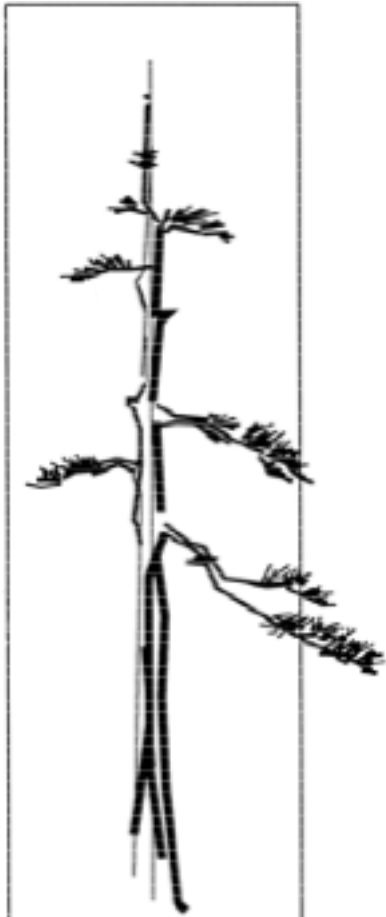


June 2011

Bonsai News



*Milwaukee
Bonsai Society*

P.O. Box 240822
Milwaukee, WI
53224

*Information line
414-299-9229*

June Club Meeting

Our June meeting has Jack Douthitt discussing the Engleman Spruce and why it is not ready for further work.

But that gives us time to have Jack critique our trees. So bring your best tree for some refinement tips from Jack, as he uses his 40 years of experience to critique and discuss your own tree.

We had a great time at our first early meeting. Remember to come early in June. We will again meet at 6:30 to host social activities.

And save the July date for the Club picnic!

2011 Events

JUNE

June 4 - Intermediate Class

June 7 - CLUB MEETING
with Jack Douthitt

June 12 - Intermediate Class

JULY

July 5 - **NO CLUB MEETING**

July 9 - Repotting workshop

July 9 - Wauwatosa Display

July 16-17 - SUTHIN workshops

July 24 - CLUB PICNIC (see
directions later in newsletter)

July 31 - Intermediate Class

AUGUST

August 2 - CLUB MEETING
Tropical trees discussion

August 4-14 - STATE FAIR

August 19-22 - Chicago Show

August 28 - Intermediate Class

To see the **year's events** go to:

www.milwaukeebonsai.org

click on **What's New**

NEXT MEETING

June 7 - 7 pm

Boerner Botanical Gardens

President's Message

"Whole Lot a Fun"

As it became clear behind the scenes that I might be given the opportunity to speak about our MBS, I kept thinking of different reasons why I felt so strongly about the group and the work we do. I thought I'd share these reasons why I admire MBS.

You demonstrate amazing resilience and desire to take on challenges while always doing the right thing. I have been involved with you in many challenging events over the years. Often the "right" answer was not clear and the decision came down to a simple question of what was right for MBS and its members, convention participants, workshop or class participants.

You care about the people aspects of decisions. It is very important to me that we not focus solely on the business aspects of the decisions we make but to also consider the implications on our future members and the greater Southeastern Wisconsin community.

You are the engine that keeps the MBS humming. We can have the best classes and the best executive committee, but if we can't enthusiastically embrace new ideas and challenges, we won't be in a position to meet our goals.

You are a whole lot a fun. I enjoyed greeting old friends and meeting new ones at our May workshop and meeting. I look forward to the laughs we'll share and more fun in the future.

-Pam

Awards Banquet December 2011

It's not too soon to start thinking about it...

What a great way to end the year by honoring our club members for their involvement in the club! So what are some of the awards???

Out-going MBS Executive Board members will be honored.

Novices and Intermediates are recognized for participation in their classes...

Some awards will be given to members who have given of their time to help at club events (based on Bonsai Bucks **) ...

And there will be a number of surprise awards (you'll have to attend the banquet to see what these are!!).

So volunteer, get involved with the fun club events and start earning your bonsai bucks!

**Bonsai Bucks - explanation of what they are... See on page 4

"People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing."

– Dale Carnegie

2011 MBS Cook Out

MBS will not have a July meeting this year. But do not despair bonsai fans, there will be a MBS cook out at Don Gumieny's Home on Sunday July 24th. We will gather at 2 PM and go till ? Burgers, Brats and beverages will be provided. Please bring a dish to share, a bonsai tree for show and tell, and a lawn chair to sit on. Collect moss for your trees and talk bonsai with friends. Map and directions are below.

RSVP to Don by 7-20-11

-262-548-0480 Office
-262-513-8395 Home

From Milwaukee:
I94 West to Exit 297 (near
Barker Road)
West on Hwy 18
(Moorland Blvd - Waukesha)
1.8 miles to Hwy 164
South on Hwy 164 (joins Hwy 59)
9.2 miles to Woods Road
South on Woods Road .4 miles to Don's
(look for the American Flag-
East side of road)

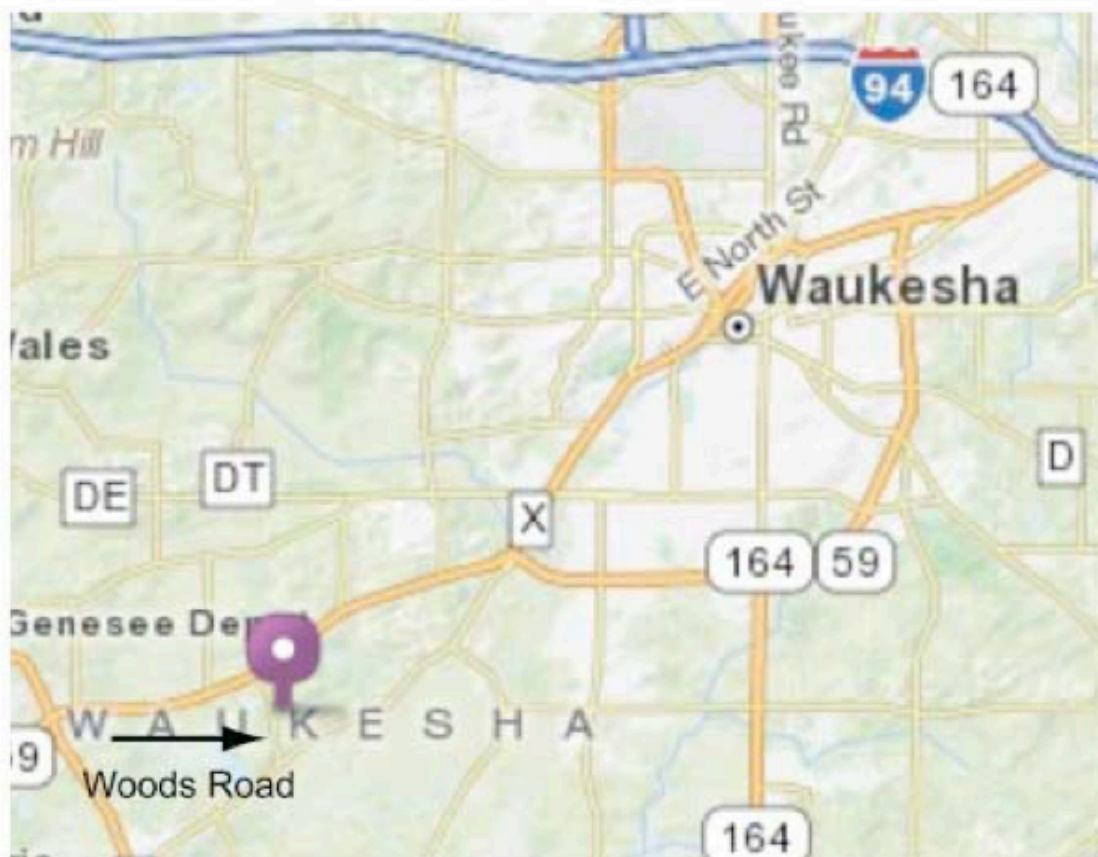
From Beloit or Kenosha:

Note: Hwy 83 is closed from Mukwonago north to Hwy 59
I43 to Hwy 164

North on Hwy 164 4.7 miles to Hwy 59
West on Hwy 59 5 miles to Woods Road
South on Woods Road .4 miles to Don's
(look for the American Flag-East side of road)

From Madison:

I94 East to Hwy 83
South on Hwy 83-7.2 miles to Hwy 59
East on Hwy 59 2 miles to Woods Road
South on Woods Road .4 miles to Don's
(look for the American Flag-East side of road)



WHAT ARE BONSAI BUCKS?

Bonsai Bucks are points that you can accumulate when helping out at a function such as State Fair, Public workshops, Folk Fair etc. Each 3-4 hour session earns you 1 Bonsai Buck. Each BB counts for \$3 towards the **Awards Banquet** in December. Earn 6 Bonsai Bucks and your dinner and delightful evening of entertainment are paid for. Anyone earning more than 6 BB will receive 1 ticket for each BB to be used in a special drawing the evening of the Awards Banquet.

Earn ONE BONSAI BUCK for each original article you submit to be published in the newsletter.

Please email your article to:

hagr8d@mac.com

SUTHIN WORKSHOPS

There are a couple more spots left for Suthin workshops call Pam at 414-352-7799. For those who have signed up and have not paid, please bring a check for your spot to the next meeting or send it to us.

STATE FAIR IS COMING SOON!!!

We are looking for volunteers for State Fair, both to work at the State Fair and to exhibit your tree in one of the three shows. We will have the sign-up sheet at our June meeting. Sign-up early to get the time slot you want.

The Bonsaidiot's Guide to Horticulture

"The greatest enemy of any one of our truths may be the rest of our truths". ~William James

by Houston S

As part of teaching an intermediate class this year, I was asked to be prepared to discuss my growing methods. This article is my attempt to provide the background information to fulfill that request. In bonsai magazines, books and internet articles, we see thousands of specific examples of bonsai styling, but very few specific, detailed examples of how bonsai are grown. Maybe this is because the topic of bonsai horticulture is such a tricky one. Even the simplest question has no universal answer.

Inevitably, the first question asked by a first time bonsai owner at a club workshop is "How often should I water?" Hopefully everyone reading this understands why that is a difficult question! The first answer is usually "It depends on the weather and how much sun your tree is getting. In the summer you water every day, but you can water less in the spring and fall." That answer never satisfies the poor newbie, so I then try the Zen Master approach. "Water when your tree needs it, Grasshopper", I say in my best imitation of a Chinese sage. That never works either, so I end up telling them to water every other day for now. And this advice is no doubt followed as a universal law, often resulting in a dead bonsai.

If you stuck with bonsai through the learning to water stage, you may then get to **"How often to I fertilize?"** This is as difficult a question as **"How often do I water?"** It depends on the type of tree, the season, the pot size and soil, and your tree's stage of



development. But that doesn't stop heroic and fearless bonsai newsletter contributors from giving out all kinds of advice to beginners and everyone else who hasn't got the good sense to ignore us.

Before I prescribe a one-size-fits-all fertilization program that might not be right for your trees and growing practices, let's start with looking at advice of experts give. A very brief and generalized summary of the advice from my bonsai books is:

Beginning in spring, feed your bonsai every 2 or 3 weeks with organic or half strength chemical fertilizer. If you use full strength fertilizer, you risk buildup of salts in the soil, and damage to the roots of your trees. Stop feeding for a month in the hottest part of the summer (mid-July to mid-August). You should supplement the feeding program by using organic fertilizer cakes. It is critically important to switch to fertilizer with no nitrogen when you resume feeding, since feeding your tree nitrogen in the fall will cause it to have weak new growth that will die in the winter. Pines should not be fertilized in spring or they will have long needles.

Much of this is useful information, but it does not all match my experiences or current practice. I have read and observed that most bonsai growers underfeed their trees. The books providing the program that I have just described also tell us to use organic material for 1/4 to 1/2 of our soil content. But just about everyone is now using bonsai soil with much lower organic content. Organic materials, things

like topsoil, bark, or peat, provide nutrients. Inorganic materials such as akadama, chicken grit, turface and pumice, provide no nutrients. So, in my opinion, if you don't use high organic content in your soil, feeding every 2-3 weeks is no longer enough.

Walter Pall has some great radical advice on fertilizing, and I suggest you read his controversial article <http://walter-pall-bonsai.blogspot.com/2010/06/feeding-substrate-and-watering-english.html> for additional insight. I was surprised to find that I have been independently doing about the same thing as Walter for many years. To summarize his program: he starts by pointing out that watering, substrate (soil) and fertilizing are all inter-related and if you take his advice, you must take all of it. You can't pick and choose. He recommends three things:

1. Modern substrate: Use a light and free-draining substrate. It doesn't matter what you use, just make sure it has the right particle size (not too fine) and is porous and doesn't decompose easily.

2. Daily Watering: With your free-draining soil, water your tree thoroughly every day during the growing season (April-to-October). If the soil drains freely, you can't overwater.

3. Fertilize the crap out of it: It doesn't matter what kind of fertilizer. Walter uses the cheapest he can find, and fertilizes at full strength, once a week. With such heavy watering, too much salt in the soil is not a concern.

My own practice is very much like what Walter suggests.

Soil: I use a free draining soil, made up of materials that are thoroughly sifted to remove fine particles. I use Dry Stall (a pumice product), Turface or Oil-Dri (they are both baked clay), and a small amount of organic material, usually sifted cocoa shells (small-size bark particles are better if you can find them). A little organic material in the soil is a good thing. Trees benefit greatly from the microbial life in the soil, and the microbes like organic matter. The soil is typically 10-15% organic, with less organic used for conifers. I have a couple of trees like stewartia or styrax that need acidic soil, and use extra organic material for these.

Very importantly, I also LOVE lava pebbles. These are the small sized (no more than 1/2 inch) red lava pebbles sold at Menards. Not "lava rock", which consists of 2- or 3-inch diameter pieces. Don't add lava pebbles to the general soil mix, just use them for a layer at the bottom of the pot. They may seem like large particles, but they are so porous that the roots grow right through them.

I feel that it is very important to use the turface/oil-dri, since clay has a property called "cation-exchange" that allows it to adsorb salts from the fertilizer. This allows the soil to store some of the fertilizer, keeping it available to the bonsai for a longer time. For this reason, I can fertilize a bit less than Walter Pall.



Watering: Daily, except if it has rained heavily. I water in the evening most of the time out of convenience.

Fertilizer: I feed the bonsai weekly starting in mid-April (except for pines - see below) until mid-September. I use

full strength fertilizer, but I always water the trees first, then fertilize. I feel that this is a common sense precaution to prevent any problems from over-salting. And it also keeps



me from having to measure fertilizer concentration too carefully, which is important when you have as many trees as I have. I also make fertilizer cakes using blood/bone/cottonseed meal and place them in the soil of the trees once or twice a year. (See back issues of newsletter for recipe). Of course, I avoid fertilizing newly repotted trees with chemical fertilizer for at least 2 weeks.

Now here is where I depart from Walter Pall's program. I don't use the chemical fertilizer for pines in spring. I have ponderosa pines, and they get very long needles if over fertilized. So on the pines, I use the fertilizer cakes and feed about every 2-3 weeks with fish fertilizer through the beginning of July. After that, I fertilize them with chemical fertilizer like the other trees.

Also, I do mix up the types of fertilizer based on the season. I use higher nitrogen fertilizer (usually tomato or rose fertilizer) most of the time in spring. About once a month, I use "flowering plant" fertilizer, which is low nitrogen/ high phosphorus and potassium. As

the year progresses, I use more of the flowering fertilizer, and by mid-September use only flowering fertilizer. I fertilize once or twice in October, then stop for the winter.

Pre-bonsai growing in large boxes or in the ground get different treatment. Every year I purchase slow-release fertilizer at the fall clearance sales (75% off!). Then apply it to growing areas and boxes in early spring, and again in mid summer.

One additional product that I find useful is Trace Element Frit. This is a material that contains all the other elements necessary for growth besides the Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium supplied by normal fertilizers. This is added directly to the soil of bonsai, and dissolves slowly to release nutrients over several weeks. The stuff really "greens up" my trees, especially the acid-loving trees. I am not aware of a local supplier, but you can look it up on eBay if you are interested. I used to use a liquid iron supplement, but the frit works much better.

With the program I've described, it is also necessary to repot your trees frequently. As the tree grows and its root mass gets thicker, the water can't drain from the pot as quickly. Ancient pines might grow undisturbed for three years, but everything else goes no more than 2 years without repotting.

Disclaimer: This article may not be copied or reproduced in any form without the expressed written consent of the people I stole it from. This information is not presented as the ideal growth and fertilization program. It is simply a description of what I do, with a bit of discussion explaining why I do it. I hope that this long explanation provides some insight and inspires you to think about your own growing practices.



P.O. Box 240822
Milwaukee, WI 53224
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Next Meeting of MBS
7PM, Tuesday, June 7
Boerner Botanical Gardens
9400 Boerner Dr
Hales Corners, WI 53130

2011 MBS OFFICERS

President	Pam W
First VP	John M
Second VP	Greg P
Secretary	Jorge R
Treasurer	Kris Z
Director	Steve Car.
Director	Steve Con.
Director	Pat B
Past Pres.	Joe H

Other Club Functions:

Newsletter - Kris Z
Webmaster - Pam W
Librarian - Tom A
Telephone response - Jorge R
PAB Board - Ron F, Don G & Houston S



Water's tracery
Hazy, sunlit jungle pool
Creatures lurk, hidden
- Joe Nemec