Volume LXV, No. 10 October 2026

THE TREE SHRINKER

Next EBBS meeting: October 7th, 2026

October 2026 Meeting Preview – Accent Plant Workshop

Since our annual show is just around the corner, we thought it would be timely to have an accent plant workshop. So, this month we will be doing just that. We had hired Lucy Judd to present and lead us, but unfortunately an accident has made it impossible for her to attend. We will miss Lucy and we wish her a speedy recovery. In her place we will continue to have the workshop but without the formal presentation or the broadcast to our home audience.

This year the club has invested roughly **$500 to purchase dozens of accent plants** for members to use in their creations during the meeting. This is one meeting where the club is putting real resources behind helping us all build wonderful accent plantings—so everyone is invited to come and take full advantage of this opportunity.

If you will be creating an accent for the show, it will help to bring the tree that will be in the show to guide you on your accent building, so feel free to bring it and the pot it will reside in.

When creating accent plants remember that they should only be as tall as the top of your pot on the stand. They should also reflect the season they will be shown in and be plants that would naturally grow near the type of tree you have. For instance, if you have a redwood bonsai, a fern would be a good choice in an accent plant.

EBBS will be providing soil, a variety of plants, and a roll of mesh for the bottoms of the pots. Wire will not be needed as accents are not wired into the pot. Bring a couple of small pots to plant in, gloves, tools and moss if you have some. Bringing extra pots for others would be appreciated as well. You can also bring your own plants to pot if you have acquired any. There should be several experienced members attending to help the rest of us with the design and planting.

Refreshments will be provided by:

- Ray Lesperance
- Ed Smyth
- Alison Seaman

2026 EBBS Schedule

Regular meetings
2nd Wednesday every month at 7:30pm **except September and October which will occur on the 1st Wednesday of those months.**

Oct 7 - Accent plant workshop at 7:30pm (no pre-meeting workshop)

This meeting is also the pickup for anyone participating in the bulk soil purchase, so please plan to collect your order.

Nov 11 - 7:30pm workshop to get trees ready for the show.

Nov 13 Annual Show Setup at 6:00pm

Nov 14-15 Annual Show

Dec 9 - Annual Holiday Party, set up at 6:00pm.

Intro to Bonsai schedule 2026

October 25 - Tom Colby
November 22 - Addison Galambos

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
Not recommended at this time except for tropical and semi-tropical trees.

Styling/Pruning
Remove seed pods and dry fruit.

Do not wire deciduous trees until leaves drop.

Once conifers are bushy, have runners and the foliage has hardened off, you can wire and style them, including cutting back. Renew pinching junipers and severely prune one last time this season.

Propagating/Collecting
Fall is a great time to perform side grafting on conifers, such as Junipers and Pines. It's the last opportunity to take hardwood cuttings from deciduous trees. It's also the last opportunity to remove air-layers this year.

Insect and disease control
Maintain defensive treatments for fungus. Remove dead plant material. Watch for and treat insect infestations.

Refer to EBBS Bonsai Seasonal guide for more info on care.

Accent Plants for Bonsai Display

(In Japanese "Shitakusa," which means the small undergrowth)

Bonsai are typically displayed in a show with an accent. This accent could be a small suiseki stone, a small figure, or most often an accent plant. Why is there an accent?



A grass-and-foliage accent planting.

In this article, I outline general guidelines gleaned from talks with Polly Gould, Young Choe, Jonas Dupuich, and by studying Japanese show books and YouTube videos from the Kokofu-ten shows, the Japanese book, "Katayama School of Keido, the Original School of Japanese Traditional Display Arrangements" by Katayama Ichiu, and David De Groot's book, "Principles of Bonsai Design" (which has a large chapter on bonsai display, including show design display). Keep in mind, I am not an expert and these are only my conclusions from study.

My personal interpretation of these resources allows me to offer this reason why we use accents in bonsai display. Accents can convey time of year or location, tell a story, or simply provide additional visual interest. We can also use the "Art of Bonsai Display" to elevate our trees to a higher art to tell a story or even to evoke an emotion. For example, we can strive to suggest a story of the tree's history and hardship, or to set a mood of a lovely summer picnic underneath a California coastal redwood.

The "story" of your tree can be specific or vague. The bonsai tree is always the dominant subject of your display. The eye should go to the bonsai first. The accent should be humble, secondary and should harmonize with the bonsai—not fight with it for attention. Some guidelines to achieve this especially with accent plants are below, but like other "rules" in the art of bonsai, these are general guidelines, not set in stone.

Use the accent to contribute to the story of the tree by suggesting the season (of the show) or the bonsai's natural habitat

- The accent is most often used to suggest or accentuate the season of the show, and/or the natural habitat of where the bonsai tree grows in the wild.
- An ideal accent plant would contain plants that grow normally in the wild under the bonsai tree species you are showing. If the accent plant grows in the wild with the native bonsai tree, the accent will always be in the right season year-round. (See Jonas Dupuich's example of plants that grow with Sierra junipers: bonsaitonight.com/2019/06/25/sierra-wildflowers-natures-accent-plants/)
- Another example from iNaturalist of what grows in our native California coastal redwood forests: inaturalist.org/guides/5143

- For junipers and pines, which do not show strong seasonality themselves, a seasonally relevant accent can be important. For example, accent plants that turn red in fall would work well with evergreen conifers shown in fall.
- In general, avoid accent plants from vastly different habitats than your bonsai. For example, tropical plants are not usually appropriate with non-tropical trees.

Contrasting the accent with the bonsai helps to express the tree's story

- The pot of the bonsai and the accent should contrast in both shape and glaze. A bonsai in a rectangular unglazed pot could be paired with a round or oval glazed accent pot. The accent and bonsai pots should not be the same color or shape—though the accent pot can be a similar level of artisan skill or value as the bonsai pot.
- If the bonsai is in flower, the accent should not be in flower. If the bonsai is not in flower, the accent plant can be (if in the right season), but doesn't have to be.
- The foliage of the bonsai should contrast with the foliage of the accent in both color and form. For example, a pine bonsai could have a broad-leaf accent plant such as a red oxalis. A grass accent may not work with a pine bonsai if the shape of the leaves is very similar.

Stands

- All bonsai trees and accent plants are displayed on a stand. The stand for the accent is less formal and less tall than the stand of the primary bonsai. Most often, accent plants are displayed on a wooden slab (or jita in Japanese). The color and texture of the bonsai and accent stands should contrast rather than match, with the bonsai stand being the "stronger" or more dominant color and texture.

Placement of accent relative to bonsai

- The bonsai and accent should lean towards each other, or towards the viewer.
- The accent plant should be placed in the spot where an imaginary line drawn from the bonsai crown would hit the table top. You can use your arm or a straight edge to estimate placement.
- The accent plant should be forward of the bonsai.

General appearance of the accent

- Accent plants should convey great age, like the bonsai. Some accent plants are many years old. However, accent plants can be made shortly before the show if care is taken to make them look old.
- Accent plants can contain a single species, or a few different species, generally an odd number.
- The plants should completely fill the pot; this contributes to the appearance of age.
- No soil should show. If soil is visible, it can be covered with live moss (rather than top dressing). Any kind of moss can be a feature of the accent. Imagine the tree in nature—moss is often on the shady ground in many habitats.

Relative heights of bonsai and accent

- The height of the accent, including its stand, should in general not exceed the height of the top of the bonsai display stand (or the bottom of the bonsai pot). For cascade bonsai, the accent is much shorter than the top of the cascade stand.
- For three-point displays, the secondary bonsai including stand is almost always about the height of the top of the primary bonsai's stand. The accent plant (the third point) is not taller than the top of the secondary bonsai pot—these accents are very tiny.
- For two-point displays, the accent plant is a little larger than an accent in the three-point display, but not as big as the secondary bonsai. Accents in a two-point display are never taller than the height of the primary bonsai stand, and are usually shorter.
- In general, the overall height of the accent (including flowers or stalks) is never taller than one third of the height of the bonsai and its stand. Usually, the accent with its stand is 1/4 to 1/6 the height of the bonsai with its stand.
- If suiseki are used in place of an accent plant, they are even smaller than the accent plant would be.

A Gallery of Accent Plantings










Accent plant examples from club shows and the Kokofu-ten exhibitions.

— written by Lisa Harper

September Meeting Recap

Bonsai Design with Sam Tan

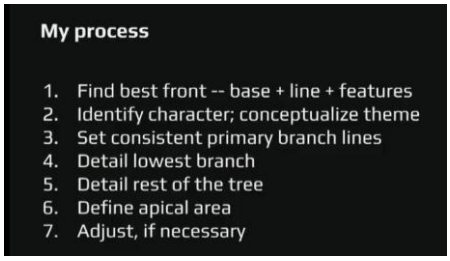


Sam Tan presents on bonsai design.

Sam Tan delivered for us a hot-off-the-press, freshly authored presentation on Bonsai Design that members agreed was thought-provoking, educational, and richer than a loamy patch of high Sierra soil after a fresh rainfall! Nuggets of insight abounded throughout the up-against-the-clock 2-hour seminar, and members would be well-served to check out the recording of our September meeting which is available by-request to anyone that would like to watch or re-watch it. Just reach out to Addison if you want access to the recorded presentation.

For those that prefer a watered-down amateur's summary of the meeting instead of the raw and unfiltered original you're in the right place; I'll do my best to deliver some of the juiciest morsels below without stepping on the quality overmuch:

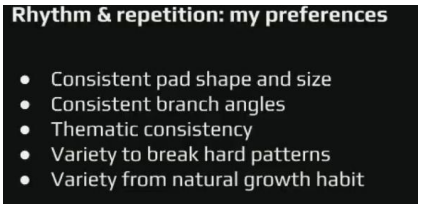
Design as a Noun – Not a Verb – this was a discussion of how to analyze the design of a finished bonsai, not how to undertake the action of design; although we did at the very end get a glimpse into Sam's actual design process the substance of the presentation was focused on understanding why trees make us feel the way they do.



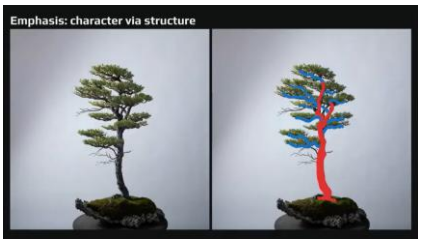
Sam's 7-step design process.

Design is an art-concept with a history as old as the bristlecones – Many if-not-all artforms involve design to some degree and so it has been studied exhaustively. Sam drew the principles of the discussion from Berkeley University academic literature focused on design in the context of modern art. It was a great foundation for concepts that were then metaphorically painted onto photographs from a variety of the best bonsai around – the Kokofu (Japan's premier bonsai exhibit), Mirai (the garden of bonsai pro Ryan Neil), and Sam Tan's personal collection. Some of the design concepts that we explored in-depth included:

- Line
- Movement
- Emphasis
- Balance
- Proportion
- Rhythm



Sam's approach to rhythm in bonsai styling.



Emphasis: character revealed through structure.

Dancing to the rhythm of the rain – Having been doing bonsai for less than three years learning something new is like buying a plant – it happens to me literally all the time! Still, the idea of finding a rhythm built into the design of my favorite trees was incredibly thought provoking. If there is rhythm in bonsai design what does it mean for that rhythm to be staccato or legato? What kinds of tempo or texture or timbre can the rhythms of our bonsai design have?

Emphasizzle dizzle – Probably my biggest takeaway was the idea of emphasis. For a bonsai to invoke strong feelings in its viewers, the artist must have made a choice about what to emphasize within the design. There should be a theme or a character or a personality or a feeling that you are whispering to the viewer through the emphasis that you create within your design. In some trees that whisper needs to be a song sung at full belt.

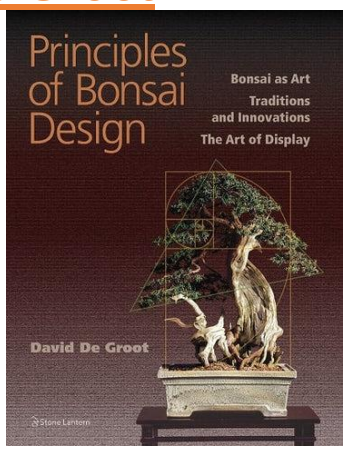
I couldn't help but notice that the second step of Sam's styling process is to identify the character of the tree and then conceptualize a theme that *emphasizes* this character. I've attempted many times to style and improve my trees but I have never thought about emphasizing my tree's character as a critical step of that process or if I have it was subconscious and subsuccessful.

Meet the Headliner: David De Groot

We are honored to welcome David De Groot as the headliner for this year's EBBS Annual Show & Sale. Dave is one of the most respected figures in American bonsai, having served for nearly three decades as the curator of the Pacific Bonsai Museum (formerly the Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection) in Federal Way, Washington. Over that long tenure he cared for one of the finest public bonsai collections in the country and helped introduce countless visitors to the art.

Dave is also the author of Principles of Bonsai Design, a thoughtful and widely referenced guide that breaks down the aesthetics of bonsai into clear, teachable concepts—from movement and proportion to the art of display. His writing reflects decades of hands-on experience and a gift for making complex ideas approachable.

As a teacher, demonstrator, and judge, Dave is known for his warmth, patience, and deep knowledge. Throughout the weekend he will lead a headliner talk and demonstration, guide BYOT (bring your own tree) workshops, and offer a Sunday show critique—a rare chance to have your tree evaluated by a true master. Be sure to bring your questions and your trees, and join us in giving Dave a warm East Bay welcome.

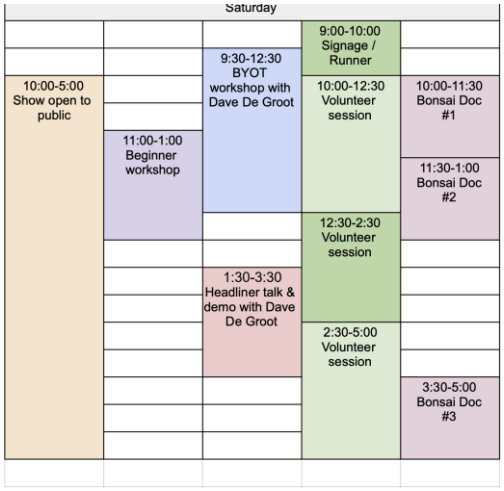


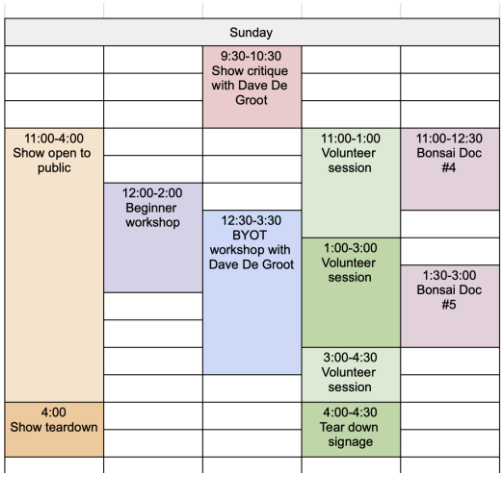
Dave's book, Principles of Bonsai Design. Can be purchased at Stone Lantern

[Principles of Bonsai Design by David De Groot – Stone Lantern]

EBBS Club Show Schedule

Join us for the East Bay Bonsai Society Annual Show & Sale at the Lakeside Garden Center, 666 Bellevue Ave, Oakland, CA. The show is open to the public Saturday, November 14 (10:00 AM-5:00 PM) and Sunday, November 15 (11:00 AM-4:00 PM). Setup begins Friday, November 13 at 6:00 PM, and teardown follows the Sunday close at 4:00 PM. The full weekend schedule of workshops, demos, volunteer sessions, and Bonsai Doc appointments is below.





Show Volunteers Needed

Our Annual Show only runs smoothly with member support, and we need volunteers across several areas this year. Please consider lending a hand in one or more of the following roles:

- Plant Sales – cashiers and sales-floor help, plus security to keep watch over the sales area.
- Signage Setup – posting directional and display signage before the show opens.
- Reception – greeting visitors and answering questions at the front table.
- Security & Hospitality – helping monitor the show floor and keeping our guests comfortable.

Please sign up for a shift on our SignUpGenius page: signupgenius.com/go/10C094DADAA2FA6FACF8-65370265-november.

Plant sale forms and tags are attached to this newsletter email for anyone who would like to print them ahead of time. Printed copies will also be available at the October 7 meeting, so you can pick them up and get your plants tagged before show day.

Join the conversation! Upcoming Bonsai Events

facebook.com/groups/ebbs

facebook.com/groups/ebbsmembers

instagram.com/eastbaybonsai/

twitter.com/EastBayBonsai

www.eastbaybonsai.org

Member Ads

Each member can run two free ads in the newsletter yearly. Email EBBS_Distribution@yahoo.com to submit your ad.

Contributors

Editor: Nick Vila
Contributors:

- Bev Martinez – October Meeting Preview
- Lisa Harper – Accent Plants
- Michael Szabo – Club schedule
- Nick Vila – September meeting recap

Composed with the help of Copilot AI

Upcoming Bonsai Events

Chino Bonsai Club 6th Annual Bonsai Exhibit
Oct 03, 2026, 9:00 AM – Oct 04, 2026, 5:00 PM
Chùa Quan Thê Âm (Vietnamese Temple), 12292 Magnolia St, Garden Grove, CA 92841, USA

Bonsai & ikebana – Midori Bonsai Club 63rd Annual Bonsai Show
Oct 03, 2026, 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Quinlan Community Center, 10185 N Stelling Rd, Cupertino, CA 95014, USA

Volunteer with EBBS

Looking for something meaningful and fun to do? Look no further than your own club!
EBBS needs members that can apply their talents to many different tasks. From newsletter editor to monthly photographer to cameraman at meetings. If interested in supporting your club and volunteering for these positions, send an email to Addison Galambos (Barcalod@gmail.com) or EBBS_Distribution@yahoo.com.

Open positions include:

- Newsletter editor – Publishes monthly Tree Shrinker; edits, adds articles and schedules in newsletter.
- Photographer – Takes pictures at meetings and functions to be used in the monthly newsletter, Instagram and Facebook.
- Cameraman – Manages the camera at meetings to ensure it is positioned correctly
- Raffle coordinator/caller – Sells raffle tickets and calls out winning numbers
- Boom operators – Holds microphones for q/a during club meetings