

Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter

www.iabonsai.org

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

September 2017

Volume 51, Issue 9



IBA September Activities

September 14, 9:00 AM, Open Study Group and Presentation at 11:30 AM

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

Topics: *To Be Announced*

September 14, 1:00 PM, EIBA Board Meeting at The Greater, Des Moines Botanical Garden. 909 Robert D. Ray Drive

EIBA August Activities

September 14, 6:30 PM, EIBA Board Meeting at Panera Restaurant on Edgewood Road

September 21, 7:00 PM, EIBA Club Meeting, Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd.

Topic: *Wiring*

September 30, 1, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM, Iowa Bonsai Association Fall Show, Reimen Gardens in Ames, Iowa. Always a great show!

Todd Schlafer Workshop

John Denny

Todd Schlafer, bonsai teacher from Denver, led a workshop recently for IBA members held at the Magruder farm. Todd shared with me that he enjoyed working with the IBA folks and their trees and that he looked forward to following those trees in future visits. Below are photos of some of the Colorado Blue Spruce trees.

Inside This Issue

IBA Activites	1
EIBA Activites	1
Todd Schlafer Workshop	1-2
Willow Leaf Fig	2-4
A Yew, Before and After	4
When Is It OK To Have Wire Biting In	5-6
Timely Tips	6





Willow Leaf Fig - An Amazing Little Tree
Dave Bogan



Ficus salicaria 'tissue cultured' grove, one

In my early years of bonsai, I became enamored by these little trees and started collecting them for my personal collection. I have now worked with them for well over 20 years and in fact, I still have 2 of my original trees that started from 4 inch nursery pots. Currently I have over 200 of this species and I can easily state they are my favorite tropical and they make fantastic bonsai. If kept in the proper environment and cared for correctly, I honestly don't think you can kill one.

Salicaria are generally culturally treated the same as any other ficus. They do require light (the more intense the better) but little else. During my years of experimenting, one factor that many get confused about is the amount of water they actually need. If one stops and thinks he or she will see that most ficus are almost succulent in nature. They are plants used to growing in extreme conditions that may dictate infrequent or frequent rain. So, they actually can store a lot of water within their structure to provide moisture over long periods of drought. Cut one and they bleed. Based on their ability to retain moisture, a lot of bonsai practices should be modified or at least re-thought. Not only does this species retain moisture but it also has evolved to know how to find moisture and nutrients when needed.

Through experimentation, I have found if they are potted in deep pots and in a soil that retains a lot of moisture, their roots barely grow and lengthen very little. If grown in a shallow container in a coarse soil and kept dry, the roots will grow and search. Look at pictures of old ficus in nature and you will see roots that grow very very long (searching for moisture and nutrients) and also roots that swell and retain even more moisture.

Another one of their many special traits has to do with their leaves. Have you ever seen a ficus wilt? No, they never do. In fact, I have seen ficus in the hot summer sun with no moisture in their soil and the leaves not wilted. This is due to another of their traits. Ficus retain a lot of moisture and can keep their leaves from wilting over long periods. If they do reach a critical drying point where the tree is in danger, it will start dropping its leaves to retain its internal moisture. Here again, I have seen ficus bone dry, lose their leaves and then after a few days of proper watering, they will re-sprout as if nothing ever happened. Show me a maple, elm or pine that will do this.

Another very useful trait that is very beneficial in bonsai is seen after dropping their leaves (or being leaf pruned) and then receiving proper care, they will bud profusely all over the trunk and branches. Leaf pruned regularly (mine are leaf pruned annually in June and some are done twice a year to increase ramification), they will develop great ramification in only a few years. Another benefit of leaf pruning is a lot of new branches, more leaves and thus generally smaller leaves. The only bad point is the bonsai can become so full that some inner branches will die back from lack of light. So, like most trees, they need to be thinned to allow light to the inner areas when branching gets too dense.

Of great interest is a new variety of *Ficus salicaria* that I have found. Not actually a new species but one that is started differently. These new ficus are grown in 'tissue culture'. A process where plant cells are used to start a whole new plant. In the case of these *salicaria*, they are started in a culture from leaves. With this amazing process has developed a ficus with one very interesting characteristic. The most significant change is how quickly the base of the trunk develops.

I first obtained a few of these from a bonsai vendor about 6 – 7 years ago. These amazing little trees had bases or bottom of the trunks that were 3 and 4 times larger than any other tree or plant of this size and age. After raising a few of these for a couple of years, I now have several little ficus with over 6" bases and a height of only around 8". I will say I have pruned them back and am keeping them at this height, but their ratio of trunk size to total tree size is amazing.



*Huge lower trunk on cloned *Ficus salicaria**

Three years ago, I finally tracked down a source for the tissue cultured ficus. The minimum purchase was 144 trees but I just had to have more. These arrived with a trunk size of a normal seedling of less than a 1/8". Now, 3 years later, many have trunks of 1" or better and only 4- 6" tall. These could make amazing little mame and future shohin size trees. This winter, using several of them, I put together several groves or forest settings. I have never assembled a better group of trees that looked so amazing at such a young age. Imagine mame or shohin size forests of this material.

Ficus of all types are amazing in how much abuse they can take and still produce fantastic results. I have repotted them year round, I have removed 90% of their roots, removed all the branches, cut them down to a stump and they have always rebounded. I have had ficus that developed "water" roots – roots that have bulges in them, and removed them with no problem. I have even found this type of root developing on the soil surface and simply cut them out with no effect to the tree. I will, of course, state that unless you have the proper facilities (a greenhouse) you should wait to perform your work until the heat of summer when they will respond very quickly.

So many people think you can't grow tropicals outside of Florida. I will say having a greenhouse is ideal but not required. For those that over-winter bonsai in the house, you simply need to use common sense with ficus. They need all the light you can give them whether it is with artificial lights or the sun. Watch their needs. Tropicals will go semi -dormant when they don't receive what they require. Although, their needs are minimal never allow one to stay wet, if anything keep them slightly dry. Always keep them clean to avoid diseases. If they lose their leaves don't despair they will usually return. Don't baby them.

In closing I honestly think the greatest secret to ficus is learning their water needs and actually making them work for every bit of nutriment and moisture. If anyone is interested more in the "leaf culture" *nerrifolia*, contact me at daveb1@frontier.com

*Note: The Willow Leaf fig has also been called *Ficus nerifolia*, *Ficus neriifolia*, *Ficus celebensis*, *Ficus irregularis*, *Ficus regularis* etc. CC Berg has now scientifically described the Willow Leaf fig and therefore its proper scientific name is now *Ficus salicaria*.



Ficus salicaria 'tissue cultured' grove, one



Ficus salicaria grove planting



Ficus salicaria semi-cascade

A Yew, Before and After

John Denny

I have enjoyed working with seedling pines, where I have wired and then bent (contorted might be a better

term) the thin trunks into various sharply curved shapes. The seedlings were then placed in soil to grow. Growing them thickens the trunk, grows nebari, creates taper, and generates branches for basic structure of the tree.



This tree is ready to work on. There will be some carving done to add interest to the trunk. Next will come a good deal of pruning, followed by wiring and placing the branches.



A beautiful little tree!

This project would not be difficult to do. The hard part would be the patience required to grow this tree, once shaped, either in the ground or in a growing pot, while the trunk gained thickness. The result was worth the wait, wouldn't you say? Now, what can of pot does this tree deserve? Hmmm?

When Is It OK To Have Wire Biting In?

Posted by Crataegus

Too much of a good thing can be sad. Just enough is useful. Too little and it doesn't work. For wiring, we want the middle one, just enough.

Blogs are wonderful for making grand statements that have marginal utility, unhinged to useful reality. Hopefully photos will clarify this commentary about what is just enough...



The wire has been on this Ponderosa branch (above) for 6 years and still hasn't begun biting in. It should be left there until it does, or the branch will have a memory and spring back.



This pine has wire biting in badly that should have been taken off earlier in the year.



And this pine has wire that is about right. (Sound like the story of the three bears?) It should be taken off now. The moderate amount of biting in will help hold the branch in place, so that any rewiring that is done may be done with smaller wire.

- The wire should bite in a little bit on a conifer, or the branch will simply bounce back to where it was. Conifers are more flexible, hence some biting in is almost essential
- On a deciduous tree, no biting in is preferred. The trick is timing it so that it doesn't. Badly bitten in wire, such as when the wire is buried in the branch, may leave scars that never really go away for deciduous trees like beech or broadleaf evergreens such as camellia. It may be better to cut the branch off and start again than leave an ugly, permanent spiral scar.

Deciduous trees are often displayed naked without leaves, and any wire scars on them are immediately obvious. Older deciduous trees are normally trained without wire to avoid scars. On conifer branches, bark eventually forms which helps hide wire scars, and they also have foliage year round so scars are less obvious. For a conifer, 'just enough to be useful' is wire biting into the branch just a bit. Sounds scandalous doesn't it...but taking wire off too soon will just waste the work.

Timely Tips

John Denny

Here we are in early September. The temps are dropping, especially the night time lows, which are in the low 50s and often dropping into the mid 40s. What does this mean for our bonsai?

First, if you have Tropical trees, they should be inside on nights below 55F. I have a couple of Schefflera that can handle a few degrees below 50F, but why stress them? If you are bringing your Tropical trees inside for the rest of the winter, give them a good spray for pests and disease, clean the soil surface of weeds and detritus, and clean the pot including the underside. Give your Tropical trees a lot of light while indoors.

September is a good time to work on junipers. Clean soil surface and pot. Replace lost soil or top dress the tree. Remove old wire if cutting in. Trim away weak, yellowing foliage, foliage growing straight downward from a branch, newly budded out foliage in branch crotches. Thin heavy growth areas, cutting with scissors rather than pinching. Open the foliage so light and air can get inside. Create a nice silhouette. Most people clean away loose bark from the trunk, even brushing lightly with a toothbrush to expose the nice cinnamon color underneath. Finally, you can wire your tree now. Continue fertilizing through fall.

Pines should be fed hard in the fall, so get your fertilizer going if you have not fed lately. Pines will shed old needles in the fall, so do not be worried if you see a lot of brown needles. You can remove them by lightly grasping the needles and moving your hand gently from the end of the branch closest to the trunk and moving towards the tip of the branch. Dead needles should easily come along as you move your hand. Do not move your hand into the foliage "against the grain" of the needles. It is easy to break or fracture needles, which then turn brown. Later in the fall you can select the new buds you want to keep and also needle thin. Do this in November.

Continue feeding deciduous trees in September. Keep the soil clean of weeds and organic cakes, etc. Freshen the soil. Look for any wire that is biting in and remove it. Remove any dead, diseased, damaged leaves. Growth has slowed and daily temps have dropped, so make sure you adjust your watering levels. Fall can be very windy at times, so make sure your trees are safe from being blown over.

It may seem early, but begin thinking about winter storage. Do you have enough room for your trees? Do you need to clean the storage area? Do you have a thermometer or two to help you monitor winter temps? Also, make a note of any bonsai related items you will need in the future? Do you have enough wire for wiring in November? What about soil and pots you may need for repotting in early spring? Be prepared.

A good way to enjoy bonsai in the fall is to visit a good show like the IBA Fall Show. You will see some very high quality trees. There will be knowledgeable club members there to ask questions. Soak up their hard earned knowledge. Remember, they made mistakes along the way, so YOU don't have to! Learn from them. Above all, enjoy your trees this fall. If your maples show great fall color, grab a photo and share it with us.