

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
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www.iabonsai.org

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IBA OCTOBER Activities

October 21, 7 PM, IBA MEETING

Des Moines Botanical Garden, Botany Lab

Topic: Full-blown round table discussions on assorted bonsai related topics. Bring your notepad and pen. Hand-outs will be given to new members for over wintering bonsai. If you are new to bonsai be there to get your hand out or suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous temperatures.

November 18, 7 PM, IBA END OF YEAR MEETING AND BANQUET

Des Moines Botanical Garden, Walsh Room

We will have a very brief meeting: awards will be presented and an *Auction* will be held.

Fall Color Contest – bring a tree with fall color. It is permissible to glue or tape leaves on.

Bare Naked Tree Contest– bring a deciduous tree that has lost all its leaves.

Winners will be decided by popular vote. Prizes will be a \$10 credit to be used at the auction.

N.B.: To attend you must purchase a \$10 ticket from our president or secretary prior to the event. The reason is that the banquet is catered by the Botanical Garden, and they need to plan appropriately by knowing how many people will attend.

EIBA SEPTEMBER Activities

October 9, 6 pm, Board Mtg. Nothing But Noodles

Restaurant. *Topics include Officers, planning October mtg, 2015 workshop, holiday party.*

October 16, 7 pm, EIBA Club Mtg. Meet at Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd. *Topics to include voting on officers, discussion of 2015 activities, discussion of winter storage.*

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2014 US National Bonsai Exhibition. Nippon Bonsai Association Award. Finest Japanese Bonsai Display. Black Pine. Brussel Martin. A massive tree which a photo can hardly do justice. Beautifully refined. Power and elegance together.

Timely Tips

Fall is a wonderful time for bonsai. Colorful foliage can be stunning. The heat of summer that stresses our trees (and us) is over. We can water a bit more leisurely, though we still have to pay attention as moisture requirements have dropped. Weeds are not growing as fast, same with pests and diseases. It is a bit easier to keep up.

So, what should we be doing and what should we be paying attention to this time of year? In addition to slowing down on watering our trees, we should be feeding in the fall. Some advocate using a low nitrogen fertilizer like 0 10 10 to avoid top growth too late into fall. Others think this is somewhat of a myth, stating that trees will not utilize nitrogen if the tree does not need it at that time of year. Personally, I keep feeding pines hard in the fall. Deciduous and tropical, I cut back to about half strength Miracle Grow. By now my fertilizer cakes are mostly expended.

Prepare your storage area early in case you have to quickly bring your trees inside due to sudden low temps at night. Very light frosts are okay for your trees, but avoid hard frosts. Have your area clean and organized. When your trees come in, they should be cleaned up – prune anything dead, remove unneeded branches, cut any remaining leaves from trees, clean loose bark from junipers. Remove from soil surface any leaves, needles, fertilizer cakes, weeds, etc. Clean your pots including the bottoms. Make sure water can percolate through the soil. If needed, scrape off old crusty topsoil and replace with a layer of fresh soil for winter.

November is a great time to work on your bonsai. You can safely prune, wire and style most trees. There is always a lot to do with your pines. Clean them up well. Do needle plucking and bud selection to balance the strength of strong and weak areas of the tree.

Now is a great time, too, to make some notes on each of your trees. What went well this past year and what will you improve upon in the care of each tree next year. Take a photo. Ponder your tree. What style improvements can each tree use? Make a plan then review it next spring as the trees come out of storage.

2014 US National Bonsai Exhibition Prize winning trees



The National Award, Finest Bonsai Masterpiece. American Elm. Suthin Sukolosovisit. Great artist, great tree. Notice how tiny the leaves have become! One cannot see the ramification underneath the canopy, but it must be spectacular.



A beautiful shohin display by Gary Andes which won an award at the National Exhibition. Each tree is a winner by itself.

My Trip to 2014 US National Exhibition

by Helene Magruder

Last spring I sent some photos of some of my trees to International Bonsai to be considered for the National Exhibition. To my delight, two of my trees were selected. My big Japanese Five Needle Pine and my Blue Alps Juniper were chosen. Then nerves set in and I set to work.

The big pine didn't worry me too much, it had been wired over the winter. It just needed to be kept healthy and tidied up. The Blue Alps juniper was another story. It is one of my least favorite trees to work on. It is prickly and grows at an alarming rate. In past years I tended to let it grow out of control and then whack it back in early spring. Now I had to keep it under control. This required weekly inspection and pruning. As show time approached I power washed the trunk and branches, scrubbed them with a toothbrush and spent hours pulling brown needles which popped up on a daily basis.

We had a problem, the pine was too tall to fit into our car. Ryan Neal had planned on making a cross country trip picking up trees for the exhibition. However, there were very few entries from the west coast so he was not planning to go. We started looking for alternatives. It just happened that Gary Wood was staying with us when he came to judge the state fair show, and he has a large van. It was soon arranged that Gary would transport my trees along with one of Fred Truck's trees. It turned out that Ryan did decide to make the trip but was turned back by a snow storm in the Rockies. I guess we lucked out.

We arrived at the exhibition hall Thursday afternoon and it was a bustle of organized activity. The exhibition hall was an indoor sports complex with two full size soccer fields. One field was for the exhibition trees and the other for vendors. There were hundreds of tables, the exhibition area each table had purple swags above with a gold tassel making a tokonoma for each tree. The vendor area was rapidly filling up with the vendor's wares. All the trees had to be approved before they could be set up. Bill Valavanis quickly gave my trees a nod and had them placed. No sooner than we had the trees set up then some of the volunteers carted them off to be photographed for the album. We even got to watch my trees being photographed.

Friday Alan and I took a side trip to Niagara Falls as we had never seen it. When we returned the exhibition was mostly set up. I had made a list of pots I needed and happily shopped to my hearts content. We saw many old friends and had a great time visiting. Brian van Fleet, a former club member was there, along with Fred Truck, Peter Warren, Matt Ouwinga, Jim Doyle, Brussel Martin, Sarah Rayner, Andy Smith etc.

The exhibition was awe inspiring. There were so many wonderful trees it took several trips around to appreciate them all. There were 107 exhibitors from 27 states and two provinces of Canada. There were a number of displays from botanical gardens around the country. Over 300 trees were on display and many people said they were impressed with the quality of the trees. It was very humbling to have my trees displayed alongside some of the best artists in the country.

The award winning trees were magnificent. Suthin's broom style American elm was about 18 inches tall and

beautiful spread of roots. The leaves were reduced to about one half inch and the ramification must have taken years to achieve. The shohin displays were amazing, they are some of my favorites. There were a number of lovely trees from Florida I had never seen before. Larches were well represented as they are a favorite of collectors in the northeast. One of the most unusual was a larch root over a statue of a reclining Penelope by Nick Lenz. There was also an invitational display of suiseki with a number of beautiful stones beautifully displayed. One of the bonuses was the astroturf underfoot which made hours of standing much more pleasant.

Bill Valavanis who has incredible energy, is an incredible organizer. He also had an amazing crew of volunteers. They had spent weeks preparing the bones of the displays, stands to hang the backdrops, the swags, the table front drapes which were all carefully ironed. People were everywhere to help you and everyone was gracious in spite of the pressure. What a great group of people!

Sunday morning we went out to Bill's garden which is delightful. It is walled and he has a number of his lovely trees on benches throughout it. We also spent a little time in the sales area and came home with a few small trees.

When four o'clock rolled around the show broke down in an amazingly short time. The vendors had much reduced inventories. Many of us were packed up and on the road in less than an hour. It was truly a memorable experience.



#1 Exhibition

#2 Vendor area

#3 Me with the Blue Alps juniper

Member Spotlight: Zoe Nady

Ivan Hanthorn

We continue our occasional club member interviews this month with Zoe Nady, who now resides in Nevada, Iowa. She moved here from Texas a couple of years ago, bringing with her a collection of bonsai and a determination to adapt her trees and her hobby to the colder environment she grew up with in Iowa. She has many skill sets, including being a nurse; however the latest curriculum that relates to bonsai is her completion of the Commercial Horticulture program at DMACC, 2008.

1. How long have you done bonsai and how did you get started?

I began my foray into bonsai in 1986, when I went to the Rose Bowl and bought an azalea bonsai at a tourist shop. I managed to get it back to Iowa, chronically overwatered it, and it predictably responded by dying. Fast forward, my next encounter with bonsai was in 1988, my first year of grad school at the U. of Houston. A friend who lived above me in my apartment building was smitten by the 'bonsai' she had just bought and could hardly wait to show it to me. She had what could only be described as a whorl of schefflera leaves on the end of a slanting stick that was glued-for-life into an undersized pot. Being tactful, I dutifully admired it, smugly knowing that I couldn't do any worse myself, despite my 0-1 track record with the aforementioned azalea. Encapsulating my first 11 years in the hobby; everything I bonsaied died via my sins of omission- some seemed more determined to die than others, but the outcome was always the same. By then, I must have amassed 40 or so English language books, most written by Japanese authors, and I am self-taught. There is no substitute for learning Japanese fundamentals, and I learned them quite proficiently. What I had failed to grasp is the uniqueness of each species that determines what you can do and when you can do it. It was only when I joined the Houston Bonsai Society that I swallowed my pride and got help from other people. Amazingly, for the most part, I quit killing trees after that (well, at least the wholesale arboricide stopped)! I have no idea why I had even kept trying year after year for those early years, after losing tree after tree after tree, but I did. I joined the Iowa Bonsai Association a couple years ago for the same reasons; I try to share the experience behind my successes and failures with others, to ease them through the frustrations inherent in beginning a new hobby. I will never outgrow my need for other peoples' input, to help me better my bonsai skills. In a perfect world, everybody gets better!

2. What do you like best about bonsai?

I greatly enjoy showing my trees. Showing trees is a great confidence builder for people new to the hobby, as well as for seasoned practitioners. I think we would get greater participation from people new to bonsai if the State Fair had a special category for hobbyists who have been in the hobby fewer than 3 years, or some other arbitrary length of time.

3. What are your favorite trees and what do you like about them?

What are my favorite species? I have yet to come across ANY tree shrub, vine, herbaceous or woody perennial, or even an annual that I haven't wanted to 'bonsai'. The operative word here is 'wanted'. That does not mean that they all make believable bonsai or even survive my intervention! Most of my trees are nursery foundlings, and asexually propagated species and cultivars (yes, some are patented). A few trees have even been expensive imports, but for the most part, I haven't spent a lot of money on plant material over the years- now pots, that's an entirely different story. I will hock my soul for a pot I want, even if it spends years upon years on a garage

shelf with countless other inmates before one of my trees is deemed suitable for it. Categorically, my flowering trees are my favorite species in the late winter and spring when they are in bloom; my fruiting species are my favorite trees in the summer when their fruits are maturing; the species that experience leaf and fruit color change are my favorites in the fall; and all my species are my favorite trees in winter– I love seeing the greens and bronzes of my conifers, and I am suffused with awe and pride at the tracery of the silhouettes of my deciduous trees. I have about 500 trees, encompassing perhaps 60 or so species and cultivars. Over the years, I guess I have lost count of just how many trees I have. And when I'm working on my trees, and even thinking about them, the boundary between me and my trees as living beings seems to get blurred. But maybe that's what bonsai is all about.

4. What aspect of bonsai do you like best and what are you best at?

Probably the most fun for me is propagating trees and plants, especially air-layering. At my tender age (ha!), I don't have the lifespan left for developing specimen material from seeds, even though on occasion I greedily pilfer seeds from an unusual species I see in a botanical garden, conservatory, yard or farmstead, or arboretum. I do this only because it would be way too obvious that I was stealing if I took out a sharp tool, hacked off a soft cutting, and stuck it into my Macdonald's iced tea for the trip home. I also make exceptions for unusual vegetables (fruits) and fruits at the grocery store, with the added benefit that some of them have even been stratified in refrigeration long enough to break seed dormancy and I can plant them right away! I have seedlings from lychees, avocados, those miniature sweet peppers, all sorts of pears, apples and citrus, most of which I'll never know what cultivar it is unless they fruit someday far into the future!

5. What aspect of your bonsai ability would you like most to improve?

There is always a need to improve. I need to work on fine ramification of secondary and tertiary branching on my elm trees. Elms can become coarse if branchlets are left to elongate too much. I also need to work more with evergreen conifers. I don't have too many, and my confidence level could improve if I 'just did it'. I've found that they just don't back bud very readily, especially pines! – Oh, really? Duh.

6. What bonsai experts have you worked with that you liked and why?

Although I haven't studied with any well-known bonsai senseis, I was fortunate to observe a Kimura demonstration in Atlanta, in the late 1990's. Also, I participated in a memorable weekend workshop with Kathy Shaner years ago.

7. Do you have a bonsai highlight – trip, award, show, tree, workshop?

One of many highlights I've had in bonsai was when I did a demonstration at one of our shows in Houston. I selected three upright junipers at a local nursery, and they were almost identical in height, caliper, and branch disposition. The first tree I left just as I bought it in the nursery container. The second tree, I pruned away only the unnecessary branches for the design I envisioned and left it in the nursery container. The third tree, I pruned away the unnecessary branches, wired and trimmed branchlets to define foliage pads, and later, potted it in an appropriate unglazed bonsai pot. This 'before-during-and-after', age-progression exhibit served to show people that bonsai is, indeed, a process and not an event or a magical transformation. All too often, based on comments I get from people at shows, people look at 'finished' trees and know instinctively that they could never produce

such a magnificent work of art. We need to work harder as hobbyists to take away the intimidation factor by educating people. It is an objective of mine to encourage people whenever I can by explaining to them that every tree they see in a show, regardless how perfect it looks, started out as a blank canvas– a cutting or seedling or the neighbor's unwanted overgrown foundation planting. With encouragement and helping people succeed early on, I am certain that more people would try bonsai and make it through the early part of the learning curve.



Two of Zoe's bonsais that have garnered critical attention at IBA Bonsai shows in the recent past.

FALL BONSAI SHOW REFLECTIONS

Ivan Hanthorn

The bonsai show of the first weekend of October was well attended and well received. We have had the good luck as a club to have presented a series of bonsai shows of increasing refinement and visual appeal, with our members and our guests expressing their notice of this by generalized expressions to the effect that “each year is better than the last”. Constant improvement is a modern American myth; you go only so far before plateau is the most probable. If that is a good level of success, nothing wrong with the plateau for a while. It is backsliding and downfall that hurts.

We have achieved this with the voluntary and caring input from several sources, but primarily from Alan Magruder, who with Helene Magruder, has attended some of the great bonsai venues in the world and has developed a practiced eye for how to make bonsai look their best. Ron Heinen's input has been very helpful

also; it is not incidental that he was until recent retirement a career teacher of *art*. It is in a bonsai show that we profess to the general public what they might not yet know—that bonsai in its fullest realized form is an art form.

This year we used a different table layout than previously common. We left a large part of the room center open to encourage the experience of seeing it all from standing at the center. Some comments were appreciative of the open view, others were indifferent. So your comments on the layout would be welcomed by the Fall Show planners for next year.

In the layout this year we probably reached our most spare representation of bonsai at one show. Rather than the old days of shoe horning into available space all the bonsai possible that members wanted to show off, we have for a while now tried to achieve more with less. Bonsai better than any other art form exploits the powerful psychological and visual phenomena that less is more, far more. We presented 25 bonsai on 20 tables. Each was given all the space we thought it needed to look its best.

Although we term it and think of it as a bonsai show, the annual fall event is in reality the IBA's little three ring circus. We have "the show", we have vending (Dasu and usually a members bazaar table), and we have educational activities that vary but usually include a talk, audio visual components, and demonstration materials. That educational component worked this year about as well as ever. All four presentations were well intended. When we started the fall show and for a few years following, we had one presentation.

I like the summary comment on this recent fall event of one of our guests: "It was good as always. You guys do a lot with your show – excellent trees, excellent displays, demos, talks, vendors and bazaar table. You have a dedicated group."

We had a theme for the bonsai show this year: Forest Bonsai, with encouragement to include kusamono if possible as companion material. The theme focus has been a practice for several of the previous annual fall shows. Usually these themes come out of styles and practices that have been discussed over the previous year or more in meetings, the national bonsai literature, and in our very own newsletter. Even so, occasionally a member expresses the feeling that the topic of emphasis snuck up on them. So here it is. The themes next year for the annual fall bonsai show will be Literati (Bunjin), a Japanese bonsai art form, and its cousin from which it derives, Penjing, a Chinese bonsai art form. Literati will be the lead emphasis, as most of our members have had at least one workshop on this bonsai style. Penjing has been discussed in several of our articles and has received increasing attention in the bonsai literature for several years. So for those of you who have experimented with this quite various form, here is your opportunity to show how it is coming along.

MORPHING OF AN INDUSTRIAL TOOL INTO A BONSAI SUPER CART (cont.)

By Ivan Hanthorn

In the previous issue there were photographs of a standard industrial hydraulic scissor lift cart in original form and a modified version of that cart still in the back of my vehicle when I got home from the welder. The cart is a Northern Industrial Tools Hydraulic Table Cart, 500 lb. capacity, item #143654. For those interested in acquiring that cart or in further modifying it as will be described, Northern Tool is a national chain of stores; one is located on the NW corner of Des Moines close to Merle Hay Mall. Thus geography is not a hindrance for pursuing this approach to handling heavy bonsai, particularly large forest bonsai and large penjing. At this point in time I am aware of five people in Iowa using this cart in original or modified form for large and heavy bonsai moving. In almost all cases, in Iowa and elsewhere, the prompter for looking into this or any other cart for bonsai transit is usually the effect of aging and the decline of all of that incredible strength we remember once having.

Before proceeding any further with discussion of this cart, we should return to the beginning. The cart is a standard tool designed to move material around on a level cement floor as usually found in any industrial or commercial setting. Its usefulness for bonsai application was brought to the attention of the larger bonsai community by Julian Adams in 2005 with an article in *International Bonsai* [pp.14-15 (2005/No.1)]: "A Bonsai Worktable; Hydraulic Lift Table for Bonsai." His use of it as an all-purpose table is interesting, and his photographs make text almost superfluous. Note however, that he kept the original wheels of the cart. He rolls his cart about a level cement floored workshop.

Alan Magruder acquired this model cart for Helene's use as they moved bonsai inside and outside their bonsai studio and noticed that on flag stone the cart's wheel design has limitations. So, he acquired larger pneumatic tires to replace the small solid plastic tires thereby making rolling a heavy loaded cart on varying surfaces much easier. Doing so required modifications of the wheel mount architecture by a welder. The modified cart was impressive in its performance and much admired by visiting male bonsai enthusiasts. Perhaps it was a guy thing.

Time passed. In the spring of this year Ron Heinen, complaining about the bodily aches and pains one has time to notice when one retires, decided to duplicate Alan's cart. I decided likewise. As it turned out Ron proceeded in his plan first, and I followed in Ron's trail. Alan, Ron, and I all acquired the same cart and the same larger pneumatic tires. (Set of 2 front straight running tires, set of 2 back swivel tires, all 10" pneumatic 300 lb. capacity at 30psi.) We each went to a welder. There is where it really became a guy thing.

Ron took photographs of Alan's adapted hydraulic cart to a local welder. He examined the photograph, inquired in detail from Ron of purpose, and decided he could improve the design to fulfill the purpose. When I later took my cart to the same welder to do the same operation, he told me that he had had some further thoughts on the cart and that he could improve it even more. So the photos of my cart are of Iowa Bonsai Cart Iteration 3 by Gino (the welder). It will fit through any standard size door, and because of width really resist tip over while loaded with a large, heavy bonsai, even when the scissor lift is up. Although this is where the usual warning "Don't try this at home" should appear, I have tested this and am impressed by the performance of this modification of the basic hydraulic lift cart.

One last bit of purely guy stuff about this cart. Previous modifications were with raw unprotected plate steel and metal bolts. In weather the new unprotected material does rust. I decided to paint the new material. Metal painting has been made easy by modern spray cans, but one still needs to use a rust proof primer, and then a rust resistant top coat, each applied with repeated light spraying. To simplify the process, I would recommend for this application a one-step product from Rust-oleum, labeled Universal Paint & Primer in One. This is an excellent product for rust prevention on metal. Color matching can be a problem. I used gloss cardinal red even though the cart is a maroon baked enamel finish. My thought was that the dangerous parts are clearly color coded. (Dangerous in the sense that these added parts can make unplanned contact with the cart interesting and perhaps painful.)

In youth I had friends who were true Motor Heads. I was occupied by other passions. Never the less a really tricked out moving machine can really be a visual delight. It won't be the same, but as this is my last chance I have further plans for the cart before it can be called finished. I am going to add some racing strips and stencil its name on both sides: "Bonsai Express".



Iowa Bonsai Cart Iteration 3 by Gino, with my largest pot and a beginning English Oak forest, in partial lift position.