

*IBA News & Muse*  
*Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter*  
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## IBA NOVEMBER Activities

**November 17, Tuesday, 6:30PM**  
**End of Year Banquet and Meeting**  
**Des Moines Botanical Garden, 909 Robert D. Ray Drive**

*Following good food provided by the Trellis café, and appropriate recognition of outstanding work if any, we will be entertained and tempted by our Grand Auctioneer Alan Magruder as he auctions off pots and other bonsai items donated to the IBA over this last year. The highlight of the auction will be the Mark Fields demonstration juniper from his spring workshop. Bring to show your project trees from the year.*

## EIBA NOVEMBER Activities

**November 11, 6 pm. Board Mtg at Nothing But Noodles Restaurant on Collins. 2016 Agenda Planning.**

**November 19, 6:30 pm. EIBA Holiday Party at Leonardo's Restaurant.**

**December 10, 6 pm. Board Mtg at Nothing But Noodles Restaurant on Collins. 2016 Agenda Planning.**

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*Not sure of the species, but it is a great twisted tree in a pot which I think is a perfect marriage of tree, pot, stand. Photo from Bonsai Bark.*

## Timely Tips

The bonsai year is ending. Or is it just beginning? Many think of late fall as the end of the growing season for bonsai. They are cleaned up and stored for the winter and pretty much forgotten until spring.

There is another way to think about this. What if we think of this as the **beginning** of the bonsai year? Well, we begin by cleaning up our trees and top soil and pots. But there is so much more we can do this time of year to prepare our trees for growth next year.

Our pines need work now – bud selection, needle thinning, perhaps pruning back a bit of length where we have new buds that have pushed further inside on the branch. Pines require wiring to position the branches where you want them.

Now is a great time to prune back Azaleas. Many ends of branches grow three or four tips at the end. Prune them back to just two tips. If the tips are not horizontal, you can wire them and rotate them to the horizontal set up. They will grow perfectly next spring.

Deciduous trees often have whorls or other problems like crossing branches, shoots with long internodes, crowding, etc. Now is a great time to prune away these issues that will only become bigger problems next year. Most twigs need shortening. Also, remove coarse branches that are too thick or will become too thick next year. Rely on thinner branches and then create some taper with them. You can do a little wiring to place branches and twigs into better position so they grow there beginning next year. Make sure you remember to remove the wire in early summer.

Junipers require clean up of loose bark. Trim weak or yellowed foliage. Prune away growth emanating from branch crotches, shoots pointing down or straight up. Thin areas of heavy growth. Wire branches to a nice position and shape them with some movement. Add a little wiggle to your trees.

So, you see, fall is really the time of year to get your trees ready for Spring growth!

## Do You Name Your Bonsai Trees?

By John Denny

My college boys make me laugh. Here is a snippet of a conversation with them while I was showing them, once again, how I wanted them to water my trees while I was away for a weekend.

Alex, the 22 year old: "Hey, Dad! Do you have names for your trees like the Japanese sometimes do?"

Me: "No."

Alex: "What kind of tree is this one?"

Me: "A spruce."

Alex: "Okay, let's call it 'Spruce Wayne'."

Me: "Funny, Batman boy."

Alex, undaunted: "Is this bigger one a spruce, too? I'd name it 'Spruce Almighty'!"

Me: "Are you working on your stand up routine?"

Zach, the younger college boy: "Hey, Dad, What is this tree?"

Me: "It's a semi cascade Ponderosa pine. Nice, huh?"

Zach: "It looks like a drunk sorority girl at a party leaning over and barfing!"

Me: "It probably sounds better in Japanese!"

Zach: "Hey, Pop. Is this the first tree you ever wired?"

Me, indignant: "Nooo!"

Zach: "Looks like it." "Nice nebari though!"

Well, that gives you an idea of what I laugh at. I have to say as my boys continued to name and comment on my trees, I laughed hard and often. It was a fun day in the bonsai yard. Just as it should be.

## Bunjin Wiring and Styling Photos

John Denny

Below are photos of bunjin styled trees by Naoki Maeokia both before wiring and after wiring. Notice how wiring makes such a big difference. Second, notice what aspects make up this style, namely long thin trunks and sparse, minimal foliage. More with less. Enjoy!



*After wiring*

*Before wiring*



*After wiring*

*Before wiring*

## Wood Adventures – Ask Wood

by Gary Wood

This is a new column – an advice column if you will – where you, the reader, can ask Gary Wood a question about your bonsai. Any bonsai. Any question is fair game. Ask why, ask how, ask when. Gary is a bonsai teacher from Alabama who travels extensively. He began life in a tree nursery, learning about trees and followed that by learning bonsai, pottery, and a whole lot of other things. We welcome him to our newsletter!

### **Question:**

Hi, Gary

When should I use cut paste? What kinds are there and when do I use them?

### **Gary Wood Answers:**

**Editors: Gary Wood is traveling and will answer in the next issue so stay tuned!**

## A Bonsai Wood Block Print for Study

Ivan Hanthorn

Over the last 150 years four generations of ten artists in the Yoshida family of Tokyo have produced an amazing output of high quality art in varying media, style, and technique. In the context of Japan's rich history of art, the Yoshida family is notable for having created a sustained and diverse range of fine art that combines the best Japanese aesthetic instincts with a clear modern international appeal. Two in particular, Toshi and Tsukasa, father and son woodblock artists, produced prints with bonsai as the subject. These particular woodblock prints should be known to and studied by every serious student of bonsai.

Why so? The artists clearly understand the art form which is the subject of illumination in their art form of choice. Each is an expression of a long developed summary of Japanese sensibilities. The woodblock prints are, like the bonsai in each, manipulated abstractions of perfection that can be breathtaking in their "naturalness." And each would be a great study print to inspire one's own beginning in the development of a bonsai.

The work below is from the end of the line of bonsai prints within the family's bonsai print production. It is better known to the general public than some of the other bonsai prints, and even comes up for sale occasionally. *Bonsai Maple*, by Tsukasa Yoshida, was executed in 1970. (6.1 x 11.3 inches.)



## **Bonsai = Are We Having Fun Yet?**

John Denny

Bonsai is supposed to be fun, right? Sometimes it is and sometimes, well, not so much. It can be frustrating, demanding, even sad when something goes badly wrong and you lose a tree that mattered. Everyone has experienced setbacks in this hobby.

But, let's talk about what makes this hobby fun. Usually, I find, it has to do with the people I practice bonsai with. Club members, friends, teachers, family. I always say bonsai friends are the best friends. I have met more good people while doing bonsai. Bonsai attracts good people and I think bonsai brings out the best in people, too. It brings out their kindness, their spirituality, their connection to nature, their sense of awe, their artistic side. And bonsai people seem to be very good at sharing things – like knowledge, tools, wire, cuttings, advice (good and not so good), and their sense of humor.

There is a lot of humor in bonsai. I laugh a lot. Sometimes I laugh at myself, like when I sit back and observe a particularly poor attempt at wiring.. I laugh when Gary Wood is in the room. Gary has said more funny things while teaching bonsai than I can remember. Gary knows how to make bonsai fun

There are a lot of other reasons to enjoy bonsai. I like learning new things. Bonsai offers me endless opportunity to learn. People like improving their technique. Bonsai offers lots of technique to work upon.

Bonsai offers us beauty. Beauty comes in many forms. Bonsai offers us beauty as in artwork – pleasing aesthetics. We see Japanese wood block prints, hanging scrolls, beautiful ceramics. Or beauty can be seen in the context of nature. Nature itself is filled with beauty and bonsai is a representation of this natural beauty.

Bonsai brings me closer to nature. I follow the weather patterns much more closely than before. I watch the sky, feel the air, and sense the changes. I follow the seasons as my trees move through them. In spring I notice the first tentative signs of green growth, summer the lush colors of green often tinged with red and pink, fall brings wonderful colors as this year did so well, and winter brings the drama of deciduous silhouettes.

And for many, bonsai brings a spirituality that connects them to a something greater than themselves, something timeless and powerful.

These little trees do a lot for us. They help us have fun and enjoy life a bit more, they bring us friendships, they arouse a sense of beauty and art, they connect us to nature and the Universe.

These little trees called bonsai are pretty amazing!

# OMOTO—THAT JAPANESE SACRED LILY THAT JOHN NAKA TOLD US ABOUT

By Ivan Hanthorn

At the IBA Fall Show at Reiman Gardens this year there was one very traditionally exhibited Omoto in a tall Korean celadon pot, the design of which is for omoto. There was an explanatory text next to the exhibit for the education of those who did not know at what they were looking. Later on Sunday I noticed Cat Nelson photographing the omoto and the text block. Hopefully thinking that something had been done well rather than off the grid, I asked her about her photograph, to which she replied that she enjoyed this sort of educational presentation and had done a lot of it in year's past at the Chicago Botanical Garden bonsai events when she was intimately involved with the presentation of bonsai shows at that institution. For those who did not attend the fall show, the text block to which I refer follows.

## Omoto, or Japanese Sacred Lily *Rohdea japonica*

Japanese Sacred Lily is one of the most prized plants in Japan but is almost unknown elsewhere. Every civilization develops a tapestry of traditions, beliefs, superstitions and symbolism, making it unique and interesting. The Japanese Sacred Lily (*Rohdea japonica*) is one of the most cherished plants in that nation but understanding its popularity when viewed from a Western perspective is challenging.

Rohdea is an evergreen herbaceous perennial native to both China and Japan where it occurs in moist woodlands and on grassy slopes. It's now classified as a member of the lily-of-the-valley family.

Rohdea has been cultivated in Japan for at least 500 years and perhaps as long in China. It's a "good fortune" plant often given as a gift at housewarming parties, when a new business opens or as a birthday present.

Its Chinese name translates as "10,000 years green," and it's believed to be an iconic rebus – something that multiplies the good luck of other items.

It's Japan where the popularity of Rohdea, where it's called *omoto*, has reached its zenith. There the plant is not grown in gardens but in pots as a kind of **herbaceous bonsai**. The Japanese Rohdea Society has registered over 600 named cultivars, some of which sell to collectors for thousands of dollars. Rohdea shows are held just as we hold orchid shows. They classify cultivars according to the length and thickness of the leaf, leaf shape and the presence and type of variegation. The pot they're grown in – called a *nishiki bachi* – is an important part of the overall display.

John Naka, the god father of American Bonsai, introduced omoto to the American bonsai scene in his first book, *Bonsai Techniques*.



*Rohdea japonica*, 1806 ill. Omoto in classic omoto pot

***Rohdea*** is a genus native to eastern Asia (China, Japan, the Himalayas and Indochina). It was long thought to contain only a single species, *R. japonica*, but recent studies have resulted in several other taxa being transferred into the genus. Common names include **Nippon Lily**, **Sacred Lily**, and **Japanese Sacred Lily**.

In the APG III classification system, it is placed in the family Asparagaceae, subfamily Nolinoideae (formerly the family Ruscaceae). It has also been placed in the former family Convallariaceae.

It is a rhizomatous herbaceous perennial plant, with fibrous roots. The leaves are evergreen, broad lanceolate, 15–50 cm long and 2.5–7 cm broad, with an acute apex. The flowers are produced in a short, stout, dense spike 3–4 cm long, each flower pale yellowish, 4–5 mm long. The fruit is a red berry 8 mm diameter, produced in a tight cluster of several together.

Although sometimes misspelled as *Rhodea*, the genus was actually named after Michael Rohde (1782–1812), a botanist from Bremen. The plant is used in traditional Chinese medicine, though it is generally regarded as inedible and possibly toxic.

Japanese use omoto for New Year much as the West uses mistletoe for Christmas. The following 1938 Japanese wood block print (with type set text) shows omoto in its flowering state used in a very traditional ikebana at New Year's time.





If you think bonsai aficionados can be obsessive/compulsive, you should look into the mainly Japanese interest in omoto and wind orchids (*neofinetia falcata*). Both can stand alone very nicely but can also be used as companions with bonsai, for which there is a long history.

Google *Rohdea japonica* and *Neofinetia falcata* to look for images. Explore a little more under each plant name and one will be amazed by traditionally presented examples of these two Asian jewels that can also inhabit the bonsai universe.

## Fall Color Photos – K. hornbeams, Trident, Japanese maple

By John Denny

