



# Pittsburgh Bonsai Society

...to disseminate knowledge,  
encourage others and create  
interest in the art of bonsai

July 2008  
Newsletter

**NEXT MEETING**

**BYOT**

**WORKSHOP**

= Bring Your Own Tree + Bring Your Own Tools  
Wednesday July 16, 2008, 7:00 pm at Phipps Garden Center, Shadyside

Stymied over styling? Perplexed about mid-year pruning? Bring Your Own Tree(s) to the July Workshop. Tap the collective experience of fellow PBS members for a new perspective or possibilities and check out their trees for ideas or inspiration. Don't forget to bring your tools and supplies!

**august event**

**The Annual PBS Picnic and Flea Market**

**Saturday August 9, 2008, 10:00 am "on"**

**At The Grealish Farm**

Please check our website: <http://pittsburghbonsai.org>

# Monthly Question And Answer Box

Do you have a bonsai related question?  
Mail or E-Mail your question to:

**Bob Dietz**  
1525 Connor Rd.  
South Park, Pa.15219  
dietz4771@comcast .net



Your question and the answer will  
appear in the next news letter 

## Our first question

I have a maple forest of five trees. How do I begin the process of removing first emerging leaves so as to miniaturize the leaves on my plants?

### Leaf Pruning

Every bonsai grower has to make sure the sizes of the leaves, branches are in proportion. With small leaved bonsai the proportions will be right anyway but with other deciduous trees, such as beeches or maples, large leaves can often be obtrusive. Leaves can be made smaller in various ways.

In mid summer, once the leaves have opened out fully, you can remove them with some leaf cutters or scissors. The tree will then experience a kind of autumn and shortly afterwards will produce new shoots with leaves, only this time they will be smaller. If the tree has leaves with long stalks, leave the stalks attached to the branch since it is less injurious to the plant. With short-stalked leaves this is not possible so the leaves should be pinched off directly at the branch.

You can make the process less of a shock for the tree if you don't remove all the leaves at once; instead cut off about half to start with, and two weeks later the second half.

Leaf pruning should be carried out in mid summer and not much later, otherwise the new shoots and leaves mature too late and your tree will be unable to shut down its growth activity sufficiently in advance of the colder weather, thus making it particularly susceptible to frost. Correctly timed leaf pruning also enhances the autumnal coloring.

Leaf pruning is also recommended if the crown of the tree has become too thick. Too many leaves keep out too much light and interfere with the circulation of air, particularly as far as the lower branches are concerned. That is why the largest leaves should be pinched out or cut off through the summer to stop the crown becoming too dense.

The thickness of a branch can also be affected by pruning its leaves; a branch gets thicker the more leaves it has, and weaker once its leaves has been pruned. Do not add fertilizer to your tree directly before or after the leaf pruning, because less water will be lost through evaporation you'll need to use less when watering. Keep your bonsai in a sheltered spot till new leaf shoots start to appear.

Information taken from: *Bonsai the complete guide to art & technique* by Paul Lesniewicz  
If anyone has done this or has more information please send an e-mail to Bob Dietz at [dietz4771@comcast.net](mailto:dietz4771@comcast.net)

## Dave Metzgar Recently Received This Letter From Jamie Adams At The Gallery Regarding This Year's Show

Dear Dave,

Hello, I hope all is well. I want to reiterate how thrilled we were to work with your organization, and how terrific all the Bonsai trees looked in the space.

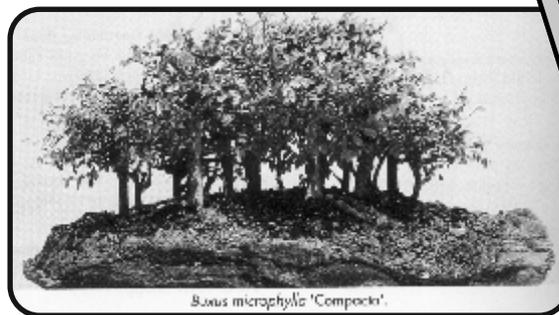
Certainly it is very soon to be discussing next year, but we would love to have a similar event next spring. Unfortunately, our schedule will be a little different next year, but we hope we can still accommodate the Bonsai Society:

We have an open slot May 1-3, 2009, which is considerably earlier, but our next open slot is not until the end of that summer.

Please pass it around to your colleagues, and let us know if it works for you, and if you are interested in repeating the event next year.

Best,

Jamie Adams  
Exhibitions Manager  
Society for Contemporary Craft  
412.261.7003 x17



For your Bonsai supplies support

the store that exists for the society



## Bonsai In The Burgh

724-348-4771

Pots, wire, tools, soil, plants

# Mike's Corner

Tips and Suggestions from Mike Stern

## Experiment

With Native American Trees

In a previous news letter Louise Means wrote an article encouraging new people to work with trees that naturally have small leaves and a short internode distance (the distance between one leaf and the next) such as Japanese maples and Chinese elms. There is no question that these trees are some of the best trees for bonsai. Over the course of time the leaves become smaller and the internode distance shrinks. With a tree the size of a bonsai, such characteristics are desirable and aesthetically pleasing. It creates a better illusion of a mature tree that has been miniaturized.

Many American trees have very large leaves and the internode distance is often measured in inches. These trees do not look as though they have much potential as bonsai. Trees that fit this category are American Elms, Slippery Elms, American Maples, Wild Cherries, Sweet Gums, Walnuts too name a few. I have American Red Oaks and White Oaks with leaves 8 inches to a foot long. The American Red Maple's leaves are large but not that large and the internode distance is usually long. (The leaves of an American Red Maple are green but the tips of the stems are red in the spring.)

When I first began bonsai, I was still a graduate student with limited economic resources. I also wished I had started the hobby 20 years earlier. Assuming I would still be interested in growing the miniature trees, I collected seeds and planted them. I initially collected seeds from Bald Cypress, Ginkgos, Sweet Gums, and Honey Locust. They were some of the trees available to me at the time. I purchased seeds for the American Hornbeam (*Carpinus Carolina*). When we moved to our current house, I would get volunteer Slippery or American Elms. Just recently I started getting American Red Maples volunteers. At first, I would merely pull the volunteers out as weeds as they had no potential. Later, I would let some of them grow unrestrained to thicken the trunks. After numerous years of doing that I started to routinely trim them. Over the course of time I discovered that the leaf size and the internode distance for all of the trees could be dramatically reduced. I currently have a Sweet Gum in a very small pot with leaves that are approximately a half an inch. I also have been able to significantly shrink the size of the leaves on the American Elms as well as the American Maples.

American/Slippery Elms' leaf size has been reduced primarily by repetitively trimming back stems that have four or five leaves back to one or two. Additionally, I have completely leaf pruned some of them and partially leaf pruned others. With the Sweet Gums, I have never completely leaf pruned one. I routinely trim back the long branches and I will also trim out the large leaves. I have only started to work with the American Red Maple and have two of them in 3 inch pots with half inch leaves. I have not tried to leaf prune these yet.

I had been growing the American Hornbeams in the ground for approximately 15 years. I had approximately 15 with thick and nicely tapered trunks. Years ago, I finally took a few and put them in training pots. I began treating them like Zelkovas. I would completely leaf prune them in the attempt to shrink the leaf size. For some reason they would die but I did not connect the leaf pruning to their demise. Later I would read that Hornbeam's do not particularly like leaf pruning. Luckily, I have 2 of the original 15 trees remaining. Hornbeams no longer receive complete leaf pruning. However, I do selectively cut out large leaves and always leave about 50% of the leaves on the tree.

Large leaf, long internode trees do not create the same illusion as Japanese maples, Chinese elms, and Korean Hornbeam's. However, with time they can develop into a very attractive tree. Many of them have incredible texture to their bark. If they are grown as larger trees the leaf size and internode distance is less of an issue. I have an American Red Oak that has very colorful red leaves in the fall. It also has a nice trunk. I am very happy with the Sweet Gums that I planted in the mid-1980s and the American Elms that volunteered.

I would encourage you to experiment with some American trees that grow near you. Collect and plant the seed at the time it ripens and falls off of the tree. Dig up volunteers in the early spring. The big advantage to these trees is that they are native to your environment and microclimate and are likely to survive. Additionally, you may be in for a pleasant surprise as I was.



# Basic Bonsai: Beginning Training

## Bonsai Bits

By Louise Means

### “I got a tree! Now what?” Beginning Training

In beginning Bonsai a basic understanding of tree styles can give you an idea of where the shape of your tree will go. Bonsai has five basic styles with numerous variations of each style. The basic five are:

**Formal Upright:** perhaps the easiest for a beginner. The form is conical, sometimes slightly rounded (broom variation) with a very erect leader and horizontal branching. People who see this style often exclaim “it looks like a miniature tree!” 'nuff said.

**Informal Upright:** The leader, or apex, the very top of the tree is off center... it leans. The branching is similar to the Formal Upright. Variations will introduce movement in the trunk, i.e. a trunk that isn't straight.

**Slanting:** The trunk will lean at a more acute angle and the lowest branch will spread directly opposite the lean direction. Branches on one side make the tree look as if it's reaching back to balance itself to keep from falling.

**Cascade:** In this style the trunk starts straight then turns sharply downward and the apex will be well below the bottom of the pot. Imagine a cliff, a tree growing over the edge of that cliff.

**Semi-Cascade:** As in the Cascade the trunk starts growing straight but for a longer length before it turns down and grows no further than the bottom of the pot.

That's a very, very basic description of styles. You will need to look at that tree you bought at the nursery and visualize what you can make of it. What style does it lend itself to? Does the trunk grow so very straight and soldier like? Does it lean as if pushed by the force of nature just a little off center? Is it low growing naturally? Then perhaps you can style it as a cascade or semi cascade.

Study your tree. Check for insects. Hand pick them if you can, if not, give it a good spray with a hose. Generally this will knock off any annoying spiders and other small insects. Clean some of the soil from the top of the pot to expose the top of any large roots that may present themselves. Snip away any dead or dying branches. Study the branching. Are there any crossing another? Remove it. Really look at your tree. Set it on a table where you can look directly at it at eye level and turn it to look from every side. Study your tree. Look at pictures in books. There are lots of them out there. Which branch would you keep? Which one just won't do? Thinking of these things before you cut helps to prevent the “shoulda, wouldof, couldof” of styling a Bonsai tree.

### Enjoy!

Next article will cover some basic tools and your first styling via pruning experience.

Questions on anything in these articles email: [pghlady51@hotmail.com](mailto:pghlady51@hotmail.com), subject line: Bonsai article question

# Bonsai Spring Show 2008

Here is a sneak preview of some of our trees in the "08" Spring Show courtesy of Margaret Vates who graciously sent me her wonderful photos.

Next month we would like to have a full color insert with photos from the show.

If anyone is interested, or has some nice shots that they took, please, e-mail them to me ASAP. My e-mail address is: [thenucleoid@yahoo.com](mailto:thenucleoid@yahoo.com) Send as many as you like, we will chose the nicest ones and do a full color insert for August.

Cindie Bonomi: Editor



# Mid-Summer

## In The Bonsai Calendar



It's Mid-Summer in the Bonsai Calendar. Here in Western Pennsylvania we enjoy weather patterns that produce thunder-storms, drenching rain, high winds and "dog day" humidity. The rain and humidity do not mean you can ignore watering your bonsai. Nope. Remember that high temps and high wind can desiccate your trees. You may need to water several times a day for exposed trees. You did protect your Japanese maples from afternoon sun, didn't you? In the wild, they are under-story trees.

You are on a twice a month feeding schedule for both deciduous and conifers. Try alternating between liquid foliar feeding and granular feed. Avoid leaf burn by feeding early in the day.

Another watering note: Don't go on vacation! Your brother-in-law may promise to faithfully water (gently)

on a daily basis, but you KNOW he's going to forget, then over-water. If your trees weren't wired to the pots, they'd float away. He may confuse their growing needs with rice. December and January are much better vacation choices.

Pests don't take vacations. They may be hiding underneath leaves, at the base of needles or in bark crevices. Stick to your spraying program.

Check your wiring on the pines. Take it off if scarring is imminent. Rewire in the fall. Pinch the junipers. Your tender care often produces congested branches. You gotta thin out the unwanted growth to let light and air in.

Keep trimming the deciduous trees to the planned silhouette.

Yet another watering note: all that moss may look pretty, but if it's covering the surface, remove some sections for "watering holes". Your thirsty trees will thank you.

Compiled by Jay Miller

# Welcome New Members

The Pittsburgh Bonsai Society welcomes: Meg Amoudi, Debbie Brys, Lynn Carney, Eugene Flenner Jr., Addison Galambos, Eric & Shelley Grotzinger, Patrick Kane, Fred Marks, John Metcalf and Nathaniel Peterson.

## List Of Plants Suitable For Mame Bonsai

*Ulmus parvifolia* 'Catlin'  
*Picea abies* and *P. mariana* 'Nana'  
*Tsuga canadensis* 'Hussi'  
*Tsuga heterophylla* 'Iron Springs'  
*Escallonia pygmaea*  
*Rhododendron serphyllifolium*  
*Rhododendron kiusianum*  
*Rhododendron tsusiophyllum*  
*Cuprosma petriei*  
Malus (crabapple)  
*Berberis* sp.  
*Saxifraga*  
*Arundinaria pygmaea*  
*Thalictrum kiusianum*  
*Salix arctica* (arctic willow)  
*Penstemon davidsonii*, var. *menziesii* and *P. rupicola*  
*Leiophyllum buxifolium* v. *prostratum* (dwarf box)  
Calluna 'Foxii' 'Nana' and 'Tom Thumb'  
*Potentilla fruticosa* dwarf form  
*Pieris arctica* 'Nana'  
*Thymus serpyllum*  
Equisetum dwarf form  
Prunus (flowering cherry)





Pittsburgh Bonsai Society  
c/o Cindie Bonomi (Editor)  
335 Newburn Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15216

# Calendar of Events

**Jul 16.....Wed. 7pm .....BYOT Workshop! .....Phipps Garden Center**  
**Bring your Tools!**  
**Bring Your Own Tree!**

**Aug 9..... Sat. 10am “on”.....Annual Picnic & Flea Market .....The Grealish Farm**

**Sep 17.....Wed. 7pm .....Wiring demonstration .....Phipps Garden Center**

**All PBS meetings, unless otherwise noted, will be held at the Phipps Garden Center, starting at 7:00 pm.**

**Phipps Garden Center is located at the edge of Mellon Park in the Shadyside section of Pittsburgh. At the Phipps Garden Center sign on Shady Avenue, just south of the intersection of Fifth and Shady Avenues, turn into the cobblestone driveway. Park in the metered lot. Walk 50 yards farther down the cobblestone lane. The Garden Center is the red brick building on your left**

#### **Severe Weather & Emergency Information**

**PBS Meetings and Special Events at Phipps Garden Center will take place as scheduled except in the event of severe weather or emergency. Unsure? Call their Emergency Phone Number: 412 441-4442 for updates.**