

# Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

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

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

Januray 2018

Volume 54, Issue 1



## IBA January Activities

**October 21, 9:00 AM, Bring a Tree**  
**Discussion of this years calendar at 10:00 AM**

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

## EIBA January Activities

**January 16, 6:30 PM, EIBA Board Meeting at**  
**Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road**  
**Topic: 2018 Calendar completion.**

**February 8, 6:30 PM, EIBA Board Meeting at**  
**Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road**  
**Topic: February Mtg agenda, club soil distribution**  
**preparation.**

## No Club Meetings in January

**February 15, 7:00 PM, Initial EIBA Club**  
**Meeting of 2018, Pierson Flower Shop on**  
**Ellis Blvd.**

**Topic: Dues, Soil Handout, Review 2018 Schedule,**  
**"Taking Trees Out of Hibernation"**

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## Air Layering Zelkovas Project

*John Denny*

I have worked with Zelkova seedlings in recent years and have had excellent success. Zelkovas (*Zelkova serrata*) is a deciduous species related to elms. They are native to China and Japan. The leaves resemble elm leaves and will reduce nicely in size. The tree naturally assumes a very nice deciduous shape. The bark is grey and is thin, so one must be a bit careful with wiring.



Zelkovas color up well in fall and can be quite showy

when large. Speaking of size, Zelkovas can make great shohin trees, but also look great as medium size or large deciduous trees. They are not the fastest growing tree, but there are things you can do to speed things up a bit, especially with shohin Zelkovas.

Zelkovas like morning sun, but can suffer leaf burn in hot afternoon sun, so keep them partly shaded then. They do not suffer from many pests and diseases. Fertilize them all summer when they are young, then slow down the fertilizer the closer they get to being a finished tree. I have grown them in EIBA club soil, Japanese soil of regular size and Japanese shohin soil. All work well. You can stay with an organic soil when the seedlings are young and getting going. These type soils are rich and also hold water well. As the tree grows you may want to switch to a standard particle size Japanese soil or Boon mix. If you make your tree into a shohin, switch to a shohin size soil to help retain water and maintain the fineness of the branching structure.



*A Broom style Zelkova. Notice how nearly all the main branches initiate from the same location and fan out both beautifully and very uniformly. Great nebari and also excellent ramification.*

You can buy Zelkova seedlings from Matt Ouwinga at [kaedebonsai-en.com](http://kaedebonsai-en.com) or Bill Valvanis at International Bonsai.

One of the unique aspects of Zelkova as bonsai is they are often best styled in a broom style format where the trunk is straight and a large number of branches all emanate from the same location on the tree, much as if you turned a broom upside down.

I acquired a couple of Zelkovas and just began growing them. I wanted them to be medium sized or larger deciduous trees. Two years later I bought five seedlings with the express purpose of making them into shohin size trees. I clipped the tap root and laid out the remaining roots in a radial fashion. I used 2 inch nursery pots, filling them partially with soil. On top of the soil I placed circular shaped weed cloth to keep the roots from growing straight down. I spread the roots on top of the shade cloth. I then laid a bit of moist sphagnum moss on top of the roots. The moss will help keep the roots moist. Place the rest of the soil on top of the sphagnum moss. Grow these for a year or two, then upsize them to a larger pot.

When your tree grows you will often have a long trunk and then a nice mess of broom style branching. In this situation, you can air layer the tree at an appropriate point below the branching. At the end of the year you can separate the top of the tree with its new roots from the bottom portion of the original tree. You now have two trees. The top one will have the wonderful branching you are after along with a shorter straight trunk. This is the tree you want. You will also have the base tree which will have a nice solid trunk and beginnings of nebari. At the cut point, you should see see many new buds pop and you can start on another broom style Zelkova. Below are some photos showing the air layer and separation and the end product.

*5 year old Zelkova being air layered. Growing roots in pot halfway up trunk. The top and bottom of this tree will be separated yielding two trees.*







*Another Zelfova grown from seedling that has been separated and the top potted up. The new tree has some heavier branches that will need to be pruned away leaving smaller branches. The cut stump should pop new branches next spring from where it was cut.*



*Here are three younger seedlings that I potted up last November. Next step is to wire the branches down a bit and spread them out.*

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## **Working With Seedlings**

*John Denny*

Creating bonsai starting with seedlings is a great way to enhance your bonsai hobby.

Here are a few of the many reasons seedlings are wonderful.

1. They are cheap! If you are short on cash, you can buy seedlings for a couple bucks versus buying an established bonsai for, say, \$75. Yes, you will have to wait a few years, but your investment will be low and it will allow you to buy several seedlings and one day you will have several \$75 trees, not just one.



2. You can create a better quality tree in the end. By managing your seedlings properly, you can create better root systems and better nebari than what you likely will get if you purchase a more developed tree. You can grow your seedling to be a shohin size or a medium size or a big tree. You are the one who determines when the trunk girth is right. As a grower, you can wire and twist the trunk in the seedling stage and begin to add movement right away resulting in a more unique, more valuable end product.

3. You will learn more about trees and how they grow and how to manage your trees as your seedlings develop.

4. Experimentation is much easier and cheaper. You can try things like building a forest or grove, roots over rock, etc. for cheap. If you fail, it cost you only a small amount.

5. Seedlings are like puppies or kittens. They are just plain cute. I have seen guys with macho personalities get a little weak in the knees talking about their cute little seedlings.

6. Seedlings are easy to move around. You can pick up seedlings and move them to shade or into winter storage easily. I have a bunch of large trees that each year I dread moving. I look forward to moving seedlings!

7. Trade them! Order ten of a species and split them with another bonsai hobbyist. Trade a couple of red pine seedlings to someone for a couple of Chinese quince seedlings. Pay a fellow club member who watered your trees for you while you vacationed with a seedling or two.

8. It is easy to work on seedlings. Manipulating seedlings is easier than working on larger trees. They are smaller and simpler, so repotting is easier. So is pruning and wiring. Your bonsai techniques will improve on larger trees as you learn and practice on smaller seedling trees.

9. Results come faster than you think. Just like children, seedlings grow fast and change the most when they are young. You will see rapid improvement which always make one feel good.

10. Pride! As your seedling becomes a good pre bonsai, then finally a nice bonsai in a pot, you can feel great that YOU created this tree from start to finish! I am sure I could come up with more advantages to working with seedlings, but you get the picture. If you are interested in trying seedlings there are a

large number of species to work with, which is also part of the fun. This is the time of year to order your seedlings. I have used two sources for seedlings that I can recommend.



1. Matt Ouwinga has grown seedlings for 19 years and offers them on his website: [kaedebonsai-en.com/shop](http://kaedebonsai-en.com/shop)

2. Bill Valvanis offers a wide variety of seedling choices also. Find his catalogue at: <http://www.internationalbonsai.com/seedling%20list>

Okay. Its winter. Not much bonsai going on in your life right now. So, spice it up! Check out these vendors and see what they offer. Beat the winter doldrums, peruse the choices, order up some seedlings, eagerly wait for the bare rooted seedlings to arrive, and then have some FUN potting them up!

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### Jins are Rarely Pointed...

*Michael Hagedorn*

...in the wild, jins tend to have a cracked, blunted, or sheared-off look. Yet in bonsai we tend to the default, and whittle our dead branches to something so sharp a bird would be nervous about landing on them.

A photo I took in my garden this past week shows what I'm talking about.

