
MIDWEST BONSAI CONNECTION

www.midwestbonsai.org

President's Message

Greetings onto the membership and welcome to a new year! Thank you to everyone who was able to come to the holiday party last December. The new venue worked out and all had a nice evening. We were very happy to see folks who are also Prairie State members at the party, and we plan on keeping the parties on separate nights in the future so that folks who are members of both groups can attend both parties. As always, we welcome comments and feedback on the new space.

As I write this, they are prepping for the Winter Silhouette Show at the Garden. A great show that I love to highlight each year; Ivan does such a wonderful job choosing trees to display. One of the few winter silhouette shows in the country, I hope that you were able to get out to it (it's running the weekend of Jan. 24 & 25). We are very lucky to have the Garden's collection in town and the chance to see some of the trees in their refined state. Fine branching is an indication of a high quality tree, of which the Garden's collection is one of the best in the country.

We on the board are already at work planning this year's programs and events, and we have some exciting ideas. We've lined up a few guest speakers and have a couple new program ideas to try. Keep an eye on the website, it will be updated as programs and presenters are confirmed. The first new program is coming up in February—we are going to have a hands-on evening of tree wiring. It's always a challenge to come up with hands-on activities that a group our size can do, and we hope that this one

works out as one of them. The plan is to have members bring a tree to wire and we will have more experienced members walking around helping those in need. Ivan talked to us about wiring last year and this is a chance to put that knowledge to work. So, please bring a tree, bring some wire and let's do some work on our trees. Some aluminum wire will be provided by the Society.

We are working on the May show right now, and we have made good progress. We have some vendors lined up to replace

missing ones, and we are working to see what options we can come up with for workshops. The old model wasn't working, but with your input we can find alternatives that will work for us and keep this show going as a bonsai activity in the Chicago-land area.

This winter has been cold and we should be watching our trees, especially for wind damage. Wind is one of the most damaging things that trees deal with in the wintertime. The dry air moving past the twigs and branches evaporates the moisture out of the tree, which it can't readily replace. With their roots and pots frozen, the trees are not able to recover from the desiccation and end up losing the afflicted branches. Evergreens are a little better set-up physiologically to deal with winter wind, but it's still for the best to keep them as protected from wind as possible.

I hope everyone had a good Holiday Season and have started the new year off on a good (if cold) foot, and I hope to see you with your trees at the February meeting!

—Cat Nelson



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Events Calendar

Monday, February 3, 2014

MIDWEST BONSAI SOCIETY FEBRUARY MEETING, 7:30 pm., at the Chicago Botanic Garden's Burnstein Hall, located in the Regenstein Center. Annual Business Meeting followed by Get Wired! – Bring Your Own Tree wiring workshop. Bring a tree to work on wiring – with hands-on help available. Bring your own copper, the club will have some aluminum available. The Bonsai 101 session begins at 7 pm, the topic has not been determined.

Tuesday, February 4, 2014

MILWAUKEE BONSAI SOCIETY.

There is no meeting in February

Wednesday, February 5, 2014

PRAIRIE STATE BONSAI SOCIETY, 7:30pm, Room TBD. Program: Show critique/video from 2013 show. For more information go to www.prairiestatebonsai.com

Tuesday, March 4, 2014

MILWAUKEE BONSAI SOCIETY MEETING. 6:30 pm. Watch DVD and discussion regarding collecting materials. For more information go to www.milwaukeebonsai.org.

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February Meeting Focus

The February meeting is scheduled at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, February 3, at the Chicago Botanic Garden's Burnstein Hall, located in the Regenstein Center. 7:00pm – Bonsai 101, will focus on wiring and the

tools required. 7:30pm – Get Wired. This will be a hands-on session, so bring your own tree to wire. Experienced club members will be on hand to help and demonstrate.

Midwest Bonsai Connection

Chicago Bonsai Club

The Chicago Bonsai Club, a chapter of the Midwest Bonsai Society, will not be meeting in February. Our first meeting in 2014 will be on Wednesday, March 19, beginning at 6 p.m., the program has not yet been determined.

Chicago Bonsai Club meets at Garfield Park Conservatory, 300 N. Central Park Ave. (at Lake Street) in Chicago. Contact: suekazoo@hotmail.com or call 773-235-9479.



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Haiku

by Susan Babyk

Chi-Beria

Snow melts as it rains.

Too early to waken buds, yet nudging the trees.

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The views and opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent those

of the Midwest Bonsai Society membership or the Board of Directors.

General Meetings

Meetings of the Midwest Bonsai Society are held at the Chicago Botanic Garden's Burnstein Hall, located in the Regenstein Center.

All meetings begin at 7:30 PM. Bonsai 101 presentations commence at 7:00 PM.

Library Resources

MBS has a fine collection of Bonsai books and journals which are available for loan. Please contact the Librarian for information.

Monthly Care Report: What to Do in February

- Don't feed the trees.
- Don't repot until the threat of frost has passed.
- Do sift soils, select plants and pots for spring repotting.
- Stock up on fertilizers.
- Come to the February meeting and bring a tree to wire.
- Prune and wire pines and junipers.
- Watch for pests and diseases.

It's the heart of winter, and we did get plenty of snow this winter, with no signs that spring is on the way. While your trees are deep in dormancy, there is still work to be done. Continue your winter care and don't forget to check the trees, as they do need water from time to time if they are not in an area where they will get snowed on, although their water needs will be minimal. Check out some bonsai books or magazines from the library.

MID TO LATE FEBRUARY...

In our area, late February can be the beginning of early spring. If you need to repot, be sure to be vigilant about not letting your repotted trees freeze, since a cold snap can be just around the corner. You can begin to wire your deciduous trees while the buds are still small. During the bleak winter months, the extreme cold temperatures can take its toll on all of your trees. The main task is to protect them from the very cold weather. Don't wait until

spring to do all of your maintenance! When the weather moderates in late winter, it is an excellent time for heavy pruning, new design and carving, needle plucking on pines (2-3 year old needles). Don't forget to remove old wire and add new wire. This is a good time to plan your repotting schedule for spring. Draw up a list of trees that need repotting, get your soil, and search for the pots you may need. Finally, watch out for mice girdling your trees. Use mothballs or a hungry cat to prevent problems!

TROPICALS...

If you have tropicals, some of the leaves may have turned yellow and are falling off, go ahead and cut the remaining ones off. Be sure to leave part of the petiole (leaf stem) to protect the new buds; also leave the growth tips. When a tree naturally defoliates, that doesn't seem to hurt it a bit. If you had to defoliate a tree, now would be a good time to wire it before the new buds start swelling and leaves start emerging. The new leaves seem better acclimated to the cooler temperatures and will harden off and not be affected again. Be careful about watering a defoliated tree too much, and do not fertilize. You can still style any of your tropicals, just no major top or root pruning.

If you have all of your tropicals in a small area or greenhouse, you still need to be on the lookout for insects,

especially aphids and soft body scale. You will want to keep air circulating either by a fan or by opening the area daily to prevent any mold or fungi problems. Keep the area clean of dead leaves and other debris.

Your trees won't generally need as much water and with the lower humidity in the house the surface

of the soil will dry quickly, so check not just on the surface but deeply. On the other hand, when the sun shines they will start to use more water, so check and check again.

—*Excerpt from articles by Ed Hake, Fort Wayne Bonsai Club and Brian's blog (<http://nebaribonsai.wordpress.com>). Reprinted by Permission.*

Sharpening Bonsai Tools

George Buehler

Reprinted from the **GREATER LOUISVILLE BONSAI SOCIETY Newsletter**

Sharp tools are an absolute necessity when cutting or trimming bonsai. Sharp tools will give you clean cuts that are smooth edged so that they will heal over properly. If a cut is not smooth, the cambium will try to heal over but will not be able to do a good job. If the cut does not heal over all the way, the part of the heart wood left exposed will rot. Remember the smaller the cut, the quicker the wound will heal. If bonsai tools are used properly, the cutting surfaces will last for years without the need for sharpening (grinding an edge). Concave cutters and knob cutters have a fairly complex blade geometry which makes proper sharpening beyond the scope of this article. You can 'touch up' the edge of your tools if you do it on a routine basis. If you wait for the tool to get completely dull, this method will not work or it will be much harder. If the tool is dulled by abuse such as cutting wire with a concave cutter, it may be better to simply purchase a new tool.

Professional sharpening, if you can find a sharpening shop to do it, will be expensive. They may charge more to sharpen the tool than the cost of a new one. If you purchased stainless tools, then by all means look for a local sharpening shop that will work on them. For straight edge blades, like a shear, professional sharpening shops will generally quickly sharpen the tool. Another problem with bonsai tools is that they generally are riveted together, making sharpening more difficult. In addition to the complex geometry of some of the tools, the straight blade tools, like shears, are short-bladed which makes getting a sharpening stone over the entire cutting length almost impossible. My technique for touching up the edge of my tools starts with a set of diamond pocket stones. This is a real misnomer, since they are similar to a fingernail file. However they are made of plastic, and

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Sharpening Bonsai Tools

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one side is coated with diamond grit. They come in coarse, medium, fine, and extra fine grades. They are manufactured to sharpen the edge of woodworking tools, and, as such, they can remove a lot of metal quickly—especially the coarse stone. A set of these costs about \$20. They are about 3/4 inch wide, which makes them fairly easy to manipulate around the smaller tools' cutting edge. If you need to purchase a set of stones, remember that when it comes to diamond stones, the higher the price, generally the better the quality of the stone. If the tools are touched up routinely, the fine and extra fine stones are sufficient. I recently found a set of what are called 'water stones' in a woodworking catalog. They are about 1/2 inch by 3/4 inch by 4 inches long. They come in a grit size about 2 to 3 times finer than the extra fine diamond stone above. Using these stones would give your tools a 'surgical' edge. However, they are expensive, with one costing about \$20.

Since the straight blades are the easiest to touch up, you should start with one of these first. Open the blade to its fullest extent—remembering that even though the tool may be dull for cutting a branch, it probably is still sharp enough to cut skin. Then, using a black magic marker, color the cutting edges of the tool—this is the beveled portion of the blade. Using the fine stone, hold the stone firmly to the blade, making sure

that the stone is flat on the cutting edge angle. Make one or two passes from the pivot end to the tip of the blade holding the pocket stone firmly, but not with a great amount of pressure, against the blade. Look closely at the edge of the blade. If the stone is held at the correct angle, most, if not all, of the magic marker ink should be removed. If an irregular pattern of the coloration is removed, the stone is not being held at the correct angle, and more attention should be given to holding it flat against the blade. Make sure each blade receives the same number of 'strokes'. Some people believe that they should touch up the back side of their shears—the flat portion of the blade. This is not generally recommended. If too much of the back side is taken off, the contact between the two blade halves will be reduced and the cutting ability will also be reduced. I find that touching up only the beveled edge is more than sufficient. For concave cutters, the procedure is much more complicated. Describing the method to use is harder than the actual sharpening. Remember that the tool is only being touched up, not really sharpened.

First look at how the blades close. They should just meet with the amount of closing being controlled by the "stop pin". This pin, which is in one handle, bumps up to and stops the other handle when the tool is closed. When the one handle just meets the stop pin, the blades should "just barely" touch. If the blades touch each

other before the one handle meets the stop pin, the pin will have to be nudged over so that the moveable handle meets the pin before the blades touch. Lay the tool on a solid surface, and with a "small" hammer, gently tap the pin toward the opposite side. Tap the pin only once and check the closing. If the blades touch before the handle hits the pin, repeat the tapping until the handle hits the pin just as the blade touches. If the handle hits the pin before the blades close, either the pin has to be tapped the opposite way or the pin can be touched up. This is done by using the coarse diamond stone and grinding a little off the mating surface. I have only had to do this adjustment once. That was because the tool was dropped, and apparently the pin was slightly bent.

Now for the sharpening: hold the concave cutter with the blade CLOSED. Look at the tool carefully and notice that one of the blade halves just slightly (about one millimeter) overlaps the other. Then carefully running an index finger over the mating surfaces, the slight overlap can be felt. The blade that crosses over is called the upper blade, and the one underneath is called the under blade. Remember, this crossing over is very, very slight.

Once again, mark both of the edges with a magic marker. The technique used is to ensure the diamond stone follows the outside contour of the blades. Open the cutter to its widest opening with the under blade away from you but the cutting

edge facing you. Hold the fine diamond stone so that it will follow the blade opening. Check that the stone meets the blade uniformly, and then stroke the blade with the stone from one side of the blade to the other. Look at the magic marker ink left on the blade. Most if not all of the ink should be removed. Make four or five strokes across the blade. If you are concerned about not holding the stone in the correct position, remark the blade with the magic marker after each stroke. Now close the cutter and hold the tool so that the upper blade is toward you with the cutting edge away from you. Keep the tool closed. Hold the diamond stone on the upper blade and push it away from you and, going from one side of the cutter to the other, make four or five strokes. After I wrote the above, I followed the instructions and noticed that one of my concave cutters had a second bevel on it—a very thin angle where the blades met. This required running the diamond stone over this angle a couple of times. If you 'touch up' your tools routinely, they will make a very clean cut. Shears and concave cutters may need to be touched up once a month or even once a week depending on the amount of use. Unless you are extremely skilled at sharpening, you should not try to use an electric sharpening machine on your bonsai tools. They can be quickly ruined by taking too much off a blade. However, the use of the manual diamond stones can lengthen the life of those favorite pair of shears you use and give a very clean cut.



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Membership Renewal Reminder

July was the time to renew your Midwest Bonsai Society membership, so if you haven't already, please fill out the "Membership Request" form provided on the last page of this newsletter. If you do not renew your membership by the end of the year you will no longer receive newsletters via email or snail mail. Your renewal is important in order for us to keep our mailing lists up-to-date. Thank you for your ongoing support. Membership dues keep the Society running and cover costs such as producing our 2 annual shows, inviting guest lecturers to various meetings, and newsletter printing and postage.

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Membership Request

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Address

City, State, Zip Code

Telephone

Date

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Please Check If Renewal

Please make check payable to:

Send to: Midwest Bonsai Society

Midwest Bonsai Society

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