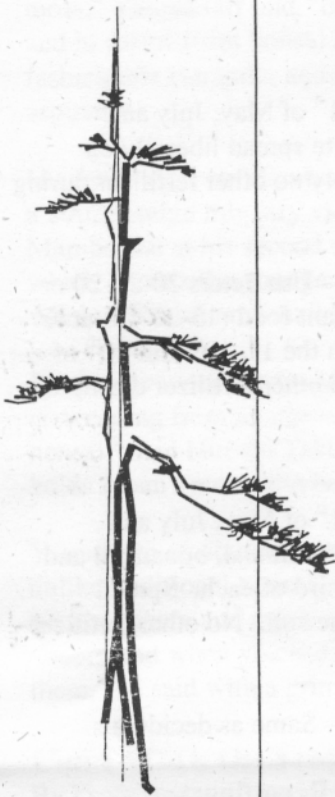


April 2005

Bonsai News



Milwaukee
Bonsai Society

P.O. Box 148
Brookfield, Wisconsin
53208-0148

Information Line
414-299-9229

APRIL MEETING – GROUP SLASH

Another year, another group slash! Caution: this event is not recommended to the faint-hearted. A large number of innocent and defenseless subjects will be viciously hacked and mutilated by groups of enthusiastic sadists. The disfigured remains of the once-proud victims will then be publicly displayed, and judged to determine which group's torture has produced the most artistic results. And finally, the slashed and twisted remnants will be auctioned to the highest bidder!

The description above may sound like one of the depressingly familiar events occurring on faraway shores. But this is happening right here in Milwaukee! And we can all participate!! Come to the Milwaukee Bonsai Society meeting at 7PM on Tuesday, April 5. Don't miss this great chance to build your knowledge of how to cut, slash, twist and hack.

Note: the views expressed above, may be an accurate representation of the sick and twisted mind of the editor, but have not been endorsed by the Milwaukee Bonsai Society or its many rational and sane members.

2005 Club Events Calendar

April

Saturday 2 - Novice Class #2
Tuesday 5 - Club Meeting: Group Slash
Saturday 16-17 - Master's Class
Saturday 23 - Novice Class #3
Saturday 30 - Black pine workshop

May

Tuesday 3 - Black Pine Demo - Steve Pilacik
Saturday 7 - Novice Class Nursery Crawl
Saturday 14 - Novice Class #4
Fri 20 - Sun 22 - Chicago Show

June

Tuesday 7 - Club Show, Styles, photography
Friday 17 - Sunday 19 - Asian Moon Festival
Sat 25 - Sun 26 - Master's Class

Programs and dates for other activities have yet to be finalized – STAY TUNED!

MBS Meetings and Information Line:

The Milwaukee Bonsai Society meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. at Grace Lutheran Church, 3030 W. Oklahoma Avenue. Call the MBS Voice Mail/Message System at (414) 299-9229 to learn about upcoming events and meeting times. To contact the club via email: mbs@asapnet.net Look for us on the web at: <http://www.milwaukeebonsai.org>

KRIS' KORNER

Hello, everyone. Are you reading up on all the wonderful things that can be done with your bonsai in March and April? Houston has been providing us with a wealth of information in our newsletters. Besides that, take the books in your library off the shelf and find out what you can be doing right now. If you don't have a library, a trip to the 1/2 price book stores will get you started. Or check the web if you have internet access.

Our April meeting is always a hit. If you've never been before, you'll see lots of activity. Trees are worked on by enthusiastic groups. You'll have a chance to hear what a number of people see in the tree they will be styling. It's amazing how many different "visions" there can be for one tree! If you have tools, we'd appreciate your bringing them. When our creations are done, we'll have them judged by a non-bonsai person. 'Awards' will also be presented. The trees will then be put into a silent auction and the lucky high bidders will have diamonds in the rough to take home. Join us for the fun.

Saturday April 30 - 8:00 - 12:00 at the church will be the place to be. Steve Pilacik from NC will be leading a workshop on Black Pines. At this point the workshop is filled, but there is always the opportunity to come as a silent observer (\$5 at the door). Here's a little bit about Steve:

Steve Pilacik is a special educator, bonsai nursery owner and bonsai teacher. Steve has presented programs on bonsai through the United States and Canada. He began his bonsai career in 1975 and has written a book on Japanese Black Pine. He has put out a new DVD, "Japanese Black Pine Expanded" in February 2004. Steve has also authored numerous articles in *Bonsai Today*, *International Bonsai*, *Bonsai Clubs International*, *American Bonsai Society* and *Potomac's Clippings*.

It's so nice out today, I'm going to have to pull out another tree and do some repotting. See you at the 'Slash' (our next meeting)!

Kris

Suggested Fertilizing Program

(By Joe Nemeec)

Deciduous:

One application on the 1st of May, July and September of Milorganite spread liberally on surface of the soil. Apply no other fertilizer during these months.

April, June and August – Use Peters 20-20-20 or Walmart All Purpose Plant food (15-30-15) at ½ tablespoon per gallon on the 1st, 10th and 20th of these months. Apply no other fertilizer during this time.

Evergreens:

One application on the 1st of May, July and September of a mix of bloodmeal, bonemeal and cottonseed meal. One third of each. Spread liberally on surface of the soil. No other fertilizer during these months.

April, June and August – Same as deciduous.

Suggested Soil Mix for Repotting:

2 parts Turface – available at Reinders in Elm Grove.

1 part Walmart Continuous Feeding Potting Mix (10 lb bag)

1 part vermiculite (available at Stein's)

1 part cocoa bean shells (also available at Stein's)

Repotting:

Most trees need to be repotted every 3 to 4 years. If, however, you find roots growing out of the drain holes, the tree should be repotted that year.

Deciduous trees should be repotted when the first new buds appear in spring.

Evergreen trees should be repotted in May.

Periodically aerate the soil of your potted bonsai to keep it loose and friable.

Species of the Month: Seiju Elm

By Dave Bogan, Evansville Bonsai Club



Seiju elm is still somewhat of a rarity in Bonsai. Information on this sub-species of elm is even harder to find. Even on the web, try a Google search and you won't find any real specific species related information. I fell in love with this elm several years ago. A species that is perfect for Bonsai. Excellent branch ramification, very very small leaves = perfect Bonsai material. Rarely seen in nurseries or Bonsai stores - they are available, you just need to search for them. Luckily in our area (Evansville, IN), one of our members (Greg Hollander of Hollander's Tiny Tree Farm) has been growing them from cuttings for several years. Cuttings, due to the fact the species was first obtained via a "sport" or unusual growth on a regular tree.

A very hard species to research and very few articles exist. Here is the only real notation I have found.

Ulmus parvifolia 'Seiju' This sport of 'Hokkaido' was introduced by Carl Young of Lodi California. It has all the good qualities of 'Hokkaido' in a larger plant. The leaves are identical except they are about 1/2 inch and the plant may reach about 10 feet if planted out. It has the same deeply fissured corky bark that begins roughening in about 2 years. The wood is stronger and more flexible and can be wired. Grows quickly, about 18 inches a year. This cultivar is best for Shohin through medium sized bonsai. It should be large enough to allow the bark to fully develop, but also can be grown to six inch caliper in a reasonable amount of time

The above article really leaves some to be desired. In the 10+ years I have grown this species I have found a few issues you should be aware of before attempting to grow them.

Characteristics: Typically a fast grower if grown in the ground. As with many other species, once in a Bonsai pot, growth rates (primarily trunk area) drops off quickly. In the ground, trunks will develop rapidly. If grown in the ground, I advise annual pruning for direction & style if possible to avoid swelling or unusual growth at the pruning points (see pruning). Luckily, once in pot culture, the individual branching and ramification continues to happen quickly.

The Seiju develops very small leaves. No leaf reduction required here. The leaves will slightly reduce over time in Bonsai (down to 1/4") but the initial full growth leaves are only around 1/2" so don't attempt leaf reduction procedures as it's really not necessary.

Seiju has many of the normal elm characteristics. In the bark department it is similar to the "cork bark" elm in many ways. Maybe not quite as fissured, the Seju will develop a corky bark in time especially on the lower trunk areas. For those of you that have grown "cork bark" elms your probably already aware of the potential for pests and diseases in the corky fissures of the bark. Maybe not quite as susceptible as the "cork bark," they should still be treated for the dreaded borer annually. I apply a bi-annual treatment of granular systemics to the soil and to date have only had borers in one Seiju. Just be aware it can & probably will happen if not treated. The only other problem I have experienced is the occasional fungus gnat infestation. The eggs of fungus gnats are laid in fall. In early fall I make sure I soak the bark areas with "pyola" insecticide over several consecutive weeks. This is a light dormant oil (canola oil) with pyrethrin insecticide mixed in. This seems to eliminate the fall eggs and since using this treatment I have not experienced any more fungus gnats.

Pruning: An undesirable characteristic (as with cork bark) Seiju can develop an unusual looking or swelled appearance especially in areas of heavy pruning. Try to limit your hard pruning to young trees. On older specimens, you can diminish this area slightly by removing some of the corky bark in the swelled area but it may stand out just as much due to the bark differences.

Seiju is an excellent species for pruning, as it will back bud readily in all areas - including the trunk. I have hard-pruned mine and within 3 years obtained decent ramification due to its rapid growth of foliage and small limbs. I will caution you to remove excess growth. Typically when pruned (especially if hard-pruned) they send out a multitude of new branches around the pruned area. Reduce the number of these down to a couple to help avoid swelling at the pruned areas. Remove all extraneous trunk growth as it appears. In spring, due to the rapid new growth rate, you will need to occasionally thin out some areas to allow light penetration to the inner areas. Small new branches will die off very rapidly after the spring growth flush if they don't receive sufficient light.

Wiring: The article above mentions that the wood is more flexible. True, but only if the growth is less than 2 years old. The wood becomes brittle with age. I have accidentally bumped my tree and broken off branches. Just a word of caution - be careful wiring. I have had better luck with clip-and-grow once the tree is over 4 years old. Branches seem to hold position well if the wire has been left on the proper amount of time. As with many deciduous species, wire longevity is directly tied to growth rate. Watch closely for rapid spring growth as wire scars are hard to heal on this species.

Roots: As with most the elms which have been started from sports, the roots are very fleshy. I definitely recommend building your root system slowly, starting when the tree is young. You can remove large fleshy roots but be cautious and only remove a couple per year. The roots are similar in texture to buttonwood in the fact they seem like soft spaghetti and break off very easily. Due to their fleshy nature be careful when cleaning the soil off the root system. No root hooks here, wash out the old soil with a hose and you'll experience less damage and broken roots. Excluding the large fleshy roots, I have no problems removing almost 1/2 the root system if required.

Fertilizer: In the early stages feed well and feed often. In the growth & establishment phase, I fertilize weekly at full strength. The trees will thank you with rapid growth. As the tree evolves, start cutting back on the fertilizer - especially nitrogen. On established or finished trees, I fertilize every 6 to 8 weeks. As with many deciduous trees, additional fertilizer generally can result in extraneous growth that needs more attention and pruning - a situation you don't need in finished trees.

Maintenance: Once established, Seiju elms are very easy to maintain. I simply perform a slight pruning two or three times a year (depending on fertilizer shekel) for shape & to maintain the openness and it looks great.

MONTHLY TIPS

GET STARTED: You should start to bring your bonsai out of their winter storage and place them on their benches. Sometimes you will find an excessive amount of moss. If moss covers the entire surface of the soil it will limit the flow of air and moisture to the root system and must be thinned. If moss is growing up the trunk of your bonsai it must be removed. Failure to remove moss on the trunk can be fatal.

Some bonsai experts clean the trunks of their bonsai in the spring. Take an old toothbrush (or borrow your spouse's toothbrush), dip it in a mild soap solution, and gently scrub the trunks of your smooth barked trees. You will remove dirt, bugs, fungi, and moss and at the same time stimulate the tree.

Inspect each of your bonsai carefully and be especially alert for old wires. Remove all old wires. If old wires are not removed the bark can be permanently scarred because of the rapid growth of branches and the trunk in the spring. After you've removed the wire if the limb does not hold the desired position you will have to rewire the limb.

REPOTTING: A bonsai is, by definition, confined to its container. At some point the tree will fill the container with roots and become "pot bound." Air, water and nutrients will not be able to penetrate the root ball of a "pot bound" bonsai. The tree will suffer and without some action being taken it will die. When should you repot? The answer depends on the age and species of tree, the size of the pot, and most importantly the health and vigor of the tree. But, as a rough guide, younger bonsai are usually repotted every one or two years and older trees less frequently.

Repot your deciduous trees first. The buds begin to swell anywhere from late February through April (at least in Cincinnati) depending on the species. As soon as these buds swell and just begin to open the roots should be pruned and the plant repotted. In general, maples are among the earliest to be repotted and oaks among the latest. This usually works out to somewhere between the first week of March and the first week of April. Deciduous spring flowering plants should usually be repotted immediately after flowering.

Hardy conifers have a wide range of appropriate pruning times and may be repotted up until June. Conifers are subject to root rot if their roots are pruned while still dormant. Pines can be root pruned any time after the candles begin to suddenly elongate. Junipers will tolerate late root pruning even into mid June.

Tropical trees should be root pruned only well after they are actively growing and the root temperature is above 60 degrees. I have successfully repotted a large ficus in the middle of July.

Protect newly repotted trees from the wind and direct sun for at least three weeks. Keep the soil moist but not wet. One month after repotting begin to fertilize weekly at one half the recommended strength. When repotting, let the soil become somewhat dry. If the soil is dry, it is easier to repot the tree and root damage is minimized. If you are potting a tree for the first time in a bonsai container it is a good idea to use a container that is somewhat large. The health and survival of the tree is improved if the tree is potted in a container larger than the size you ultimately want. The larger container has more soil which minimizes the shock from transplanting. When repotting, I use some Osmocote in my soil mix. Osmocote is a slow release fertilizer that releases its nutrients over a three month period.

WATERING: Water your trees when the surface of the soil feels dry to the touch. Continue watering until the entire root ball is moist. Don't water again until the soil surface feels dry again. Your soil should not be bone dry (complete absence of moisture) and is unhealthy for any tree even for junipers and pines (which prefer their soil to be somewhat dry). A moist soil is the safest and most desired condition for most plants. After moist, a soil becomes wet which can be tolerated by few trees. If your soil is always wet, check for poor drainage, non-functioning roots, and review your soil formulation.

COLD WEATHER: If your bonsai are in leaf and we have a sudden cold snap you must provide your trees with protecting from frost. New growth is very tender. A sudden cold spell will not only kill the new growth but can damage new root growth.

-Jim Hagan

As with most groves, once it's established I only need to re-pot about every four or so years, depending on the species. Then its a simple matter of pruning off the bottom and sides & back into the same pot it goes. Keep in mind, since it was derived from a sport, you can not grow this species from seed as none are available. It must be started from cuttings.

Location: Full sun. I have never experienced any growth reduction or leaf problems. It would probably fine in slight shade but I feel the full sun light makes it stronger and reduces the leaves even more. My expressed opinion is if they start spring in full sun, they will be able to withstand full sun all year. I feel moving a tree back and forth stresses and confuses it - another story.

Again, Seiju elms are a little hard to find but well worth the effort. I have had the pictured grove (picture from 2001) setting for well over 10 years and it has become a favorite in my collection. The picture really doesn't do it justice but maybe it will encourage you to try one. On a further note, it was re-potted two years ago into a brown shallow pot that looks a lot better. The pictured pot was a temporary home until I found the right one. I also have several single trees which are becoming very nice individual informal uprights.

Editor's note: Small Seiju elms are available from several mail order suppliers, and vendors selling partially developed trees are not at all hard to find at bonsai shows and conventions. Seiju elms are hardy enough to be grown in the ground in our climate, if given slight protection from wind and rabbits.

Note: Bonsai Tips on the following page come from Jim Hagan of the Bonsai Society of Greater Cincinnati. They are meant for March in Cincinnati, but are appropriate for our April.

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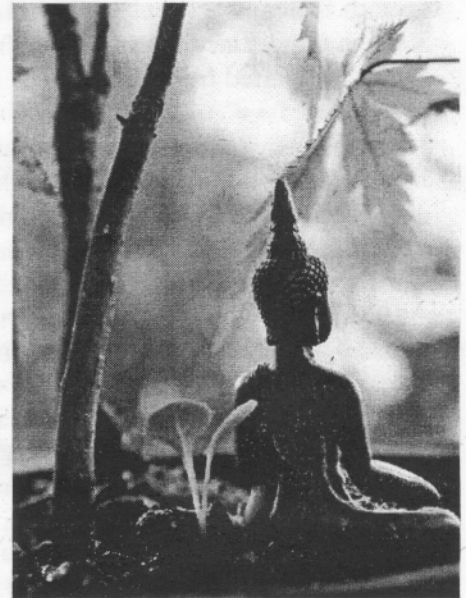
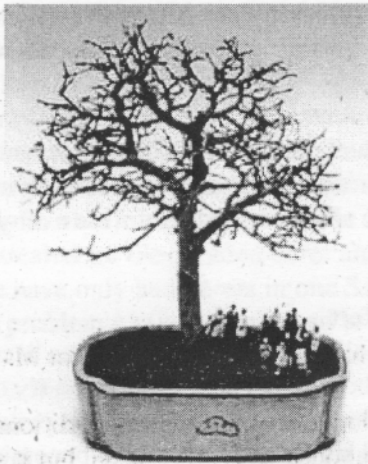
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Bonsai goes hip and ironic in urban Japan

From Yahoo News. (Submitted by Kris Ziemann)

Editor's note: Do you ever feel humble, hopeless and inadequate when comparing your bonsai to those pictures of great Japanese bonsai in books? Well, apparently some Japanese feel that way too! So here's a "dumbed down" version of bonsai that they have invented.

TOKYO (AFP) -

For centuries the Japanese have dwarfed trees in bonsai gardens which gained fame around the world.

Now the delicate art is undergoing a revolution of sorts with some inspiration from Latin music, extraterrestrials and the realities of cramped apartments. The modern twist to bonsai began 20 years ago at a humble drain outside the home of Paradise Yamamoto, also known as Japan's top mambo musician.

One day, Yamamoto was struck by the velvety beauty of the moss growing over the drain lid. Soon he started growing chunks of moss in a small container. When he put a miniature train on the moss, he realized something else -- he no longer thought he was looking at a pot, but at a wide landscape from Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. That's when the idea came to him: to make bonsai not just show trees, but scenes from life.

Dubbed "Mambonsai", his art entails dwarfing not only trees but also statues to bring a less abstract dimension to bonsai. The often comic results have drawn young people to bonsai, which had become a pastime largely of the elderly. His bonsai include trees with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il striking a pose from the soil of the plant pot, a series in which aliens creep out from under bonsai tree trunks, and a creation-metaphor Mambonsai in which nude Adam and Eve figures lounge under a miniature palm tree.

"It's perfect for people who live in metropolitan cities and don't have spacious gardens. A balcony or a small space is enough to enjoy Mambonsai," said 42-year-old Yamamoto. Bonsai usually takes years to grow, with enthusiasts studiously attending to every detail to raise the perfect tree. For Yamamoto, the artistic dimension is not the skill at growing the plant -- but rather the originality in how it is presented. "Since traditional Bonsai is on the decline to some extent, Mambonsai has contributed by gaining the interest of people who had no link with bonsai, especially the younger generation," said Yoshimi Inoue, an editor at Bonsai Sekai, one of Japan's two major bonsai magazines.

According to Yamamoto, a plump cheery man who doubles in winter as a Santa Claus, the trick of Mambonsai is to free itself from tradition. Instead of being constrained by the formal rules of bonsai, Mambonsai is free in form and ironic in intent.

Yamamoto said he never meant his invention to move into the traditional world of bonsai. He simply wanted to boast about his Mambonsai to friends. "I had no desire to make a business out of putting miniature figures on moss," Yamamoto said. But instead, the Mambonsai has drawn a following, featured on Japanese television and in mainstream bonsai and lifestyle magazines. Yamamoto has held a series of exhibitions in Tokyo's fashionable Harajuku and Shibuya districts and hosts seminars in which he teaches his art to Mambonsai aspirants.

His 2003 book on Mambonsai has captions in nine languages and he and his plants were even featured as part of a 2002 foreign ministry video sent to 110 countries to promote Japan. In May, he is due to show his Mambonsai at his second exhibition in London. "Unlike bonsai, Mambonsai can be completed in a short time, which attracts the younger generation," said Haruhisa Akimoto of the All Japan Shohin-Bonsai Association. Shohin-Bonsai are small bonsai trees under 20 centimeters (eight inches), an ideal size for Mambonsai.

But however successful Mambonsai has been in showing bonsai to a new generation, traditionalists believe he is deviating from an age-old practice. "I would not say that Mambonsai perverts bonsai, but it strays from bonsai," said Hiroshi Takeyama, chairman of the Nippon Bonsai Association, which has 10,000 members and holds Japan's most elite bonsai exhibition. "Mambonsai is closer to being a miniature garden," he said.

Yamamoto attributed the difference in views to Mambonsai's lack of pretension. "This is easy to understand unlike traditional bonsai -- which requires a perfect balance between the bonsai trees, pot and empty space between them and much is left to the audience's imagination," Yamamoto said. "Mambonsai is clearly understood when you see it. Mambonsai isn't welcomed in the traditional bonsai world. It is such a nuisance to them," he said with a grin.

Can I Work On Tropicals in Spring?

By Dave Bogan (from the newsletter of the Greater Evansville Bonsai Society)

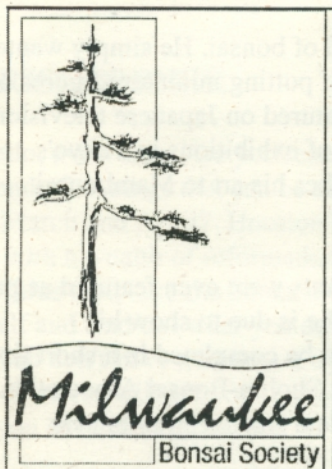
Every year I hear this same question. The answer: "Yes - BUT."

Maybe I get this question because members occasionally drop by and see me working on my tropicals in early spring. The huge difference is my tropicals are maintained all year above 70 degrees with excellent light and high humidity. But even with the better conditions I still avoid some work until later. Greenhouses make all the difference.

Now back to the question. Tropicals can be worked on once the weather warms up, but you should still take some precautions and limit the scope of your work. In our area (Evansville, IN), spring for tropicals is mid-June. The huge difference is the increase in light and night temperatures. As spring arrives, our days become longer and sunlight is more direct (thus higher temperatures) and the nights are warmer. Night temperatures must be consistently above 50 degrees F at a minimum. Prior to the start of these conditions, you should never re-pot a tropical unless it is a "must" due to health or other problems.

Tropicals are just like other plants in that their root systems don't become real active until the proper time in spring. With the real tropical spring not arriving until mid June, you must remember this means limited root growth also. If the bug hits and you must work on tropicals, limit the work to the upper areas. Minor pruning as well as wiring is fine. But even this work will show slow results this time of year. A good example is the ficus. If you prune a ficus in April, it will start forming new buds in about 3 weeks and then leaf out 1 or 2 weeks later. Thus, a minimum of five weeks is required before you start to achieve the desired results. If this same tree is pruned in June, it will respond and probably be back in full leaf in 2-3 weeks. If you repot and prune at the same time, the combined results will be visible even quicker on very healthy specimens.

So it's best to wait. Even with my better conditions, I will only do minor pruning and wiring until June. Hey, this gives you something to look forward to later!

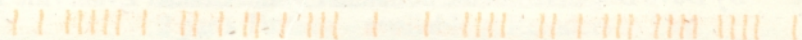
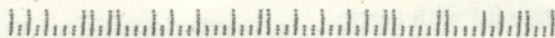
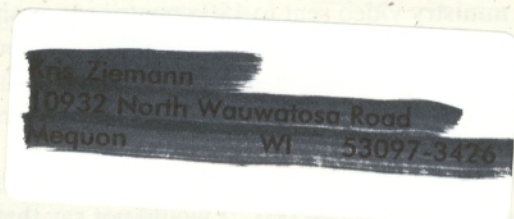
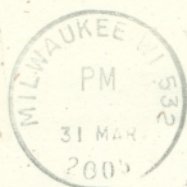


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Next Meeting of MBS
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*Spring had come riding
Astride a frisky young colt
Over green meadows.*

- Mary Turner