



# BADGER BONSAI SOCIETY

Promoting and Enjoying the Ancient Art of Bonsai Since 1972

Badger News | A Publication of the Badger Bonsai Society | AUGUST, 2010

### NEXT MEETING DATE: August 12th, 2010

6:30–8:00 p.m.  
Olbrich Botanical Gardens  
3330 Atwood Ave. Madison, WI

### MEETING AGENDA: PRIVATE SHOW / CRITIQUE

We are going to try something a little different, a private show. If each member brings at least one tree from his or her collection we can have a nice little show. Mid May is one thing but bonsai should be in full glory by now. Pick your favorite and show it off!

### CLUB OFFICERS:

- President ..... Tim
- 1st Vice President ..... Matthew
- 2nd Vice President ..... Devon
- Secretary ..... Duke
- Treasurer ..... Gary
- Librarian / Newsletter ..... Greg
- Refreshments ..... Elaine
- Past President ..... Ron

## Membership are Essential - President's Message

By: Tim

If you are not a club member, I urge you to join our little group. Membership dues help pay for our costs, such as backdrops for our show, which, by the way, Gary didn't get paid until May. We also try to give a donation to Olbrich every year to keep us in somewhat good standing with them. Other costs include such items as newsletters to those without email and our web site domain: [www.badgerbonsai.net](http://www.badgerbonsai.net). We do not have a budget because of our small size, which means that money must come from somewhere when different issues come up such as backdrops. Perhaps larger organizations could put this under miscellaneous. Don't get me wrong, we are hanging in there, but please consider paying dues if you haven't done so already. Even some of your past Presidents, including me, have been doing so.



July's meeting took place at Gary's house. For more than one reason, the invitation to attend was for members only. If you did not attend, you missed seeing Gary's items that he built, sewed, or put together to make his hobby easier and more enjoyable. He demonstrated how he waters, fertilizes, and makes his potting medium. At his invitation, we critiqued some of his many trees. I think everyone left with some good ideas for their own future use.

I tried initiating a game to help everyone get to know each other better. Alas, there were no takers, but I urge everyone to make an attempt to know at least the first name of each of our members and perhaps a little something else about that person. I am going to work on this too. It will help for making a stronger club.

Inside This Issue

- August Announcements .....02
- The Perfect Nebari .....03
- Adventures in Fertilizing ..... 05

For the August meeting, please bring one or two trees to show. Each tree will be constructively critiqued by you, me, and the rest of the membership. One sheet of paper will be provided for all the short critiques. If you want to show, but don't want critiques, that is fine, and the paper will not be present for that tree. I urge everyone to participate.

See you all there, your fellow dues paying participant,  
- Tim

# August Announcements

By: Devon

This will probably sounds crazy, but another year of bonsai is closing in on us and Jack Frost is dusting off his tools. Yes, I did hear about the heat wave.

You see, there is a Maple tree on the edge of town that I see on my way to / from work. I call it **"The Sentinel"** because it is consistently the first tree to bud in spring and the first to turn from chartreuse to orange-red. I noticed it last Friday, it's turning and soon it will begin to drop. Then I will celebrate my birthday, wedding anniversary, Halloween, Thanksgiving and hope my bonsai are safe for Winter. OK, I'm getting carried away.

**At the next club meeting, on August 12th**, all members should bring at least one tree to show. We are going to try something different this year and encourage everyone to show at least one tree and have a mini-show for the club meeting. For those interested some constructive criticism\* comments can be written on a piece of paper as Tim indicated in his cover letter. If you are not interested in a critique, no problem, no paper.

Please limit yourself to two three trees so there will be enough room for everyone. If you have a place mat or stand to place under your bonsai, great, but not required.

So pick your favorite bonsai (you have one, or ask a friend or spouse). Give it a little TLC and come show off your creation one last time this year before Fall comes down and turns into Winter. Don't laugh, it will be here before you know it.

\*Constructive criticism has a compassionate attitude towards the person qualified for criticism. Critique is intending to uplift the other person. Hence the word constructive is used so that something is created or visible outcome generated rather than the opposite. "Helpful Comments."

## Milwaukee Bonsai Society at 2010 Wisconsin State Fair

New at State Fair This Year - They will be having critiques of the display trees - one critique per show! MBS members as well as members of the public are welcomed to attend these critiques. They will be held at **7:00 pm on Thursday, August 5; Monday, August 9 and Friday, August 13**. This is an excellent opportunity to have a close-up view and discussion of the trees. There is no charge for the critique but State Fair admission and parking is not included.



August 2009 1st Place Professional and Best of Show  
32nd Annual Mid-America Bonsai Exhibit

## 33rd Annual Mid-America Bonsai Exhibit

August 20 - 22, 2010

Chicago Botanic Garden

**From the web site:** It is one of the biggest regional shows in the nation. Centered on the Chicago Botanic Garden's Permanent Collection, featuring almost 50 world-class trees, it's a showplace of trees from across the Midwest. Enthusiasts from five states bring their trees to be judged in the main hall at the Garden's Regenstein Center - with this year's Guest Master Michael Hagedorn.

**From your humble narrator:** *This show rocks!* I first attended two years ago and it is now my annual pilgrimage. This year I think I have 4-5 people coming along to check it out. The garden has about a dozen permanent specimens and there is a show with about 50 or so trees. Then there is the vending! Oh My Gosh! There is so much material to choose from; pots, plants, tools literature, stands, stones, jewelry and Tchotchkes, just to name a few. I highly recommend a budget and a plan. I have found folks willing to deal on Sundays. But don't insult anybody with low balls, be a respectful haggler. Window shopping is very acceptable.

Oh yeah, I heard there is a whole Botanic Garden to check out, so bring your walking shoes. I wouldn't know... I wear bonsai blinders. I did check out the Japanese garden. Very beautiful, but soon it was... "Alright, I'm headed back to the show now."

**For More information, visit:**

[www.midwestbonsai.org/augustshow.html](http://www.midwestbonsai.org/augustshow.html).

# The Perfect Nebari

By: Greg

Something I have been promising myself since last year, is to take more tree stem cuttings this season in the hope of getting more to root. I only got to a few last season. Now I have two Azalea and six Honeysuckle cuttings to show for my efforts. The process of taking and 'striking' cuttings has been well documented and just about any informational Bonsai book will have this info within it's pages, so I will not go into much detail on this. Try one of our many books from our library open to members. I will bring some to the next meeting or let me know by e-mail and I will see what I can do, that's ~~email-removed~~, also for those not wanting to read there is one DVD on propagation that has some good info in it also in our club library. What I will focus on is a procedure to take that cutting and help it form... the perfect nebari.



I got the idea on trying this from an old archive section on the web site [www.Stonelantern.com](http://www.Stonelantern.com) who got it from an old issue of Bonsai Today (#8.) A good nebari is an integral part of the whole bonsai, without a good nebari you can only achieve a fair looking bonsai. A cutting is probably the purest way to achieve a quality nebari, being that you can control the root growth from day one.

A long time ago I read about two ways to achieve a good nebari, one was to place the whole tree in the ground on top of a clay tile, this prohibited the formation of a tap root and forced the roots to flair out, this seemed a very good idea worth trying, the only problem I had was in the stability of the plant and it's ease to shift with external forces, such as myself, a squirrel, a dog, the wind, etc. The other method was to girdle the tree with a piece of wire below ground and hope new roots formed before the tree died.

The method we are about to embark on is a combination of the two, applied to a cutting, so if the cutting dies you are not out a whole lot of investment.

You will need a cutting with root hormone, planting medium, and something flat with a hole in it big enough to slide the cutting into, I am thinking one of my kids old scratched CD's (one less thing in the landfill, just think ten years ago all of those AOL CD's that flooded to us in the mail).

You can use a piece of clay tile, just use a masonry bit on your drill and carefully drill a hole, the diagram above also shows how to make a forest or a multi stem bonsai with multiple holes cut into the tile.



Place the tile on top of the medium, apply rooting hormone to the cutting and insert the cutting through the hole in the tile into the medium, and treat the new cutting as you would any other of your cuttings, proper watering, sunlight, etc. Within a few years depending on how fast your cutting grows, the trunk should expand out to the width of the hole which will slowly act as a girdle and cause the tree to actually form new roots on top of the tile. The whole time the lower roots stabilizes the tree thus causing little stress, a healthier environment in which the tree can grow happily.



After a few years if all goes according to plan your cutting should look like the plant in the following photo.

At this time if the roots on the top of the tile are enough to support the tree it is time to cut off the roots under the tile. Cut off flush with the tile, the tree will be easier to remove this way. Resist the

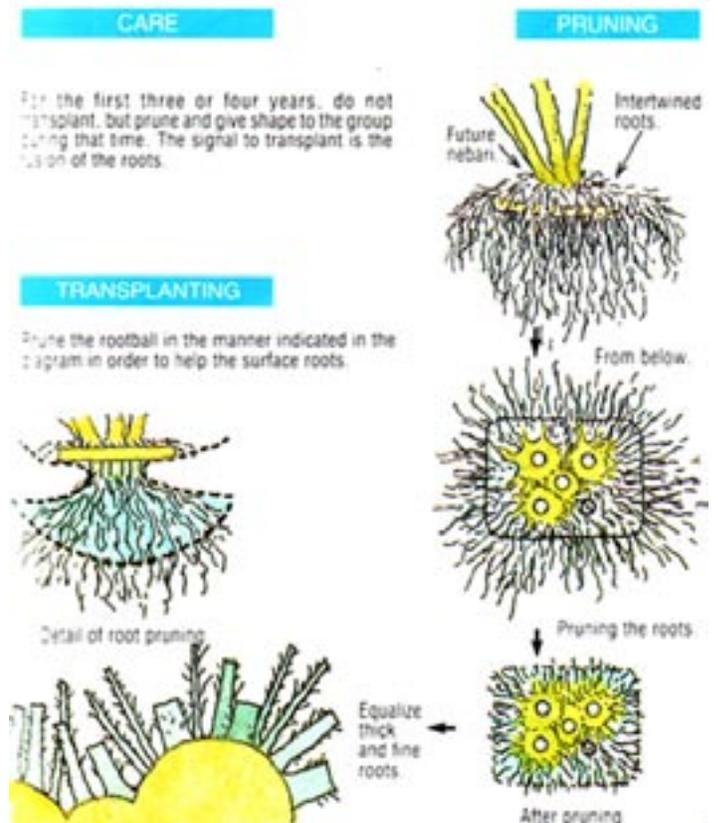
temptation to bust the tile apart this will only damage the young roots, simply pry out or poke out with a pencil or similar object. If done right, your young tree should look like those in the next pictures.



Good luck. Try new and interesting species, experiment, but most of all have fun. If anyone tries this I would like to hear about your results and some photos. This would make a good article in a future newsletter. If you are doing another project of any kind, we would be glad to have anything done by our members; shelving, Japanese garden design, water features, rain barrel, etc. Email the info to us: [info@badgerbonsai.net](mailto:info@badgerbonsai.net).

Hope to see all at the next meeting.  
-Greg

Now plant your new bonsai into fresh medium, secure the tree from any movement, fertilize and let it grow. After a few more years, no one ever said bonsai is a quick and easy endeavor, your bonsai, complete with an AMAZING NEBARI, will be able to compete in any contest; that's if you have been keeping up with the trimming and shaping of the area of the tree above the roots.



# Adventures in Fertilizer: The Miracle Growing Power of Bat Poop and Fish Guts!

By: Devon

I want to talk to you about fertilizing your trees. When I started cultivating bonsai I knew that too much fertilizer or improper application could kill my trees, so I began by not fertilizing at all, and then very minimally. Now that I am more comfortable with my green-hued opposable digits, I am fertilizing about every 1-2 weeks. To quote Harry Carry "Holy Cow!" The results have been amazing. My foliage is more colorful and abundant. I have more fruits and flowers. Everybody is healthier-looking overall.

When I began fertilizing, about four years ago, I used low doses of Miracle-Gro about once a month with so-so results. Then I got a hold of bat guano and fish emulsion. Guano (poop) and emulsion (guts, etc) are organic as opposed to chemical, like Miracle-Gro. Bonsai books recommend using different fertilizers to vary the macro/micronutrients levels which will increase the odds of providing a well balanced diet (makes sense). I was alternating between the low dose Miracle-Gro one month and a mixture of Jamaican bat guano and fish emulsion the other. The results were better, but I still wasn't amazed. And I wanted to be AMAZED! The next year, after winning a 2lb bag of Green Dream (slow release organic pellets) at the annual club dinner, I began using fewer chemicals and more organics with better results. So this year I took what I learned and pushed the envelope of conventional wisdom.

This spring, I began a more robust fertilizing regime. I started fertilizing every two weeks or so with weaker doses in early spring (starting in April) and will continue applying stronger mixtures more frequently until late fall. The products and solutions I use change as the seasons change - more on that later. I gave everyone a healthy dose of slow release Green Dream or plant spikes around June 1 and every Saturday or Sunday, for three out of four weeks, I use a strong mixture of Mexican bat guano and fish emulsion solution. Just to mix it up, sometimes I use that same solution with a splash of Dyna-Grow (and Pro-TeKt silicone for the deciduous trees). On the fourth week I use Miracle-Gro in a moderate to low dose. For my acidic soil loving plants, like azalea and pine, I supplement with low-dose MirAcid on that fourth week. The results are AMAZING! My foliage is so much healthier looking and more abundant on all my bonsai.



An assortment of full-sun loving trees in the backyard of my home. Juniper, Jade, Schefflera, a Pine a Hen-and-Chick...

When it comes to using chemically based products I tend to apply weaker doses, but I have taken to using the fish emulsion like a chef adds salt and pepper, by sight and intuition (but never by taste). I go heavy with this product. However, due to the higher nitrogen, I am still using the guano as the directions indicate. Over-fertilization can be as detrimental to plants as under-fertilization. Caution is advised because "fertilizer burn" can occur when too much fertilizer is applied: drying out roots, burning foliage and even killing the plant.

## Let's talk about N-P-K

**Fertilizers typically provide in varying proportions these elements:**

**Primary macronutrients:**  
nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K).

**Secondary macronutrients:**  
calcium (Ca), sulfur (S), magnesium (Mg).

**Micronutrients or trace minerals:**  
boron (B), chlorine (Cl), manganese (Mn), iron (Fe), zinc (Zn), copper (Cu), molybdenum (Mo) and selenium (Se).

*Adapted from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fertilizer>*

## So What Does That All Mean?

**(N) Nitrogen for Plant Growth:**  
foliage production and general health

**(P) Phosphorus for Root Growth:**  
develop roots and increases leaf area

**(K) Potassium for Plant Strengtheners:**  
proper growth of flowers and fruits, helps with the absorption of other nutrients, and toughen plants so that they can better withstand disease and cold temperatures.

## What to Apply When;

### Suggested Fertilizer Application

These numbers are not to be taken literally, only as a guide to understand how to vary the N-P-K through the course of a growing year to best feed your bonsai.

**Spring:** 10-5-5

**Summer:** 10-15-5

**Fall:** 5-10-15

**Winter:** none, do not fertilize during dormancy

## My Arsenal

These are the products that I have been using. I've placed an ® on the products that are brand names.

**SYMBOL KEY:** (N-P-K) [purchase] {use}

### Organics

**Green Dream®** (6-6-6) [Ron] {outdoors}

**Fish Emulsion** (5-1-1 – N-P-K)  
[common nursery] {outdoors}

**Bat Guano** (Mexican) (10-2-1)  
[common nursery] {outdoors}

**Bat Guano** (Jamaican) (1-10-0.2)  
[common nursery] {outdoors}

### Non-Organics

**Dyna-Gro®** (7-9-5) [Ron]  
{indoors/outdoors}

**Pro-TeKt®** Silicon Solution (0-0-3) [Ron]  
{outdoors}

**Miracle-Gro®** (20-20-20 and 24-8-16)  
[common nursery] {outdoors}

**MirAcid®** (30-10-10) [common nursery]  
{outdoors}

**Schultz Plant Food®** (10-15-10) [common nursery]  
{indoors/outdoors}

**Plant spikes** (10-10-4 – N-P-K will vary)  
[common nursery]  
{indoors/outdoors}

## Precautions and Disclaimers

I want to let you all know that this method is working for me, and I encourage you to use fertilizer, but ALWAYS (x's 3) read the label of what you are using, especially the non-organic chemical stuff. These products can and will kill your lawn, bonsai, pets and even you if you do not use them properly. The organics are not as harsh but caution should still be used. I've already told you about "Fertilizer Burn" so here are a few other things to consider.

## A Few DOs and DON'Ts

### DON'T

**Feed a tree that is under stress**

> Stress ranges from over or under watering to newly pruned roots, pests or disease.

**Feed trees in winter or when they are either dormant or growth has slowed down**

**Feed when your trees are outdoors and summers are extremely hot**

**Feed until temperatures have moderated and growth has resumed**

### DO

**Know what species of tree your bonsai is**

> Most broad leaf trees and tropicals can be fed with general, balanced N-P-K fertilizer.

> Conifers, azaleas and certain others benefit from a monthly application of an acidic fertilizer, such as MirAcid.

**Feed a tree when in periods of active growth**

> This is generally from mid-spring through early summer and from late summer to early fall.



### My arsenal of fertilizer products.

From top left: Schultz Plant Food, ProTeKt, Dyna-Gro, Mexican Bat Guano, Jamaican Bat Guano (the bag got a hole), Fish Emulsion; Plant Spikes, Green Dream, Mirical-Gro, MirAcid and finally the "box" I keep them in.

## Precautions and Disclaimers

*Continued...*

### Water

I always water thoroughly the day before I fertilize. I read that this lessens the chances of burning your roots / foliage as well as increasing the capillary action in the roots to take up the fertilizer. This made sense, so I made it part of my routine. Also, I don't fertilize when I know rain is on the way. Instead I wait until after the showers so the food isn't washed away too quickly. It's only a day or two before I water again so I want the maximum effect of the fertilizer.

### Dispensing

I have special fertilizer watering containers. I use a one-gallon jug made of sturdy plastic to make my mix (most recipes call for mixing "X" amount of fertilizer to one gallon of water, so this is quite helpful). Then I pour my solution into a small (maybe a quart) sized plastic watering can with a long spout to control the flow as I dispense the fertilizer.

### Watch the wire, it will bite you!

Watch your wire! I can't stress this enough. Your plants will be growing faster and the wire will cut in deeper, quicker. Don't rob Peter to pay Paul on this one.

### Weeds! And more ^%#\$%^ WEEDS!

Maybe it's because pulling weeds was used as a form of punishment when I was growing up, or maybe because I grew up in the golf course encrusted, over-manicured lawns of the Chicago suburbs, either way I DON'T LIKE WEEDS! However, just as your bonsai like the extra food, so do the weeds.

At times I had larger weeds in my bonsai pots than in my yard – OK, I'm exaggerating, but seriously, **THE WEEDS, PEOPLE!** I was blown away at the amount of undergrowth I was getting. Oy vey! Pull the weeds whenever you pinch or spend any time with your trees.

### This Stuff is Poison

I don't like touching any of this stuff and make sure I wash my hands thoroughly when I am done. As many of you know, I have two young children and they have been told to stay away from my fertilizer box. (I keep all the products in a military issue metal ammo case that I store in my basement landing.) The box isn't locked but is latched and won't open without some effort (and when the box is opened, the smell alone would drive most people away anyhow).

### What a Wonderful Smell You've Discovered

There is a reason that "emulsion" rhymes with "revulsion" this stuff smells, and I mean smells, **NASTY!!** As for the guano and Green Dream, well they don't smell too much better. There is however one nice side effect of the smell, no one goes near my bonsai. I have approximately 175 plants, from seedlings to specimens, so keeping the neighborhood kids away is just fine with me. Getting over the revolting smell is one issue you will need to contend with when using organics.

In closing, I just want to reiterate, fertilizing has made a huge difference in the health of my bonsai and I can't recommend it enough. Like most things I took to it slowly but once I learned more, I went full bore and started singing its praises! **No Bull.**



An assortment of partial shade loving trees on the East side of my home. Boxwood, many Ficus, Spruce, Plum, Azalea, Elm...