



BADGER BONSAI SOCIETY

Promoting and Enjoying the Ancient Art of Bonsai Since 1972

Badger News | A Publication of the Badger Bonsai Society | FEBRUARY, 2011

NEXT MEETING DATE: February 10th, 2010

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

MEETING AGENDA: **TOOL CARE**

February is a good month to clean up and sharpen tools.
This is what we will focus on during the upcoming meeting.

CLUB OFFICERS:

President	Matthew
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Hello Badger Bonsai Society

By: Matthew

“The Zen in bonsai as an art is in the doing, rather than the accomplishment.”

-- Khan Komai

It is February. That means winter is still in full effect in Wisconsin and yet, if you're like me, you are probably already thinking about getting ready for spring. Don't feel bad, spring is an exciting time, and you should be ready for it. With only three months until the frost-free date, there is a lot to do. If your trees are not buried by snow, now would be a good time to check on them to make sure they are not drying out. Hopefully you have already done this several times by now. Sometimes it can be easy to neglect dormant trees under the assumption that they and their environment are not changing. Winter does not like your trees. Don't let it get the best of them. If you have tropical trees in your house, water them sparingly, especially if they are in cold windows.



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When the roots are cold, they do not take in water as fast. If they are relying on natural light alone, the amount of water they need is minimal. It can be difficult to gauge how often to water indoor trees since the dryer air causes the surface of the media to dry faster. As with all trees, it is a good idea to use a small piece of bamboo as a

moisture indicator. If your trees are in a humidity controlled environment with artificial lighting, they are luckier than most, and will have different requirements.

If you don't have any tropical trees to occupy your time, February can be a good month to clean up and sharpen tools. This is what we will focus on during the upcoming meeting. Tool care is important for several reasons. First, but not necessarily foremost, proper tools with a clean and sharp edge will affect the outcome of a tree. A clean cut heals faster and cleaner. Also, keeping clean tools will reduce the chances of spreading disease and infection. How would you feel if you went in for surgery and saw dirty, rusty tools laid out on the table? Secondly, bonsai tools have value. As anyone with more than a basic scissors knows, good bonsai tools are not cheap. Therefore, as an item of value, they should be treated with respect.

Since I am not qualified to call myself a "Bonsai Master" I will try to include a quote in every newsletter. I do enjoy wisdom and philosophy, so please bear with me. This month I'm looking at a fundamental truth in bonsai. (Please refer to the quote at the beginning of the article.) As we all know, a bonsai tree, as a work of art, is never finished. This sets bonsai apart from all other forms of art I can think of. When a painter puts down the brush, the painting is finished, when a book is published, the writer begins anew, but when a bonsai artist puts away the shears, its only a matter of time before the same tree needs attention again. Indeed, as long as a tree is alive, it is a work in progress and will continue to change. People are shocked when I tell them that it typically takes three to five years to develop a "bonsai" tree. This doesn't mean there is no enjoyment in working on the tree for that time. It's hard to grasp this concept without embracing it. Modern culture seems driven to have things right now. Instant gratification is



the American dream. I will admit, it was seeing the "finished" products that sparked my interest in bonsai and I assume the same is true for most in the hobby. But as we strive to create our masterpiece, our patience is put to the test, our planning and foresight are exercised, and hopefully, we learn something about ourselves as well as the trees we work on.

So when the time comes for another tedious task like cleaning and sharpening tool or wiring a tree from bottom to top, take the time to enjoy it. And when your tree looks like a twig sticking out of a pot, don't be ashamed, all trees start as twiggy little sticks. Enjoy the doing, and your masterpiece will develop with you.

-Matthew

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Bonsai Tool Care

By: www.westcoastbonsai.com



How to care for your bonsai tools

Keep your tools clean.— As with all tools, cleanliness is important and insures the continued proper function of your tools. Shears or knob cutters with built up sap or cut paste will not cut correctly and may even damage the portion of the tree you are cutting. Jining tools or grafting knives with sap built up will not only stick when cutting but may also cause an accident.. At a recent monthly bonsai class that I have been attending I heard the master scold a student for having dirty tools, NOT the kind of impression you want your teacher to have about your work ethic. Keep your tools clean.

Cleaning your tools

Now there are many thoughts on this process. I read where one well known teacher tells you to “sterilize your tools” after finishing work on one tree BEFORE your start work on the next. He suggest a liquid sterilizer or even a flame from a lighter. This is going a little overboard. If you were doing an emergency repot and root trimming on a diseased plant it would make sense but for general trimming, especially when you are trimming dozens of trees throughout the day it is just impractical.

Cleaning your tools at the end of the day is best accomplished with soap and water. Wipe any excess sap or dirt off first and do a quick

cleaning and rinse well with warm water. After I clean my tools with soap and water I dry them toughly and spray them with WD40. Then I wipe the tools again with a clean dry rag to remove the excess WD40. This helps to ensure there is no water in the springs or hinges or under the collar that might encourage rust to develop.

Removing rust

Your tools should never be left outside over night or worse, in a bucket overnight when it is scheduled to rain like a good friend of mine did. Rust will start almost instantly. IF your tools do develop rust a small piece of steel wool, a little oil and some elbow grease will usually get the job done. Then repeat the cleaning process all the way through the WD40 stage and place them where they belong.

What if I drop my tools? – Yikes! You would not believe how many times I have done that myself over the last 18 years. I have Arthritis and holding my tweezers or cutters for a long time often gives me cramps and I lose my grip. My friend Bob makes fun of me and has suggested I put rubber mats around my trimming bench. OK, I can take a joke but keep in mind that is the same friend who used the bucket.



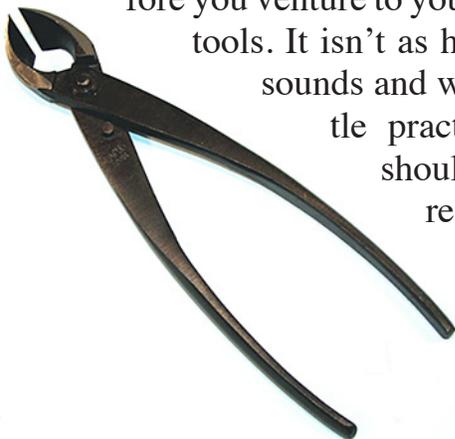
Dropping your tools does happen, even to our teachers. If you drop a tool and the worst happens, you break the tip off your trimming shears, hopefully they are not Master quality tools, don't panic they can be fixed. The tips can be ground down using your electric drill and grinding wheel or even by hand with oil and stone. Or you can take your tools to a pro for grinding.

Sharpening your tools

This is another job you should learn. Don't wait for your tools to get dull. If you have a lot of trees, 20 or more, a little sharpening once a week will save you countless headaches later. If you have hundreds of trees then a little sharpening every 2 or 3 days is best.

The best way to sharpen your bonsai tools is a hand held oil stone. A good two sided flat oil stone will cost you about \$30 the cost of a cheap date. It will save you hundreds of dollars over the life of the stone. Flat oil stones are used to sharpen shears and tools with straight blades. Curved stones are available for sharpening branch and knob cutters. Remember to sharpen the tool from the outside of the blade. The inside is generally flat and close to the opposing blade.

Practice sharpening your general use garden shears or an old pair of household scissors before you venture to your bonsai tools. It isn't as hard as it sounds and with a little practice you should be ready to tackle any



bonsai tool. If you get really good give me a call and I will let you do mine.

Storing your tools

That is where the cloth bag comes in, don't just throw them in a box or bucket. After you have cleaned your tools you need to put them away safely. I suggest a cloth or leather tool bag. These can be bought at most bonsai shops or at any of the many bonsai shows that are held around the country. If you have a wife or girlfriend who sews with a little luck and your best behavior you might get a custom made bonsai tool pouch for Christmas or your birthday. If they have one of those fancy machines your new toy may even have a stitched bonsai design.

Caring for your bonsai tools is like caring for your car. If you wash it, get it serviced regularly and keep the tires and breaks in top working order it will last you a long time. Keep your bonsai tools clean and sharp and stored in an orderly matter they in turn will always be ready to do the job you bought them for.



Bonsai master breeds happiness in a pot

From beer cans to bedside tables, 15-time winner of bonsai competitions Kunio Kobayashi extols the art of micro-pruning

By: www.cnnngo.com

Kunio Kobayashi, 60, opened the Syunkaen Bonsai Gallery in West Tokyo eight years ago to promote the art of miniaturized plants to a wider -- and increasingly international -- audience. Since then, thousands have strolled through the gardens, workshops and display areas of the 15-time winner of the annual Kokufuten Competition, taking away a new understanding and wonder for a cultural heritage synonymous with Japan.

CNNGo: When were you first bitten by the bonsai bug?

Kunio Kobayashi: I still remember the very first time that I saw a real, true bonsai tree, on display in the Sakafuten exhibition, held near Tokyo Station. I was in my twenties, and it was just a revelation. It wasn't any old tree, but the famous -- and 600-year-old -- 'Oku no Kyosho,' or 'pine at the end of the road.' It was so powerful and impressive that I decided that I wanted to follow that path and become a bonsai artist.

CNNGo: OK, what precisely is a bonsai and when were the first ones cultivated?

Kobayashi: These are miniaturized plants grown in containers and they can be found as far back as ancient Egypt, with potted olive and date trees often found in the grounds of temples. The term 'penzai' cropped up in China during the Jin Dynasty and the practice spread to Japan during China's Song Dynasty, between 960 and 1279. It was a time when Japan was importing and adapting many of mainland Asia's cultural pastimes. Cultivation of plants became a hobby of the wealthy and influential during the Tokugawa period.

CNNGo: Why do they appeal to the Japanese so much?

Kobayashi: They fit so perfectly with the people and society of this country. When you work on a bonsai plant, you feel nearer to nature -- to the forests or mountains -- even though you might be in an apartment in the middle of a city. Japanese homes are also very small and often people cannot have their own garden.



Kunio Kobayashi expertly waters one of his plants at his Syunkaen Bonsai Gallery.

CNNGo: What is the secret to growing the perfect bonsai?

Kobayashi: You can grow almost any plant as a bonsai, although specimens are chosen for their suitability and happiness at being in a pot. If you take a maple and work on it at the right time of year, the DNA in the plant makes the leaves shrink. The leaves of an oak tree, on the other hand, will never become smaller and large leaves then look out of place on a tiny bonsai.

CNNGo: A real problem for high-school-age bonsai. What are some of the most popular styles?

Kobayashi: There are numerous styles that a plant can be encouraged to take, ranging from the formal, upright style -- known as 'chokkan' -- through cascades of tiny foliage that are reminiscent of flowing water, groups of trees that resemble growing forests and individual plants whose roots grow out of the cracks and holes in a rock, a style known as 'ishizuke.'

CNNGo: Is modern-day bonsai going in any different directions?

Kobayashi: 'Pop bonsai' is a modern take on the ancient approach, with seedlings encouraged to grow out of beer cans, coffee mugs or any other receptacle. This practice encourages the owner to use his or her imagination and creativity.

CNNGo: Don't you ever get tired of looking at miniaturized plants?

Kobayashi: No, I still get that old feeling whenever I see a particularly good example. The aesthetics of the plant may be very attractive, but there is also the inner element. It is seeing the living and the dead combining to create a vision of beauty. When I look at a good bonsai, I have a feeling of the importance of life and new respect for nature. These trees have been struggling to survive for so long and I feel humbled by that. Syunkaen Bonsai Gallery: Nihori 1-29-16, Edogawa-ku, tel 03 3670 8622, www.kunio-kobayashi.com

Read more:

Japanese bonsai master Kunio Kobayashi

CNNGo.com <http://www.cnngo.com/tokyo/play/bonsai-master-breeds-happiness-pot-001574#ixzz1D814vcxL>

