spring growth from red or black pines to stimulate a second flush of growth in summer.



*Removing a spring shoot from a Japanese black pine – the primary act of decandling indoors.*

The term typically refers to more than the simple act of removing spring candles as the timing of the practice and various techniques relating to after care have a large effect on the results of the practice.

### **What Decandling Isn't**

The following techniques are similar to decandling in that they focus on improving the balance and vigor of pine bonsai, but fall outside of the practices commonly referred to by the term "decandling."

1. Cutting, breaking or removing spring growth before the spring needles emerge. One technique for balancing vigor in pine bonsai involves the reduction of spring candles as they are elongating. These techniques produce very different results from decandling and will be considered separately.
2. Removing part, but not all, of a spring shoot. Decandling involves the complete removal of given spring shoots. Reducing spring growth by half or some other percentage can be used to address vigor in pine bonsai, but produces different results from decandling.

### **A Note on the Term "Decandling"**

As spring growth develops on red and black pines, the emerging shoots can be said to resemble candles. As used here, however, the term decandling refers to the removal



of spring shoots after the new needles have emerged. I don't know how the term "decandling" came to be associated with the removal of growth after the shoot ceases to resemble candles, but I'm loath to introduce another term as the community in which I participate uses the term decandling consistently and successfully. The Japanese phrase for decandling is me-kiri: "bud-" or "shoot-cutting".

## Why We Decandle

Sometimes the reasons why we decandle pine bonsai can get lost in the discussion of how we decandle. In short, decandling is the single-most important technique used to develop beautiful black and red pine bonsai.

*Black pine exhibited at the 2011 Taikan-ten*



## Why Decandle Red and Black Pine Bonsai?

1. To stimulate back budding. The stress caused by removing spring growth can activate dormant or adventitious buds on woody growth. Back buds – buds that develop not at the ends of branches but from within the tree's interior – allow us to maintain the size and shape of our trees. Without them, bonsai would grow larger and larger each year.

2. To increase branch density. Decandling adds density by replacing single spring shoots with multiple summer shoots. Decandling further increases density by stimulating adventitious buds at the base of spring candles – barren areas that don't typically produce buds. And as summer shoots are usually smaller than spring shoots, internodes are further reduced yielding more refined ramification.

3. To regulate vigor. Decandling is a useful technique for keeping new growth on pine bonsai in check.

4. To promote balance. Various decandling techniques can be used to decrease vigor in strong areas and increase vigor in weak areas to improve overall balance.

5. To reduce needle size. Red and black pine bonsai are at their most beautiful when the needle size is a good fit for the tree. Decandling can let us produce short needles on small trees and larger needles on larger trees.

## Selecting Trees for Decandling

While decandling is a great technique for refining red and black pine bonsai, knowing when to decandle is just as important as knowing when not to decandle.

When is Decandling not Appropriate for Red and Black Pine Bonsai?

1. When the goal of training is to increase the size of the trunk. Let these trees grow until the trunk reaches the desired size before decandling.

2. When a tree is unhealthy. Decandling is stressful for pines – only decandle trees that are healthy, vigorous and insect-free.

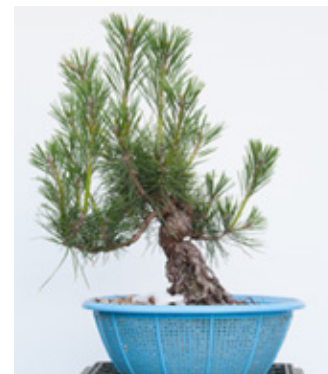
3. When a tree is weak or under-fed. If otherwise healthy pine bonsai have not received adequate fertilizer in spring or have been weakened from stresses like repotting or inclement weather, take a break this year and decandle the following year when the tree is stronger.

Feel free to decandle when your red or black pine bonsai are in refinement phase, are healthy, well-fed, and growing in soil with good drainage. Following are some examples of when to decandle and when to hold off.



*The trunk needs to develop – do not decandle (3 years old)*

*The trunk has reached the desired size – start decandling (9 years old)*





The tree is entering refinement phase – decandle (15-20 years old)



A tree in refinement phase – decandle (19 years old)



This tree is entering refinement phase – decandle (20-25 years old)

This pine is less vigorous than normal after repotting – do not decandle (35-40 years old)



The cork bark black pine is less vigorous than normal after repotting – do not decandle (40-50+ years old)



## Preparing Trees for Decandling

Preparing red or black pine bonsai for decandling is straightforward – keep trees healthy, give them lots of sunlight, and feed heavily. If the tree is growing in poor soil, repot it in soil that drains well and decandle when the tree begins to grow vigorously.

How Much Should I Feed Black Pine Bonsai I Plan to Decandle?

A lot. Start applying fertilizer as soon as the roots become active. In warmer areas, this may be as early as February – in areas with longer winters this may be as late as March or April.

If using dango or similar dry fertilizer, begin by placing a few balls on the surface of the soil and add more each week until the surface of the soil is nearly covered with fertilizer. If using liquid fertilizer, apply it consistently throughout spring. Combinations of dry and liquid fertilizer are also acceptable.



Black pine – week 0

Black pine – week 1



Black pine – week 2

Black pine – week 3







Black pine – week 4



Black pine – week 5

to develop, the longer new needles will become. Put another way, if we decandle on the early side, new shoots will have a longer time to develop than shoots decandled a few weeks later. Let's pause there for a moment....



Black pine foliage

## When to Decandle

Depending on our approach, we can decandle all of a tree's new shoots on a single day or spread out the process over a few weeks (more on that later). This period of time is defined primarily by climate.

## Climate

In general, decandle earlier in northern latitudes or cooler climates and later in lower latitudes or places with warmer climates. The following provides a rough guide to when we can start decandling in different parts of the US:

- Cool climates  
(Seattle, Pacifica) – late May
- Moderate climates  
(San Francisco Bay Area) – early June
- Warm climates  
(Los Angeles, much of the Midwest) – mid to late June
- Hot climates  
(much of the South) – early to mid July

If you're not sure where to start, seek help from an experienced bonsai enthusiast in your area and, if possible, ask to see their trees to get a sense of how pines respond to decandling in your area.

## Tree Size

The decision of when to decandle also depends on the size of the tree. The more time summer shoots have

In general, we try to encourage large needles on large trees and small needles on small trees. Very small needles on a large pine would look out of place – more like a white pine, in effect – and might make us wonder about the health of the tree. Large needles on a small tree look unruly and obscure branch pad definition. Developing needles in proportion to the overall size of the tree tends to produce pleasing results.

By decandling large trees early in the decandling season, we give summer shoots adequate time to develop appropriately long needles. By decandling small trees later in the decandling season, we give summer shoots less time to develop, thereby producing shorter needles. Let's pause again for a moment.... Still with me?

If so, great – you've just internalized one of the most important aspects of decandling. It may seem picky to make distinctions as small as a few weeks here or there, but pines respond well to these subtle adjustments, and it is with these subtleties that some of the most beautiful pine bonsai have been created, and by which some of the best pines of the future will be created.

## End of Part One – Decandling Black Pine

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### Making the Cut

After many years of decandling red and black pine

bonsai, I find I still need to pay close attention as I work. It's easy to cut too high or too low, cut at an angle, or accidentally cut nearby needles. If you can avoid these cutting mistakes, you're off to a great start.

### Making the Cut

There are only a few things to keep in mind when making the cuts to remove spring growth, but each is important.

- Make the cut square – angled cuts can yield uneven summer growth
- Leave some new tissue – adventitious buds sprout from new tissue; cutting into last year's growth will reduce vigor and stimulate needle buds
- Don't cut surrounding needles – it's easy to accidentally cut surrounding needles; make cuts with



Careful not to cut surrounding needles

Approach shoot with scissors closed



Open scissors when you get to the shoot

Cut with care



Bad angle

Bad angle



Good angle

Plenty of new tissue



I'll say more about how much new tissue to leave below.

### Techniques for Controlling Vigor

So far we have covered techniques for controlling the vigor of summer shoots for an entire bonsai. Now we'll look at three techniques for controlling vigor shoot by shoot. One of the greatest benefits of decandling is the ability to weaken strong branches and improve the vigor of weak branches. It is through the successful application of these techniques that well-balanced pines are developed.

### How Do I Control the Vigor of Individual Branches?

There are three main techniques for controlling the

vigor of individual branches:

- Pulling needles
- Leaving stubs
- Decandling different branches at different times

Having decided to decandle a given branch, we first remove the spring shoots.



Spring shoots

Spring shoots removed



To further reduce the vigor of this branch, we can take the first approach noted above and remove some of last year's needles.



Before pulling needles

How many needles we can pull or leave depends on how many needles we started with, the relative vigor of the branch, and the general approach to decandling. The range is often between three and twelve pairs per branch. I'll say more about needle pulling below.

The second approach to reducing vigor involves leaving a stub at the base of the candle. Leaving a stub preserves tissue that produces auxins, the hormones that apical buds use to slow down the development of adventitious and lateral buds. The longer the stub, the more auxins, and the slower the adventitious buds are to develop. Simply put, long stubs slow down the

development of summer shoots.

### Using Stubs to Control Vigor

A common approach to leaving stubs is to leave long stubs on strong shoots, small stubs on weak shoots, and medium-sized stubs on medium-vigor shoots.

- Strong shoots – stub length is about 2x diameter of shoot, often between 1/4" – 1/2"
- Medium shoots – stub length is about 1x diameter of shoot, often between 1/8" – 1/4"
- Weak shoots – stub length is about 1/2x diameter of shoot, often between 1/16" – 1/8"



Long stub

Medium stub



Small stub

### Using Timing to Control Vigor

The third approach to the reducing vigor of individual branches is to decandle weak shoots early and more vigorous shoots later. We know that the earlier we decandle a tree, the longer the summer shoots will have to grow. By removing spring growth from the weakest shoots first, we give the summer shoots on these branches a head start over the branches that will be decandled later.

Putting It All Together – Approaches to Decandling  
There are many ways to decandle red and black pine bonsai. I don't believe that some techniques are better or worse than others as I've seen many techniques used



to great effect by professionals and hobbyists alike. Rather, each technique has its benefits and drawbacks. I tend to use several approaches during any given decandling season depending on the needs of the tree and my available time.

### **One-Day Approaches**

A simple distinction among decandling techniques can be made based on the number of days required to complete the removal of spring shoots in a given season. The most efficient approach is to remove all candles on a given day. The one-day approach is appropriate for most pines that are regularly decandled, and it makes the most sense when time is limited. Traveling professionals, for example, often take this approach when return visits to a customer's home are impractical.

Removing all of a tree's spring shoots on a single day gives summer shoots an equal amount of time to develop. Thus, the basic act of removing the spring growth does little to balance the weak and strong areas of the tree. The two most common techniques for balancing vigor when removing all of a tree's spring shoots on a given day are pulling needles and leaving stubs. In order for these techniques to work properly, one must identify the strong and weak areas of the tree.

In general, upper branches are stronger than lower branches, and exterior branches are stronger than interior branches, but the most obvious indicator of vigor is the size of the spring shoot.

*Small, medium, and large shoots*



Reducing vigor in stronger areas can help balance the overall vigor of the tree. When taking the needle-plucking approach, this means we leave fewer needles in strong areas and more needles in weak areas.

- Strong areas – leave 3-7 pairs

- Medium areas – leave 5-9 pairs
  - Weak areas – leave 7-12 pairs
- The weakest areas – shoots with 1-3 pairs of needles – are generally left alone.

The stub approach is similar. We leave longer stubs in strong areas and shorter stubs in weak areas.

- Strong areas – leave long stub
- Medium areas – leave medium stub
- Weak areas – leave very short stub

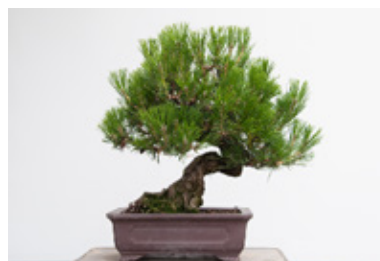
Don't feel comfortable evaluating the different areas of vigor on the tree? It's perfectly fine to keep all stubs short and pluck every branch to a set number of needles from top to bottom. Many pine growers in the U.S. and in Japan prefer this approach and have great results. Try both approaches and see what works best for your trees.

### **Multi-Day Approaches**

When growth on a pine is way out of balance – some shoots are very strong while others are quite weak – I'll often decandle a tree over a period of several weeks, removing groups of spring shoots every 10-14 days. We begin by removing the weakest shoots to give the summer shoots on these branches the longest time to develop. After dividing a tree into groups of relative vigor, we can decandle as follows:

1. Remove all small shoots
2. Wait 10 days
3. Remove all medium shoots
4. Wait 10 days
5. Remove all large shoots

In practice, this might look like the following.



*Day zero – before decandling*

*Day zero – after removing small shoots*





Day 10 – after removing medium shoots

Day 20 – after removing large shoots



### Putting it All Together

Decandling can become interesting when we start to combine techniques. For example, after removing all of the spring shoots from the above pine, I pulled needles from the strong areas to further reduce their vigor.



Day 20 – after pulling needles

As an alternative to pulling needles, I could have left stubs in the strong areas. Or I could have combined all three approaches. In short, we can combine any number of approaches to decandling red and black pine bonsai.

Considering the number of options this leaves us with, it can be difficult to know where to begin. Experience is our best guide here. But as hiring a professional to work on our bonsai or taking our trees to a workshop with an experienced teacher isn't always an option, we may be navigating these options alone. Which is fine. Simply starting with a best guess and learning from the results is a great way to learn how our trees respond to decandling.

### Decandling Aftercare

To restate a common theme: decandling is very stressful for pine bonsai. In some cases trees can lose

up to 60% or 70% of their foliage during decandling. One-year old needles that have been growing beneath the shade of new shoots are newly exposed to full sun. Scores or even hundreds of small wounds have opened from which a tree may have lost sap. It's important to take care at this point to keep decandled pine bonsai healthy.

#### How Do You Care for Trees after Decandling?

Be kind to them. Freshly decandled pines are gathering their strength to send out new growth at this stage – growth that won't be as strong as it was in spring. Here are the areas in which you can make a difference.

- Watering – removing significant amounts of a tree's foliage reduces transpiration and the tree's need for water, however, decandling happens near summer solstice and even decandled trees can dry out quickly this time of year. As always, take care not to over or under water and reach for the hose before the soil completely dries out.
- Sunlight – keep decandled pines in full sun. Last year's needles may yellow a bit but sunlight is necessary to help stimulate budding.
- Fertilizing – in general, stop fertilizing when you decandle. If you use dry fertilizer, remove it when you remove the spring shoots. If you use liquid fertilizer, stop applying it when you decandle. After four weeks, begin fertilizing again following the same incremental approach used in spring. Exception – if your tree is on the weak side, continue fertilizing throughout summer.

Decandled pine  
9 years old



#### Anything Else?

Yes! Right after decandling is a good time to wire pine bonsai. Some restraint is required as the biggest cuts and bends are best performed when the tree is less active, typically in fall or early spring. When wiring pines after decandling it can be easy to break needles or injure recently cut areas so proceed with caution. And as new buds can begin to appear after just one

week, the window of opportunity to wire is narrow. Wiring pines once summer shoots appear is possible but not advised as new growth breaks easily.

Not sure if this is the right time for you to wire? No problem, there's no rush – feel free to wire in fall with the rest of us!

### **Let Summer Buds Grow**

In general, we want two new shoots at the end each branch to develop on black and red pine bonsai.



*Red pine – two summer shoots*

Nature, however, doesn't always provide us with what we're looking for.

*Black pine – three shoots*



*Four summer shoots*

*More shoots than I want to count*



One shoot can be acceptable – especially when that's all we get – but three shoots are less so. It's easy to fill a silhouette with branches that have three, four, five or more shoots each, but this isn't always desirable. What

are the benefits of branches with two shoots each?

- More attractive branch structure
- No unsightly knuckles
- Easy to maintain balanced branch density
- Easy to wire

Are there any exceptions? Definitely. It's fine, for example, to leave more than two shoots when preparing a tree for exhibit if extra foliage is needed to improve the silhouette. I also occasionally leave three or more branches on trees in development knowing that I'll thin out extra branches in the future.

What do I do when more than two summer buds appear after decandling? Usually nothing. Some practitioners recommend thinning summer buds to two to save us the work of fall cutback and to avoid swelling that results from large numbers of buds that emerge from the same spot. Removing extra buds in summer, however, does not always produce the desired effect.

The appearance of more than two shoots on a single branch is an indication that the branch is fairly strong. In general, the more summer shoots we find, the stronger the branch. Looking at problem in terms of strength, the problem to be solved is not the number of shoots but how best to deal with excess vigor. Why not remove the extra shoots? Reducing the number of shoots can channel remaining vigor into a smaller number of branches, thereby producing even more vigorous growth on the remaining shoots. It's often better to let the extra shoots develop through summer and remove them when they harden off in fall or winter.

What if there are five or more shoots – won't that create a large knuckle? My main concern in these cases is not scars or the unsightly branch unions that may develop, but overall branch vigor. Unless it's important to preserve the branch, I'm more likely to remove it entirely as there's too much energy to be of use in a refined tree.

So Much Information – Where Should I Begin?

So, what if I'm somewhat new to bonsai and I think I have a tree that could benefit from decandling but I don't know where to begin? Easy – keep it simple. If you're having trouble finding a starting point and there are no decandling pros in the area, try the following:

- Remove all new shoots on June 15
- Don't leave stubs
- Leave no more than 10 pairs of needles per branch



That's it – for now. By taking a simple approach, you can learn how your tree responds to the decandling and you can begin making adjustments the following year. Is the summer growth too weak? Try feeding more, decandling earlier, or waiting until the tree is healthier before decandling again. Is the summer growth too strong? Try decandling later or removing more needles. Is the summer growth unbalanced? Feel free to experiment with the various techniques for controlling vigor.

Unhappy or completely surprised by the results? Take heart – many pines respond unpredictably to the first few decandlings. Red and black pines often settle into a pattern with 3-5 years.



*Black pine on display at the 2011 Gomangoku exhibit*

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## **Timely Tips**

*John Denny*

The heat and wind has been brutal this week. I hope your trees are doing okay. I have added an overhead shade cloth, 30%, recently and that is helping some of my more sun sensitive trees.

Be thinking of repotting Tropical trees soon. They like to be repotted during their peak growing times of June and July. Do it early enough that the roots get established again and you still have many days of outside growth left in the season.

This is red and black decandling month. See the article in this issue on Pine Decandling. By cutting candles now, these pines will push a second flush of smaller candles. This helps even the vigor of the various parts of the tree when done correctly. It also results in smaller needle size and ramification.

June is also growth management month for deciduous trees. They have grown hard resulting in many large leaves. By pruning back leaves now, you will open the tree up so sunlight can get into the tree's interior. This will encourage back budding. Unless you want to grow out a key branch, prune back each twig to just a couple of buds. Some trees like Trident maples can be defoliated at this time of year, but only if the tree is strong. You can leave some of the interior leaves and leaves on branches you wish to strengthen. New leaves will come back in about three weeks.

Junipers should be nice and green. If they are strong you should see good strong growing tips. Do not pinch these off as these are the growing power of the tree. We don't pinch junipers like we were taught in the old days. If you wish to prune back a bit, go in with scissors and take out specific branchlets. But, don't overdo it. Keep the trees strong.

Watch for diseases and pests. React if you notice an issue. Look for color change of foliage, check undersides of leaves, look at the edges of leaves for curl, look for spots on leaves, etc.

Most of our trees require fertilization. If your tree is in the growing stage, you can fertilize hard. If you have moved more into the developing stage, you should still fertilize, but you may want to back off to a moderate level. If you have a tree fully into the finished bonsai stage, you usually want to reduce your fertilizer. Pines should not be fertilized now until new needles have hardened off, usually August 1.

If you have nice trees, think about showing them this year. You don't have to win first place. Most people just enjoy having a tree be part of the show. Think about the Iowa State Fair coming up soon. Or the EIBA show at New Bo in August. Or the IBA Fall Show.

Most of all, enjoy your trees!