Pittsburgh Bonsai Society

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

May 2008 Newsletter

NEXT MEETING

WEDNESDAY  May 21, 2008, 7:00pm

Azalea Workshop!

Phipps Garden Center, Shadyside

You can buy new hardy nursery stock at modest prices and bring your trees-in-training from past azalea workshops for refining. Don't forget your tools!!

JUNE EVENT

Our 27th Annual Spring Show

June 14 Saturday-15 Sunday

Held at The Society For Contemporary Craft  2100 Smallman Street
Pittsburgh 15222 (Strip District)

Please check our website:  http://pittsburghbonsai.org
Preventing A Tree For The Show

Now is the time to start thinking about putting a Bonsai in the spring show.

The checklist below outlines some of the steps to be considered when preparing a tree for the show. Keep a few things in mind: if you feel your tree is good enough to show, prepare the tree yourself, don’t wait until you get to the show and expect someone to help you.

1. Remove any wire that is unsightly or improperly applied.
2. Remove any weeds from the soil surface.
3. Remove all dead twigs.
4. Rub the pot down with Armor All, light baby oil, or hair cream etc. To give the pot a dull glow, remove all excess liquid and buff with a dry cloth.
5. Mosses and the like may be used around the tree but do not overpower the soil surface.
6. Use fine pebbles, and haydite (not white, or granite chips) to finish the soil.
7. Try to use a stand and a companion plant.

Also, there should be a request for items for the silent auction.

A Note From Bob

April was a great turnout for the dawn redwood, I guess it helps to have a tree that everyone can take home.

Many thanks to Bob Grealish for his presentation on the group planting. Bob had planned on putting a additional forest planting, but we ran out of time. Maybe we should consider weekend meetings to give us more time for project just as a forest planting. Dave Metzgar won the raffle and took home the very nice composition that Bob had put together.

May is azalea month, there will be new trees to purchase for $10.00 each. I will bring last years demo plant as well as a plant that had been cut back two years ago, and will show how to reduce them in size. Please bring any azalea that you have to the class.

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 newsletter.

For your Bonsai supplies support the store that exists for the society

Bonsai In The Burgh

724-348-4771
Pots, wire, tools, soil, plants
“Collecting Large Trees In Nature”

Digging up trees seems like a simple process. If the tree is small and has a good root system, the process is rather simple. Dig around the tree and lift it from the soil. It is important that all of the roots be severed before any effort is made to pull the tree out of the ground. Do not attempt to pull the tree out of the ground if you can still feel that there are roots or a root that has not been severed. Also do not push down on the shovel to begin to lift the root ball until you feel confident that all of the roots have been severed. By doing so all or most of the soil and Flora will fall away from the root ball. This is not a good thing to have occurred especially when you are not in a position to immediately put it in new soil.

Rarely do trees growing in the wild have a nice compact root system. Getting a large root ball increases the odds of the tree will survive. In my previous article I emphasized the three year plan and would continue to do so for large trees in the wild. What follows is a process that describes how to extricate the tree.

Collecting larger trees requires a more complicated process of tree removal than described above. One cannot merely place the shovel in the ground at an angle and sever all of the roots. The roots that are growing directly down cannot be reached by a spade.

To remove a large specimen you must dig a trench around the tree that is wide enough and deep enough for you to be able to slide the spade under the tree without having the root ball fall apart. This is a time consuming and requires a good deal of effort. Actually a great deal of work. Moreover, it requires a great deal of strength. The weight of the soil is usually more than you have imagined. I continue to underestimate how heavy the tree and root ball will be when digging up large trees.

After you have completely trenched around the tree and severed all of the roots, you will need to tilt the tree from side to side making sure a large enough piece of burlap fits under it. The burlap should be secured around the root ball to ensure that it does not fall apart in transport. Picking up the tree by the root ball may be preferable than picking it up by the trunk. Once it is removed, sliding it along on a child's toboggan is a good idea.

To accomplish such a task a number of tools are required. You need a sharp shovel that is sturdy. A solid steel shovel is recommended. It might be tempting to take an army shovel as it is compact and light but it is unlikely to be up to the task.

A mattock also is a helpful tool to dig outside of the root ball in the trench.

Long handled pruners are necessary to large roots which the shovel cannot sever.

A saw is also helpful to cut unnecessary large branches as well as thick roots that are too large for the pruners to pass through. I often use a reciprocating saw.

A hatchet and a pry bar can be helpful on difficult roots.

You will need burlap or plastic bags to surround the root ball and keep it moist during transport.

Finally having at least one other person to help you move your new tree is a requirement.

Consider taking a long some seedlings or young trees to plant and replace your find. This is environmental friendly and you may be planting the next find for a future generation of bonsai collectors.
Principles of Bonsai trees
Not all plant material will make a “small tree” for Bonsai. The idea is to cultivate a tree to produce a realistic representation of a mature tree such as you would find in nature. To be successful, the potential Bonsai specimen should have one or more of the following characteristics:

Small leaves or needles, or an ability to become small with Bonsai techniques.

Attractive bark or roots (buttress).

Hard wood that can be shaped or pruned to retain a shape.

Attractive branching.

All parts of the ideal Bonsai trunk, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruits, buds, roots should be in scale with the size of the tree. You will find there are a few exceptions that make quite attractive and superb trees despite the scale not being in proportion. Many fruiting and flowering trees will be in this category and have “normal” sized fruit or flowers.

Plant Selection
Last month’s newsletter had an extensive list of possible plant material. For the beginner, this selection can be overwhelming at first. There are, however, several species that are suitable for the beginner to “practice” on. And before we go on, you are going to kill trees! Hopefully not intentionally, but Bonsai is a learning process. The more you learn about the tree and its needs, the less loss you will experience. For the purpose of Basic Bonsai, I have chosen three species. All of them are available through our own Bob Dietz or through your local nursery.

False Cypress:
Chamaecyparis obtusa,
Chamaecyparis sp: hinoki,
Taxodium Distichum: Bald Cypress

Junipers:
Juniperus procumbens nana,
Juniperus chinensis

Maples:
Acer buergerianum: Trident
Acer palmatum: Japanese: Maple

If you have a computer or library access look these plants up in a good tree or bush database. Study the requirements of each one and decide which would suit your back yard or patio environment. Do you have enough sun? Can you protect it from wind and freezing conditions? Is it easily accessible? You will need to water it often and keep a close eye out for insects and diseases. Because of the small size of the trees and their pots you will find that “things” happen a whole lot faster to your little ones than they would growing in the ground or in a typical deep house plant pot.

Enjoy!
Next article will cover “I got a tree! Now what?” Beginning training.

Questions on anything in these articles.
E-mail: pghlady51@hotmail.com
Subject line: Bonsai Article Question
Here in Zone 5, frost has occurred as late as Memorial Day, so continue protection for the more delicate trees in your collection. Too much sun combined with windy conditions can be especially tough on maples. Remember, they are an under story tree.

Feeding can be increased to twice a month if you haven’t root pruned or repotted individual trees. If fertilizing is a cause for anxiety, use a dilute 20-20-20 liquid, such as Peter's.

Check your wired trees. This is a rapid growth period and wire can cut into the bark almost overnight. To remove wire, don't try to uncoil it to save the wire, cut through the coils.

Trimming long shoots on the deciduous trees is okay to maintain shape or silhouette. Remove faded or dead blooms from early flowering trees and azaleas or rhododendron. A good time to repot flowering species is immediately after blooming. It’s also timely to think about pots. Think a year ahead.

Which trees will you be “potting up” or “potting down”. Plan your purchases NOW for the Spring Show.

Too much water for your pines generates candles which produce long needles. Regulate the amount of water and finger pinch the longer candles. Finger pinching the soft growth on larch and juniper keeps it compact.

May is a good month to switch tooth brushes. Use the old one to gently brush off winter's grime and algae. Be especially careful with pines; their flaky bark plates are fragile.

Finally, check each tree for critters and diseases. Systemic fungicide can control the chalky white deposits of mildew, especially in oak, hawthorn, crab apple and beech. Aphids are found on the underside of broad leaves and wooly aphids lurk at the base of needles in pine, larch and even the leaves of the crab apple. Systemic insecticides help, but use caution and follow manufacturers' recommendations.

Compiled by Jay Miller
A good way to start a discussion at a Society meeting is to inquire about the optimum training container for early-stage trees just beyond the “twigs in pots” stage.

Keith Scott used postal sorting trays. Herb Geissler chose the cost-effective kitty litter box from K-Mart. Some of us were addicted to cut down 5 gallon plastic buckets or sturdy nursery pots. Some folks wheedled the plastic flour and sugar containers away from their local bakery, which made nice square training pots. Aviation or tin snips for cutting, a couple of drilled drainage holes, and the containers were ready for planting.

If you are determined to train your little trees in a “bonsai pot”, err on the side of water conservation and consider an oval or square mica pot with a 4” depth. Bob Dietz has them in stock at Bonsai In The Burgh, 724 348-4771 dietz4771@comcast.net.

If you have come across a different approach to this perplexing pot problem, let me know. We'll be happy to publish it.

Jay Miller < suisekifan@yahoo.com >
Calendar of Events

May 21 ....... Wed. 7pm .... Azalea Workshop! ........... Phipps Garden Center
Bring your Tools!

June 14-15 ... Sat/Sun ....... Annual Spring Show .......... (Strip District)

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

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.