

IABA News & Muse
May 2010
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Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
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MAY ACTIVITIES

MAY 18, DES MOINES MEETING

Des Moines Botanical Center
Bonsai Stands for Show, Alan Magruder
Choosing a Site for your Trees, Helene Magruder
Tree of the Month -Elm, Angie Allison

Bring an elm - or any tree, and a stand for showing your tree.

EIBA Calendar

May 9 Mother's Day Bonsai Show Noelridge Greenhouse

May 20 Club Meeting John Denny home
Topic: Accent Plants - Alan Hanthorne
Developing Elms - Bill Ball

May 22 Club Workshop "The \$15 Challenge"

MAY 28-30, RENDEZVOUS, Brussel's Bonsai, Olive Branch, MS

TIMELY TIPS

Well, I thought spring was here but after a frost the other night I'm not so sure. Looks like it may be a while before we can move our tropical trees outdoors. Everything seems to be happening early otherwise. Some of my azaleas have already started blooming. Usually it is a couple of weeks later than this. Pine candles are shooting up like crazy and will be ready for spring work soon. The weather is all very confusing.

It is so exciting to watch pine candles elongating and the flower buds on the azaleas swelling. Of course, it is an indication of work coming up but that's why we do bonsai isn't it? After the azaleas have finished 75-80% of their blooms the rest of the blooms should be removed making sure to pinch out the little central stalk of the flower, a little fuzzy stick. It will sap energy producing seeds instead of the energy going to growth. This procedure should cause the tree to bloom all at the same time next year instead of blooms straggling along over a period of time.

White pines should be pinched when they are barely starting to open up the needles. Don't pinch the candles on weak branches. Pinch off about 3/4th of the strongest

candles, usually the ones on the apex of the tree. A week or so later pinch 3/4th of the medium candles and leave the weaker candles alone. Do not pinch developing trees or branches you wish to elongate. This process will help balance the tree and promote ramification.

Black pines are done a little differently. Some spread out the process over a couple of weeks. I de-candle mine all at once but I leave a longer stub on the strongest candles, and shorter stubs on medium candles. I leave the weakest candles alone. This process balances the energy in the tree and you will get more even growth. It also encourages back budding.

Keep your deciduous trees and junipers shaped. When a branch develops 6-8 leaves cut it back to 2-4 leaves. On junipers snip back long shoots just below the level of the other foliage so brown tips won't show. If you feel you must wire deciduous trees now, do it loosely or check every few days to make sure the wire is not cutting in. This is the time of year for the big growth spurt and branches swell quickly.

Proper watering for your trees is a life and death thing. If trees are allowed to dry out completely it is certain death. If they are watered too much that can also be certain death. A soil that drains well can be a life saver. Too much water can cause root rot which can be hard to reverse once it has started. So, what is the best way to tell if you need to water or not? Wind and/or sun can dry the surface so it is a good idea to check beneath the surface for moisture. I use my finger to probe down to the first joint. If I don't feel moisture I water. Some people use a chopstick, poke it into the soil and check to see if it is moist. I don't find it easy to tell if it is moist. Know your trees. You will quickly learn how they look and feel when they need water. You can lift the pot slightly and be able to tell by the weight if it needs water. It can save you a lot of grief if you learn their needs.

With all the rain we've been having some trees can become waterlogged. If you are concerned they are retaining too much water put a wedge under one side of the pot so it sits on a slant and that will help it drain better.

Every time I water I check every tree for signs of pests or diseases. I also pull weeds when I see them. I read somewhere that carrying a pair of tweezers with you can help get those weeds out. I keep meaning to try it, I usually think of it when I'm out there trying to get one of those

persistent weeds out and I'm too lazy to go get a pair. Anyway, weeds compete with the tree for water and nutrients.

It is a good idea to rotate your trees on a regular basis so you get even growth on all sides of the tree. I do it every time I fertilize which works well for me.

Here is the test to find whether your mission on earth is finished: If you're alive, it isn't. -Richard Bach, writer (b. 1936)

EASTERN JUNIPER

(A species update by Larry Totton)

We no longer need to point at an Eastern Red Cedar among our yamadori and say, "Actually, it is a juniper, classified as *Juniperus virginiana*." Professional botanists have been equally frustrated by the use of a misleading common name for this tree. Just this April, I learned the new, official, common name for the tree is Eastern Juniper.

Many agencies already use this new name, maybe for years now. Let's stop making excuses for our "ditch cedars" and promote the new, accurate title, Eastern Juniper.

It turns out that the Western Red Cedar (out west), and our White Cedar are also not botanically classified as cedars (genus: *cedrus*), but are both arborvitae (genus: *thuja*). It appears to me that "wrong" common names are often shared by trees with similar wood characteristics more than growth habits or genetics. Correct or not, the lumber industry will likely be very slow to change established common names for their products, so use which ever names work for your needs.

If you take a college botany class, be prepared to use the official Latinized genus + species name assigned to any given plant. I'm glad we often try to include the botanical names of trees in our IBA shows. A name tag on the table may not matter for the artistic impression, but knowing what you're growing is helpful to many at the showing.

And if there were a God, I think it very unlikely that He would have such an uneasy vanity as to be offended by those who doubt His existence. -Bertrand Russell, philosopher, mathematician, author, Nobel laureate (1872-1970)

STATE FAIR ENTRIES

The time to send in your entries is coming up. Those of you who have entered before probably got a postcard reminding you. You must have your entries in by July 1, which isn't as far off as it seems. Everything is done on-line now. You can go to: www.iowastatefair.org/competition/howtoenter.php Or you can google Iowa State Fair and click on competition, how to enter/premium book, premium book/entry forms. A drop down menu will appear, click floriculture. Under departments choose floriculture again.

Do read the rules, note it costs all of \$5 to enter up to 10 trees. Scroll down to Division 205 which is the Bonsai competition and the classes are listed. It really isn't necessary to list what classes you plan to enter---that could easily change between now and fair time.

You can enter online or print out the entry form (my preference) and mail it in with your check. Be sure to buy your tickets on the entry form as they are discounted. You will need to buy a vehicle permit to bring your trees in to unload. This year the book says that you will have to park in the north lot for \$10. I guess we'll see when we get there. Entries will be accepted beginning May 17. Do consider entering a tree or more. It is a fun day and there is always a lot of interest in the show. After the judging the judge may critique you tree for you if he doesn't have to catch a flight.

It is hard enough to remember my opinions, without also remembering my reasons for them. -Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, philosopher (1844-1900)

HELPFUL INVENTIONS

Necessity can foster great inventions. It is so much easier to work on a tree when it is on a turntable, a nice sturdy one that can bear some weight. Bill Todd, who happens to be a talented machinist put one together with some found items. The table is a disc from an old plow. It can handle the biggest tree.



If you want to treat some fresh jin in order to age it, it is very helpful to have a small blowtorch on a small bottle of propane to burn it (being careful to protect the living tissue in the tree). The small propane torch is also very handy if you need to anneal some fine copper wire. I keep a roll of thermostat wire on hand. It has two strands of wire covered with a plastic coating. I slit the coating and bare the wire. I cut them in about 18-24" lengths. With a pair of pliers grasping one end, I run the flame of the torch down the

length until it glows red. Voila- I have annealed wire. I'm sure it isn't the best quality but it works just fine.



Here is a photo of Gary Wood treating some jin on a Ponderosa pine. The flame ages it instantly.

My husband came up with our latest and greatest invention. Some of my trees are so big there is no way I can lift them and it isn't easy for my husband, it often takes both of us to lift the biggest ones. Alan found an hydraulic table cart in a tool catalog. We visited the store and they were intrigued with our intended use for it. We have to take it over a flagstone path so we had the small plastic wheels removed and the local blacksmith replaced them with 10 inch pneumatic wheels. The table raises up to about 36 inches so I can pump it up to the height of the stand the tree is on and slide it onto the table. It also goes low enough (17") that I can work on tall trees without standing on a stool. It was a bit pricey but so are visits to the chiropractor.



SELECTING NURSERY STOCK

This time of year we are often tempted to start a new tree from nursery stock. What should we be looking for?

First of all choose a healthy plant. Sick plants are not worth the time you invest in them. If they live at all they will not grow and develop well.

Look for a good trunk. It should have taper and be nicely shaped. You cannot grow a good trunk in a pot. If you want a long range project you can grow it in the ground to develop the trunk if it will grow at all in our climate.

Look carefully at the root spread, nebari. You may have to dig a bit but check to see if the roots have a nice spread and are appropriately placed.

Look for good branches. Better too many than not enough, you can always cut some off but it is pretty hard to add some. Do they start low enough? Are they well placed. If the lower branches are thin and the top ones are thick it will not make a good bonsai.

Will the growth habit work for the style you want? A rug juniper might make a nice cascade but it will never work in an upright style.

Is the plant big enough? A small plant will take years to grow into a bonsai but a plant larger than you want can easily be cut down to the desired height. Dwarf varieties often make a better choice.

Fruit and flowers will not reduce to an appropriate size. An apple tree cut down to a bonsai will still have a full size apple. A crabapple is much more in scale.

A few trees will not reduce their leaves. A silver maple or a red oak will always have large leaves. Elm will reduce nicely and the leaves will be more in scale with the size of the tree.

Decide what you want your finished product to be and look for nursery stock that will fill the bill. If you can't see the tree in it don't buy it. Look further, don't waste your time trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

This is a condensation of an article that Ron Martin sent me years ago. ED

I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity. -Gilda Radner -actress and comedian (1946-1989)