



The Tree Shrinker

Volume XXXXII, No. 9

A MONTHLY BULLETIN

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East Bay Bonsai Society

September Meeting: September 10, 2014 @ 7:30 p.m.

Message from the President

Happy September Everyone!



I love the anticipation of fall in the Bay Area, my most favorite time of the year. Fall approaches the final quarter of the year and the time for reflection, tying up loose ends and setting the stage for the coming year. I liken my anticipation to that of each bonsai tree in my collection...each saying, let me be cooler, let me rest the winter and ferociously spread myself open again in spring. The hot weather

in Antioch takes a toll on each. Building resilience is hopefully what they are doing.

The August picnic at the Nelson-Trumm's was so enjoyed by many members and friends. I personally enjoyed getting to know several of the new members better. While the reason we come together in these social events is our interest in bonsai, the essence of meeting those of you on a more personal and relaxed basis brings surprises, humility and joy in knowing you as an EBBS member.

The September membership meeting is a very important one. New as well as old members will be apprised of the best practices and requirements for the grand show – the time for one or more of your trees to debut and/or reappear to the eyes of others. Each of us has worked yet another year to show how we have personally affected our tree. The tree will in most cases not be to its perfection. This takes years. But it can show the significant journey of your care, pride and learning along the path of the tree's growth. Every member has one such tree candidate. I encourage and hope that each of you will submit at least one to exhibit.

The success of the 53rd Annual EBBS show - October 11 to 12, 2014 will happen with each member volunteering in any capacity you can. Also at the September meeting, you will be apprised of the many committees and ways you can contribute time and effort to the success of the show. You hear that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it takes every member to produce a great show. Be there to listen, sign up and ask questions.

Warm welcome and kudos to Suzanne Muller for accepting the Board's appointment to fill Director 3 seat until December 31st. She has already accepted a Board task by heading the Nominations Committee to gather candidates to fill the 2015 slate of openings on the EBBS Board of Directors. Members, I call out to you to offer your interest in considering any of the open positions. The Board is the caretaker of EBBS finances, fundraising, educational and society programs. So many of you have skills and experience to contribute and will have fun working with a great bunch of bonsai enthusiasts, too. Please see the article of open positions in this Tree Shrinker.

Finally, John Nackley, EBBS Past President, single-handedly wrote and submitted a grant sponsored by the Golden State Bonsai Federation. It has been awarded to EBBS and November 15th a workshop on Wiring Techniques will take place for 10 persons. This is a superb opportunity for especially the newer members beginning to learn bonsai techniques. But if you don't sign up soon, I am sure the older members and members of other clubs will take advantage of this opportunity, like ME☺! See the article on the workshop in this edition.

Sincerely,

Linda Soliven, your President

Sept meeting

Show time is coming! The September meeting will focus on how to prepare your trees for the show. Bob Gould always has perfectly groomed trees in our shows and he will share with us his secrets about how he does it. Tom Colby will hold forth on stands, why you need them and what are inexpensive alternatives. Michael Hylton is our show chair and he will tell us what needs to

be done for a successful show and how each of us can help to make the show the best one ever. As a special treat, Janice Dilbeck will tell us about how the individual trees are arranged in the show. EBBS has always devoted considerable effort to how the overall show is presented and Janice does this particularly well. This is an important part of the show and is frequently overlooked or not understood in other club shows. We are lucky to have talented people like Janice to stage our shows and she will tell us what goes into arranging the trees in a show.



There was no formal signup for refreshments for the September meeting due to the long gap between regular meetings. If you have enjoyed refreshments in the past, now is the time to reciprocate by bringing an addition to the refreshment table.

August Potluck

The August potluck was held at the home of Rick Trumm and Janet Nelson. It was a wonderful event which gave the members the chance to socialize with one another. The weather was pleasantly warm, the collection of bonsai was breathtaking, and the food was superb. If your idea of a potluck dinner comes from the times when everybody's mother prepared her favorite version of rubber chicken for the elementary school benefit, you were in for a surprise. The meal demonstrated once again that EBBS has some very talented cooks. The best part of the day was the gracious hospitality of the hosts. The club owes Rick and Janet a big thank you not only for hosting the potluck this year, but for the many times they have done it in the past.

Show

Excitement is building for our show on October 11 and 12. Everyone is welcome to show a tree. If you are a new member, the club encourages you to bring your best tree. Everyone should be thinking about which of your trees you would like to show.

Now is the time for you to do all that you need to make the tree show-ready. Don't neglect the choice of pot and stand for your tree. The September meeting will tell you how to prepare your tree for the show. You will be amazed at how nice your bonsai will look as part of the show.

As usual, there will be a sales area at the show. Here is the place to sell anything that no longer meets your vision of what your collection should be. Small cuttings and inexpensive pots are particularly welcome. Many of the people who come to our shows are not bonsai aficionados and are amazed and delighted with a small tree in a pot. The fine print says that twenty percent of the selling price of each item goes to the club.

It takes a lot of work to put on a show and each of us should contribute at least an hour or so of their time to make the show a success. Our show chair, Michael Hylton, as well as chairs of the various committees will soon be asking for your help. When they do, please respond generously.

Golden Statements

We are certainly living in a high tech age and we are dazzled and delighted with the many new offerings that technology has recently bestowed on us such as the smart tv, smartphones, minicomputers and the many social web sites. We wait in eager anticipation of the many more wonderful things that we know will soon come. Wonderful as these things are, we should not lose track of the fact that low tech still has something to offer besides quaint nostalgia for the olden days. Take for example, what could be more low tech than the possibility of having a paper copy of a magazine delivered several times a year to your mailbox by a postman (remember him?)? But wait--how about a magazine packed with information about bonsai?

There are many timely cultural tips as well as stories about the movers and shakers of the bonsai world. The magazine is filled with pictures in beautiful color of trees in recent shows, which gives you good information about how to style (or not how to style) your tree. The magazine also features general articles on topics relating to bonsai. The best part of all this is the low price.

If you want to expand your knowledge of the bonsai world and all it contains and having a subscription to a magazine like this appeals to you, and it really should, send your check for twenty five bucks to: Golden Statements, P. O. box 348, Monterey, California. If you are more technically inclined, subscribe at: www.gsbfbonsai.org/golden-statements/subscribe-to-gs. If you are already a subscriber, then you know just how good the magazine is. Be sure to renew your subscription when it runs out.

Honorary Members

On occasion, EBBS honors members who have been long time supporters of the club and the bonsai world at large. All have exhibited great generosity of their time. Many have also been exceedingly generous of their bonsai as well. Honorary membership is an acknowledgement by the club of the contributions that the person or couple has made to the club and to the art of bonsai in general. The Board is pleased to announce that there are new honorees, three couples.



The first honorees are Tim and Emma Kong. People who have been club members for a while have enjoyed Tim's many programs. His programs are always a lot of fun, and they are wonderful learning experiences because they are packed with great information. Tim and Emma are always at our shows where they offer a helping hand wherever needed. EBBS is not the only beneficiary of Tim's presence. He has given a helping hand to many of the local clubs. Simply put, the bonsai world is a better place because of Tim and Emma.

The next couple is Bob and Virginia Callaham. For many years Bob was the producer of the club newsletter. Bob was a technical writer for at least a portion of his career. The quality of the Tree Shrinker reflected this. Bob did it all for many years from writing and editing the final copy to printing and mailing the finished newsletter back when most members wanted their copy by snail mail. For many years Bob was present as a nonvoting member at the regular Board meetings both to gather information for the newsletter as well as to offer his sage advice. Virginia Callaham made a continuing and significant contribution to the club by bringing to each show a large collection of exquisitely grown accent plants.

The final couple honored is Ruben and Kay Guzman. Ruben maintained a nursery for many years and held workshops at his nursery. These workshops were the first introduction to bonsai for many of the current members. In years past, Ruben was very active in EBBS, holding several offices on the Board including serving as club president. Ruben was very generous with his knowledge of bonsai which he shared with the club by offering programs at the club meetings. Always Kay was by his side. Ruben recently passed away and the bonsai world lost a significant contributor.

Audit

EBBS has a number of people who quietly work behind the scene to make the club run efficiently. First and foremost of these people is our hard working treasurer, Pat Cahill. The bylaws of the club require that each year the finances of the club be reviewed by an audit committee. This year the auditing committee

was Tom Colby and John Nackley. The committee met with Pat and is pleased to report that the financial records of the club are in good order. As a matter of fact, the committee would like to thank Pat on behalf of the club for the excellent job she does.

The Board of directors feels that the regular meetings should be devoted only to bonsai and as a result, the financial health of the club is not regularly reported either at the meetings or in the newsletter. Rest assured that the club finances are not secret and if you are interested in where the club stands financially, all you need to do is ask Pat and she will be delighted to give you a timely report.

Bonsai stands

Imagine for the moment that you are a lady and you have been invited to the opening night of the San Francisco grand opera. You know that the occasion is where the top one percent strut their stuff and you need to dress accordingly. After much searching for just the right gown at the fashion houses, you select an Amani gown which has many yards of beautiful silk damask. Of course you will wear the diamond necklace from Tiffany that has been in your family for generations even though it doesn't compliment the gown very well. The big night comes and on the way out of the house you realize that you need shoes so you grab an old and dirty pair of tennis shoes. You are good to go, right? Well not exactly. Your overall composition leaves something to be desired.

Surprisingly, we frequently treat the tree we enter in a show exactly the same way. We spend lots of time fussing with our trees to get them just the way we want them. They are in a pot and whatever pot works is fine. On the way to the show, we grab something to put the tree on and we are good to go, right? Well, not exactly. Just like the hypothetical lady who selected with great care a gown for the evening and lost track of the rest of the outfit for the occasion, we lose track of the fact that we are not displaying a tree in the show but that we are presenting a composition. The stand is an essential part of the composition which consists of the tree, the pot and the stand. Think of the stand as a picture frame. It completes the presentation of the picture, should be a compliment to the picture and yet does not compete with the picture for your attention.

Stands come in a wide variety of sizes and shapes and the stand that you select should reflect the features of your tree. A stand with square legs will show a formal tree such as a pine to best advantage. A stand with curved legs is a good choice for a maple with a gently curved trunk. A very low stand is needed for a tall tree. A very tall stand might be used to elevate a short, twiggy yamadori juniper so the fine details of the tree can be seen and enjoyed. The criterion for a good stand is a clean and simple design that does not compete with your tree. When choosing a stand for your tree, take a moment to observe whether the stand reflects the features of your tree.

Stands can be custom ordered in both the correct size and style for your tree from Jerry Braswell at

www.artofthediaza.com . Jerry usually has a backlog of orders so if you are interested in getting a stand from him, best to act soon. Jerry will be a vender at our show and may have a stand or two that could meet your needs.

Stands are expensive and if you are overwhelmed by sticker shock, don't despair. There are several options for displaying your tree which do not involve the purchase of an expensive stand. The first is to borrow one from another member of the club. At the actual set up of the show there usually are stands available for trees without stands, but they may not show your tree to the best advantage due to problems of style and size.

The various oriental furniture stores in the area have stands that can be used for bonsai. These stands should be looked at carefully because many of these are meant to display ceramics and may not work well for bonsai due to their relatively long and narrow shape. Bamboo mats are frequently used as an informal summer display stand in Japan and may serve as inexpensive alternatives for display of your tree. They are usually available in import stores.

Slabs of wood cut from the trunk of a tree are often seen in local shows. If you purchase a slab, select one that is one half of an inch thick or less. Thicker slabs tend to visually dominate the tree.

Three boards can be arranged in a staggered formation and this presentation is particularly useful for a large pot. Each board should be about one third the width of the pot.

Lastly, very simple stands can be made from short sections of hardwood. A bit of sanding and finish is all you need. McBeath Hardwood in Berkeley has bins of squares of wood cut from larger boards which are great sources for potential bonsai stands. Be sure to measure your pot before you go to ensure that the new stand and the pot is a good match.

If all else fails, bring your tree to the show even if you do not have a stand for it because at the actual setup of the show there are usually a few stands available for use. Do be aware the available stands may be not be the best choice to show your tree to the best advantage.



Bonsai Soil

Part 2 – Major Soil Components

Last month in Part 1, Don Meeker provided an introduction to bonsai soil and brief excerpts from Bonsai literature to give some history on the subject. Here in Part 2, Don reviews the major components now widely used for bonsai potting soil. In Part 3 in a future issue of the *Tree Shrinker*, Don will review some of the science, physics, chemistry and biology involved in potting soil composition and the culture of living trees in pots.

Akadama – (from Bonsai Today Masters' Series *Pines*.)

Literally translated, akadama means red clay balls. Akadama is the standard soil for most conifers, including pines. It is excavated from quarries (between an upper layer of topsoil and a lower level of sand) in *Akagi-yama* in Honshu, 75 miles north of Tokyo. The excavated akadama is not fired, but dried in hothouses.

Akadama has a pH of 6.5 to 6.9, slightly acidic to neutral. Many enthusiasts use 100% akadama, particularly for pines and other conifers. You can also use akadama as an ingredient in your current soil mix, as it works well in combination with other soil components.

Akadama drains extremely well, retaining only optimal amounts of water. This encourages maximum root vitality and discourages root rot.

Akadama has a low cation exchange capacity, meaning it does not hold nutrients as well as some soils. Because ongoing access to essential nutrients is so important, it is a good idea to use slow release fertilizers with akadama.

Akadama comes in soft, medium and hard granules, and in various sizes. Generally, the larger the tree and pot, the larger the granules should be. Because akadama is imported from Japan, cost can become an issue, especially if you have a large conifer collection.

A domestic mix

Turface or Haydite, bark, coarse sand and a small amount of mycorrhizal fungi medium is a fairly common mix used by American bonsai enthusiasts and professionals. Some Bonsai mixtures utilizing Bonsai Grade Haydite are:

Deciduous: 55 - 65% organic material blended with 35 – 45% Bonsai Grade Haydite

Conifer: 25 – 35% organic material blended with 65 – 75% Bonsai Grade Haydite

Tropical: 65 – 75% organic material blended with 25 – 35% Bonsai Grade Haydite

Haydite

Bonsai Grade Haydite is a specially sized and graded, highly durable ceramic-like material characterized by a microscopic, non-connecting, internal void system. The micro porous internal structure of the Haydite particles helps to maintain optimum moisture levels for vigorous, healthy plants.

Bonsai Grade consists of tiny sponge-like ceramic particles about ½ to 1/4th the size of a pencil eraser.

Each of these tiny ceramic sponge-like particles possesses the unique ability to absorb excess water, and then slowly release the water back to the plant. Each particle becomes a tiny time-release capsule metering life sustaining water.

Those who practice the fine art of Bonsai have known for years that Haydite also offers excellent drainage and helps provide free passage of air and water to the root system which promotes vibrant, healthy plant growth while significantly reducing soil compaction.

Haydite is produced by expanding and vitrifying selected shale in a rotary kiln at temperatures in excess of 2000°F. This process makes Haydite sterile and environmentally inert. It is a natural, non-toxic, highly absorptive ceramic granule with a generally neutral pH. It is dimensionally stable and will not degrade or compress like other amending products.

Bonsai Grade Haydite should be mixed with the appropriate amount of organics and loam. Local climactic conditions will dictate what type of soil blend you should use for successful bonsai propagation.

Turface

Turface is widely available and reasonably priced. It is a calcinated clay product. If you get it for your bonsai mix be sure to get the variety MVP.

Turface is primarily used in athletic fields. It is designed to shed water and, as to water retention, it is most like sand. If Turface is used, I advise it not be used as the sole component in potting any plant. But it does have value giving structure and drainage to a mixture if used in minor portions, (*I would suggest never more than 33% of the mix*). Turface has no nutritional value. Turface is dusty. I wash mine in water before use in a mix. Although it is best if the potting mixture is dry when potting, damp Turface works as it doesn't clump.

Sand

Many growers use or recommend sand in their mixtures. Sand does help give structure and aids drainage. Avoid fine sands, and especially ocean beach sands because of their salt content. I get a coarse sand from a local landscape supply company. After I wash and sift out the fines, I can use only about half the volume I bought. I never exceed about 20% of the mix, usually less.

An excellent alternative, #12 grit, is used in construction. It is not easy to find. Its chief value is that it is sharp and rough and a little more coarse than the sands that are generally available. Most available sand is smooth. The coarse and sharp characteristic of grit holds moisture better, but still drains well.

Vermiculite

Vermiculite holds and releases moisture, and is valuable in giving texture. Vermiculite, like all the other mineral components, brings no nutritional value to the mix. Vermiculite is very light and does not give any mechanical weight to the soil mix, and thus does not

contribute to the 'foundation' values of the soil mix for holding the tree upright in the pot. Relatively small in size, vermiculite is a good mineral component for small shohin or mame bonsai.

Perlite

I have preferred perlite to vermiculite primarily because it is available in several larger particle sizes than vermiculite which is relatively small. Otherwise its general characteristics are similar to vermiculite.

NOTE: *The dust from perlite, reportedly, is as dangerous as asbestos dust. Whether true or not, I use great caution when handling perlite. I wash it rather than sift, to clean out the dust particles so they don't float about in the air.*

Lava rock and pumice

Both lava rock and pumice are volcanic in origin and have similar properties. They are porous, so hold some water in a soil mix. They have no nutritional value. They are fairly cheap, especially if you can find a bulk source. Sometimes several people can get together and buy a half yard and split it. That makes it pretty cheap. Both come in several sizes. A small, about 3/8", particle size pumice is sold at the feed stores. It is used as a bedding material for horse stalls and is called 'Dry Stall'. It is cheap and good, although quite dusty. Again I wash mine rather than sift it.

Small lava rock is available from some Bonsai nurseries. Lava rock comes in several usable sizes. Small dark or black lava rock 1/8" or 3/16" is available and is sometimes used as a topping both for appearance and to protect the roots.

Pumice, like akadama, may be used as a specialty soil for sick trees or trees with root problems. But great care must be taken that the tree and soil do not dry out and that adequate fertilization is maintained. If used to plant a tree with poor or weak roots, in a short period strong vigorous roots may develop as in akadama. Pumice requires greater attention to watering. For this purpose akadama, in spite of its greater cost, may be a better choice.

Other mineral components

Poultry grit is used by some. It is easily available and economic. If you get poultry grit, **be sure it is not crushed sea shells**.

Cat litter

Cat litter is a calcinated clay product. It is fairly small in size, but not fine. If you get cat litter **be sure it is unscented**.

Crushed granite

In the high Sierras you can almost always find piles of crushed granite off of little side roads where you can gather a few gallons. It is good stuff, giving structure and weight to the potting mix. Wash it, dry it in the sun, then sift it to get the sizes you'll want for your mix.

Most landscape supply stores carry crushed granite, and it is not very expensive. Crushed granite is heavy

and may be best used with smaller or medium sized pots as it will make large trees heavier and more difficult to move.

A final note on mineral, i.e. non organic, soil components

They do not have or contribute significant nutritional elements to the soil mix, but they will release small amounts of their chemical makeup over time. This is not adequate to meet the needs of living trees and is so marginal, it should be discounted when considering fertilizing requirements. Mineral components give important structure to the potting soil, keeping it more porous than just organic material or fine soils.

Organic components

Many bonsai enthusiasts now use akadama as the sole component of their potting soils for pines and junipers. I live in the Diablo Valley with very hot and dry summers and prefer some organic material in my mixes to help with moisture retention and soil temperature control. The organics do not heat up, or (in our mild winters) get as cold as swiftly or as much as mineral components. Tree roots are adapted to the more moderate ground temperatures and may be stressed by large temperature swings and the significantly higher and lower temperatures of the small bonsai pots. Organic components in the soil mixture help to moderate both water loss and temperature swings. But pure akadama mixes works well in the more moderate climates of the communities around the San Francisco Bay, and some enthusiasts in the inland valleys have good results using only akadama.

Many sources recommend either pine bark or fir bark. Both are good organic components. Availability and price may be the deciding factor. Organic material breaks down over time in the pot environment, and that provides needed nutrients to the roots. That break down also creates acidic by-products that increase the soil acidity (decreases the pH). This is generally very moderate, depending on the local water characteristics. East Bay Water is generally very slightly acidic. Contra Costa Water District tends to be slightly alkaline.

Fir bark is more readily available in the San Francisco Bay Area than pine bark. Some folks swear by one and swear at the other. I know of no factual data to go one way or the other.

Other components now easily available include coco-chips and Oak Leaf Mold. Some composted materials are also available. Be careful of Oak Leaf Mold or composted material as they may contain insect eggs or larvae. If you use these, the old Japanese tactic of spreading it out in the sun for a week to ten days is a good option. I bake my potting soil mixes for about 40 minutes either outdoors on the barbeque or in the oven at about 325 degrees to kill any obnoxious residents. Solar is more economic and environmentally friendly. Since we generally repot here in the winter months, if you choose to do the solar sterilization, you may need to start in October or November to have your soils ready for potting.

Bonsai Calendar

- Sun – gradually move shaded deciduous trees into sun to promote fall color.
- Watering – Water regularly, but don't over-water.
- Fertilizing – Use low or zero nitrogen fertilizers.
- Repotting – Begin repotting redwood, shimpaku and quince after mid-month. Begin repotting flowering and fruiting varieties of prunus.
- Styling/Pruning – Remove seed pods and dry fruit. Do not wire deciduous trees until leaves drop. Renew pinching junipers and severely prune one last time this season.
- Insect and disease control – Maintain defensive treatments for fungus. Remove dead plant material. Watch for and treat insect infestations.
- Propogating/Collecting – Last opportunity to take hardwood cuttings from deciduous trees. Last opportunity to remove air-layers this year.

Refer to the EBBS Bonsai Calendar for more details on seasonal care.

Bonsai Instruction at Merritt College

These workshops are a splendid opportunity to learn about how to develop your trees into first class bonsai that you would be proud of. In these workshops you work on your own tree under the guidance of an experienced bonsai artist. These classes are open to all experience levels.

The workshops are held at 7:00 pm on the fourth Monday of each month when the college is in session. The meetings are in the Landscape Building at Merritt College, which is located in the Oakland hills off Redwood road. Leading the workshops are two members of EBBS, Bill Castellon and Randall Lee. Interested parties can contact Bill at 510-569-8003 or Randall at 510-864-0841. The workshops are free (except for a nominal parking fee) and are a wonderful experience. All you need to take advantage of them is to just show up tree in hand.

Events by Others

GSBF's Bonsai and Suiseki Garden: open Wed., Thurs., Fri. 11:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m., Sat. 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., Sun. 12:00 noon–4:00 p.m. Enter at gate across from Boat House.

Articles or Services for Sale (or give-away)

Wanted to Buy (or for free)

Each membership household, free of charge, may place a five-line ad related to bonsai in four newsletters each year. Send a copy of ads to your editor by the fourth Monday of the month to appear in the next publication. To place an add call (925) 458-3845.

East Bay Bonsai Society—Schedule for 2014
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Regular Meetings: Second Wednesday, every month (except August and October) @ 7:30 p.m.

Place: Lakeside Garden Center, 666 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland.

Visitors welcome—for more information: call: (925) 431-0452

Website for Bonsai Garden Lake Merritt: <http://www.gsbf-bonsai.org/lake-merritt/NewHome.html>

Meeting Program

Sept 10	Show Prep
Sept 28	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Don Meeker & Linda Soliven
Oct	No club meeting due to proximity to show
Oct 26	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – J D Lin
Nov 12	Juniper Jubilee – Mike Pistello
Nov 23	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – John Nackley
Dec 10	Holiday Dinner

Special Event

Oct 11-12 Fall Show – Matt Reel

Nov 15 Wiring Workshop – John Doig
