



THE TREE SHRINKER

Next EBBS meeting: September 2nd, 2026

September 2026 Meeting Preview – Sam Tan on Bonsai Design



Sam is the previous president of the Bonsai Society of San Francisco. He is a passionate practitioner who enjoys creating bonsai from native North American species. Sam studied bonsai under Ryan Neil at Bonsai Mirai, where he interned in 2019. He exhibited his work at the 2022 Pacific Bonsai Expo and again in 2024, at which time he also served as a demonstrator. He regularly posts his work on Instagram at [@samtanbonsai](https://www.instagram.com/samtanbonsai).

Sam's talk will explore the elements and principles of bonsai design. Using case studies from his personal collection and beyond, he will show how he applies these ideas in practice while offering a framework for analyzing, appreciating, and creating bonsai.

Refreshments will be provided by:

- Mike Cullen
- John Shiffer
- Ron Reid

2026 EBBS Schedule

Regular meetings

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

Sept 2 – Sam Tan on Bonsai
Design, **6:30pm + pre-meeting
workshop**

Oct 7 - Lucy Judd will once again
delight us with accent plantings at
7:30 (no pre-meeting workshop)

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

September 27 - Nick Vila

October 25 - Tom Colby

November 22 - Addison Galambos

Bonsai Calendar - September

Sun

Gradually move shaded deciduous trees into sun to promote fall color.

Fertilizing

Use low or zero nitrogen fertilizers

Repotting

Not recommended at this time except for tropical and semitropical 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

Rotate trees at least twice this month to promote symmetry as canopy completes period of rapid growth.

Watering

Monitor automatic watering systems during hot months. Mist leaves of Satsuki azaleas during hot spells. Water regularly, but don't overwater..

Fundamentals of Bonsai Display with Jonas Dupuich



Jonas discussing display principles with a two-tree display featuring Steven's Oregon Ash and an accompanying olive tree

In August we had Jonas Dupuich lead an interactive club meeting focused on helping evaluate the principles of bonsai display using member trees, stands and accents. This kind of exercise is always a wonderful refresher in advance of our own club's upcoming show in November; and who better to learn from than a bonsai professional with a prolific history of participating and running bonsai exhibitions including the Pacific Bonsai Expo (happening again next February) and the Bay Island Bonsai exhibitions from a time long ago!

We had wonderful engagement this month with members bringing in trees that showcased a wide range of development stages and display concepts. Here were some of my biggest takeaways from the meeting:

- **Variety is the spice that flavors your display!** - A display is made up of many components: trees, stands and slabs, accent plants and of course the pots you're your plants reside in playing a huge role in the overall display. The more variety you can have across all these elements the more interesting your display can be. Repeating stand shapes, stand colors, pot shapes, pot colors, tree types, and foliage types can make your display feel homogenous.
- **Love for the Natives** – Multiple club members showed examples of trees that have been grown from seed and represent California native species including Oregon Ash and White Alder. For the owners of these trees there was a consistent interest in evoking a display theme of California native ecosystems. The main elements reflective of the environment and geography are the trees and accent plants but even the stands can carry the theme forward. There are myriad reasons to focus on environmental insinuation as a theme for a display although Jonas pointed out this is a somewhat Western predilection. Although less common in Japanese bonsai tradition I like to think that interest in native display themes stems from our community's common understanding that native species contribute overwhelming value to long-term environmental sustainability.



Itoigawa Juniper from Michael Szabo

- **The mother daughter design** – Multi-trunk style trees are telling a story that should be reflected within the height, size, and thickness of the trunks. Your tallest trunk should be your thickest trunk and vice versa. And one of the easiest ways to help guide your tree toward the right relationship of heights, thickness and overall impact is by creating deadwood (on junipers especially)
- **Display layout** – Put your biggest components furthest away from the viewer and then order the elements progressively closer to the viewer based on their size and presence in the display.



Michael Jensen Akula's shohin olive

- **The smaller the tree the more important your branching** - One of Michael's big questions was how to develop a shohin size tree (trees that will measure less than 8" from the height of the canopy to the base of the surface roots). Jonas discussed the importance of having well placed and dense branching to create a convincing overall proportion for such a small scale.
- **Stand features** – The shape of your stand is very flexible. As long as your pot fits comfortably on the stand you can explore shapes and sizes that complement the other elements of your display. Stand height should try to bring the tree to slightly below eye level if possible.

From the Bonsai Garden

The garden is looking for volunteers to help in the daily tasks that keep the garden running smoothly. If you are interested in helping, volunteers can sign up on website at

<https://bonsailakemerritt.com/>.

For more information on the positions contact Suzanne Muller at queueinteriors@comcast.net.

Positions available:

- Docent coordinator and scheduler
 - Bookkeeper
 - Docents
- Instagram Manager
 - Director Assistant
- Writers for Articles & Publications

Save the date!
Mammoth Fundraiser January
23-24, 2027.

Book Club Review – The Hidden Life of Trees

By: Nick Vila

Last month I introduced my book club review project; read one bonsai-related book per month and share a review focused on highlighting the ideas in the book that we can all apply in our bonsai practice. At the time it felt like a good way to get more reflective about bonsai. Unfortunately, the change of pace was more jarring than if I had spent all night boppin at a Wu-Tang Clan concert then been forced to go straight to Sunday morning mass. You could say I struggled a bit with this book and its slow pace. Maybe the experience of reading this book is the real hidden life of trees.

The Hidden Life of Trees is a full to bursting with interesting information about trees, forests, weather patterns, soil, pests and disease, wildlife and all the nature that surrounds a forest ecosystem. It approaches these topics with science and research that lay a strong foundation of credibility, but it also strains to connect each of its observations with the idea that trees have a life journey paralleling our own human experience. This need to anthropomorphize undermines the book's scientific credentials quite a bit. Another club member said it better than I could: *"A lovely and pleasant read although a touch saccharine on the personification front"*. *Hidden Life...* is a thought provoking but scattered collection of observations from a forest manager using metaphors that are sometimes inspiring but other times excessively romantic.

Even so, I found much worthy of reflection in this book. My favorite thoughts, anecdotes and themes:

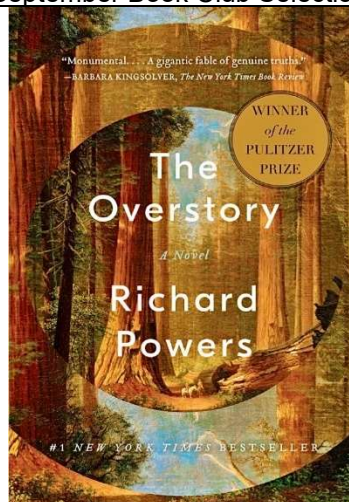
- The effects of climate change are powerfully documented in this book; these discussions made me wonder how the ancient forms that we strive to re-create in bonsai design will also be affected by climate change. Will the ancient trees that people observe 1000 years from now have aesthetic features that are distinctly attributable to the effects of global warming? Will wind-influenced design stand alongside "global warming induced" design?
- One of the author's suggestions for addressing climate change focuses on conservation efforts in old growth forests. It turns out that the oldest trees on the planet are also the best at carbon capture by a huge margin. Quite an interesting inversion of my own expectation – I would have thought 1000+ year old trees would lose efficiency in their ability to capture carbon dioxide through photosynthesis, but the exact opposite is true. **"If we want to use forests as a weapon in the fight against climate change, then we must allow them to grow old."**
- Plants can store memories! I found this particularly amazing; a species of fern instinctively retracts its fronds upon contact, but in a controlled experiment, the plant was able to learn that a dripping stream of water would pose no danger and eventually stop triggering its reflexive withdrawal. A month later this learned behavior was still observable. The author hypothesizes that these memories would likely be stored in the tree roots and even cites scientific research that has found a parallel between structures of root tips and neural networks in the human brain. [Read about the original experiment](#) – **"It is now an accepted fact that the root network is in charge of all chemical activity in the tree."**
- The structure of European beech trees functions as a funnel driving rainwater inward to the trees' surface roots. Deciduous tree design is commonly approached with an "up and out" style and branch shape, but I have never thought about how this structure helps to collect more water than a coniferous tree shape. The next time I wire out a Japanese maple I can reflect on whether my results have a functional ability to funnel rainwater. **"Rain falls on hundreds of thousands of leaves, and the moisture drips from them down onto the twigs. From there, it runs along the branches, where the tiny streams of water unite into a river that rushes down the trunk. By the times it reaches the lower part of the trunk, the water is shooting down so fast that when it hits the ground, it foams up. During a severe storm, a mature tree can down an additional couple of hundred gallons of water that, thanks to its construction, it funnels to its roots. There, the water is stored in the surrounding soil, where it can help the tree over the next few dry spells."**
- In Central Europe there is not a single remaining old growth forest left standing. The largest stand of trees is under 200 year old. This was quite sad to think about, but it inspired me to consider that a deciduous bonsai forest featuring European Beech carries on a representation of something that the world has otherwise lost – a look into the ancient forest forms of old-growth European forests from hundreds of years ago.
- German humor: **"It's no skin off an old oak's back if a wild boar wants to use its bark as a scratching post"** – All of the oldest trees in a forest show sign of natural wildlife interacting with them.

- The author observed the following regarding the shape of 200 year old tree crowns – **“deciduous trees produce growth that becomes shorter and shorter every year leading to curved claw-like branches that resemble fingers plagued by arthritis. Pine trees redirect their growth [from vertical to lateral] even earlier so that by the time they reach old age, the whole crown is wide with no visible leader.”**
- These observations about the growing habits of yew in European forests are strikingly similar to the behavior of our local redwood forests: **“Right from the beginning, [yew] puts considerably more energy into building up its root system than other species of tree. Here, it stashes away nutrients, and if misfortune strikes above ground, it grows right back without missing a beat. This often leads to the formation of multiple trunks , which may merge when the tree reaches an advanced age, giving the tree an untidy appearance. And boy can these trees grow old!”**
- Trees have an incredible power to change the micro climate around them. When a beech forest becomes well established several changes to the micro climate can be observed: the annual leaf fall creates alkaline humus that begins storing moisture and raising humidity. The large canopy of the forest interrupts wind currents reducing evaporation and preserving that humidity created by the humus. The trees have more water available in the root system allowing them to grow larger and transpire more. The impact of an established forest on the temperatures can be as dramatic as more than 50 degrees! I wonder if we could ever represent a tree's self-created microclimate within our bonsais.

“‘And when I go, only a part of me is gone’ – This phrase from a hit by German pop singer Peter Maffay could have been written by a tree.”

There were many other interesting topics throughout this book and I would happily recommend it to anyone that has a passion or interest in trees and how they work.

September Book Club Selection:



The Overstory: A Novel— “No fewer than five people have gifted or suggested this book to me, and I’ve done about the same for others. A reviewer wrote, “...trees...are both the stealth protagonists and the beating, fine-grained heart of this strange, marvelous book.” It’s a Pulitzer Prize winner, a generational effort, and, if you have the emotional bandwidth for a deep dive of several generations of people and their lives with trees, worth it. A delicious set of stories.” – Michael

EBBS Annual Picnic Potluck

A great big Thank you to Michael and Marilyn Jensen-Akula for again opening their beautiful home for our annual picnic. It was great to get together with new and older members to break bread and enjoy the conversation. We had 23 members join in and they brought delicious meals from international cuisines. We also had a show and tell of various bonsais and a hosted tour of Jensen's beautiful gardens.

If you haven't joined us, please plan to next year. Just the view is worth the time the effort.

Pics from the picnic



View from the garden



Janet Nelson



Ernie Katler



Laurien Fiddes



Alex Chaney



Mike Cullen



Jeremy Stevermer



Michael Jensen-Akula

Front Row: Ellen Federini, Tom Fedor, Dennis Miu, Laurien Fides, Janet Nelson, Manas Kanungo, Beverly Martinez, Julie Holcomb, Dennis Hawkins, Ann & Ernie Katler.

Back Row: Shawn Shokoor, Angela & David Lucas, Rick Trumm, Jim Link, Mike Cullen, Ray Lesperance, Jeremy Stevermer, Michael Jensen-Akula, Alex Chaney

Not Pictured: Marilyn Jensen-Akula, Uri Aono, Michael Teide

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 camera man 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

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

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Addison Galambos
Bev Martinez
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Upcoming Bonsai Events

American Bonsai Association Sacramento Live Auction & Consignment Sale

Sep 19, 2026, 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Shepard Garden and Arts Center, 3330 McKinley Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95816, USA

Chino Bonsai Club 6th Annual Bonsai Exhibit - Sat, Oct 03

Chùa Quan Thê Âm (Vietnamese Temple)

Don't miss our bonsai exhibit, daily afternoon demonstrations by David Nguy, Saturday evening live auction and consignment sales, Sunday morning kids workshop (limit 10). See flyer below for more details.