



# The Tree Shrinker

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A MONTHLY BULLETIN

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## East Bay Bonsai Society

### May Meeting:

May 13, 2015 @ 7:30 p.m.

### President's Note

It's May and that means our trees and gardens are in full swing. So is EBBS. This month we have our very own Bill Castellon doing a presentation on bunjin style trees. It should be a great meeting. The momentum continues in June with our annual Frolic in the Garden, where we get to view the bonsai trees and get a behind-the-scenes tour of the Bonsai Garden Lake Merritt.

It was a great time in April for those of us who went on the field trip to Lone Pine Gardens. It was an opportunity to purchase trees, pots, figurines, and succulents, and enjoy the lunchtime company of other club members. It was also an opportunity to get opinions from other members before purchasing a tree.

Now is the time to start thinking about what trees you want to sell or donate to the club at our July auction. The auction is a big source of club funds, and your help and contribution will be greatly appreciated.

Happy bonsai'ng!

Michael

### Special Notice

**In May, the Bonsai Instruction at Merritt College will be on May 11<sup>th</sup> instead of May 25<sup>th</sup>.**

### May Meeting

The May meeting will feature a presentation by Bill Castellon on how to create and maintain bunjin style trees. The bunjin style is also known by the perhaps more familiar name of literati style. These trees are tall and slender and feature a minimum of branching. Really good bunjin style trees are not often seen, and the program promises to be a learning experience for all of us. Many members know Bill either as one of the fine bonsai artists who leads the workshops at Merritt College, or from the many splendid programs that Bill has presented in the past. He is an excellent speaker and his subject is one that should not be missed.

Thanks in advance to Pat Cahill, Bill Rice and Michael Hylton for offering to provide refreshments to the meeting.

### June Meeting

The June meeting will be held at the Bonsai Garden Lake Merritt. Two EBBS members will present a behind the scenes tour of the garden. Janice Dilbeck is in charge of the collected trees under the direction of the curator, Kathy Shaner. These trees are mainly California and Sierra Junipers and are probably the most spectacular trees in the collection. Janice will tell us how she manages them. Bob Gould has been intimately connected with the bonsai garden since its inception, and he serves many roles. One of his most visible activities is leading tours of the garden.



Hopefully this meeting will not be your first visit to the garden, but this may be your first chance to see important people on the garden staff in action.

### April Meeting

The April meeting focused on short presentations by four EBBS members and was directed toward subjects that are helpful to newer members. Bob Gould discussed tips on how to choose a tree that will eventually make a fine bonsai. Once you have selected a tree, the next step is to plant it in a bonsai pot. Bob

gave pointers on how to choose the best pot for your tree. He gave out a very detailed handout summarizing his comments, and the handout is attached to this newsletter.



Once your tree is in the bonsai pot, Janice Dilbeck detailed the whys and wherefores on how to apply wire to the tree so that the tree can be shaped into a fine bonsai. She also discussed tools that you need to work on your tree. Janice also supplied a handout which covered the material that she presented and is attached to this newsletter.

The attached handouts reflect many years of study by two very fine bonsai artists. Together they present a simple summary of essential facts that you need in your own journey as a bonsai artist, and are both well worth your while to read carefully.

Tom Colby gave an overview of how your bonsai tree grows with the thought that if you understand what your tree needs, you can more easily work your way through all the confusing and sometimes conflicting information about how to grow your tree. His comments are presented more fully in a separate section of this newsletter.



Polly Gould brought a display of splendid accent plants. She is one of the few people in the area who specializes in accent plants, and it was a special treat to see a group of her well grown accent plants.

Polly emphasized that the accent plant should come from the same environment as the main tree in your display, and she offered examples of pairing accent plants with trees. As one example, the choice of a fern accent plant would not work with a California Juniper because the fern comes from moist places and the juniper comes from relatively arid areas.

The accent plant should also reflect the season. Brown grass would be fine in a fall show since many grasses become brown in the fall, but would not be appropriate for a spring show when plants are actively growing.



One of the challenges of growing accent plants is that they can quickly dry out, leading to the loss of the plant. Polly places her plants in a bed of sand which is kept moist. The sand slows the drying of the soil in the pots to a manageable rate.

### **How Trees Grow**

One starts by considering three separate ideas. First, your tree grows by having specialized tips on the roots called feeder roots. Their job is to slurp up water and trace chemicals which are then transported to the leaves through the trunk which acts as a pipeline. By the action of water, air, sunlight and nutrients, the leaves then produce the food the tree needs in order to grow.

The feeder roots act like a swinging garden gate that goes both ways. They can absorb water from the soil, but if the soil becomes dry, water can flow from the roots to the soil. This can dehydrate the roots. If the condition continues long enough, the feeder roots will die.

The second idea is the fact that bacteria which eat living plant tissue can populate waterlogged soil, usually starting with the feeder roots. This produces a condition called root rot and is very difficult to treat once it is established. Root rot, more often than not, leads to the death of the tree. Counter intuitively, the tree dies from dehydration even though it is standing in a puddle of water because there is no way for the tree to take up water once the feeder roots are gone.

The last idea is that as roots grow, they slowly change in character. As the tree grows, it needs more water and nutrients, so the root ball slowly increases in diameter. The roots left behind the growing tip become much harder, develop bark and begin to look exactly like the trunk of the tree. Once this has happened, this part of the root structure is no longer able to slurp up water.

A tree planted in the ground can survive a hot summer day when the top couple of inches of soil become dry because the roots are deeper into the soil. A bonsai tree cannot survive the same hot summer day because the bonsai pot it is planted in is only a couple of inches deep and the entire root ball is dried out. Once the soil becomes dry, the feeder roots are quickly dehydrated, and if the drought is prolonged for more than a day or so they die.

Soils used for bonsai are mixtures of a wide variety of components which include pumice, lava, sharp sand, decomposed granite, Japanese baked clay (called akadama) and gravel. All of these components come in the form of pellets which are more or less one eighth of an inch in diameter and do not pack together well. The air space between the pellets allows excess water to drain out of the soil which largely prevents root rot. A frequently heard opinion is that the roots need air to survive. Trees planted in the ground do not have an abundant supply of air and they grow just fine. The air space in bonsai soils is solely for draining excess water from the soil. Current fashion is a soil composed of one third each of lava, pumice and akadama, although many other formulations work just as well. The key is that the soil mixture drains well and you water it enough to keep it moist.

Since the composition of the soil is mainly rocks, the soil has little or no nutrients to offer the tree, so you have to add them in the form of fertilizer. A close look at the food making process tells us specifically what we need to give the tree. The manufacture of food by the tree takes place in the leaves and uses water, air, sunlight and nutrients to make it all work. The essential chemical compound which catalyzes the food making process is chlorophyll. Without chlorophyll, the process comes to a halt. Since chlorophyll is about six percent nitrogen by weight, the tree needs nitrogen to continue the supply of chlorophyll. The tree also needs

potassium and phosphorous, but the action of these is less direct than the need for nitrogen.

You can use one of three basic types of fertilizer. First is organic, meaning that it comes from once living tissue. Examples are fish emulsion, bone meal, blood meal and cottonseed meal. The second type is inorganic fertilizer which is composed of chemicals like ammonium phosphate, potassium nitrate and urea. The last type is inorganic fertilizer which is blended with plastic. The thought here is that small amounts of nutrients are released from the fertilizer pellets each time you water. The good news is that all three types of fertilizer work well.

As the tree continues to grow, the roots run into the side of the pot. The feeder roots can no longer grow, so the tree slowly loses the ability to absorb water. Further, the remaining roots start looking more like a trunk and they can no longer be active in supplying water to the tree. This situation calls for repotting the tree and trimming the root ball to leave a little space between the side of the pot and the roots. New roots will grow from the cut ends of the root ball and they will have feeder roots at their tip. Contrary to popular opinion, root pruning is not what keeps bonsai trees small. It actually keeps them alive by keeping a vigorous supply of feeder roots.

While all this may sound a bit intimidating to the newcomer, the really good news is that your tree really wants to grow for you. All it needs from you is a little thought about its needs. Next time EBBS has a show, enjoy all the beautiful trees that will be on display. These folks got it right.

### **Great Day Spent "Shopping" At Lone Pine Nursery**

About a dozen members and their spouses attended this year's Field Trip to Lone Pine Nursery in Sebastopol. Everyone left some cash there and we helped each other select their trees, pots, succulents, and accent plants to take home.



The grounds were also a great place for our group lunch and the weather was perfect. An all-around great day!

## Cool Web Site

Probably the biggest change in the world of bonsai in the last few years is the increasingly large body of information about all aspects of bonsai that is available on the web. Our very own Michael Hylton is a web surfer extraordinaire and has found a site that is worth sharing:



<http://bonsaibark.com/2015/04/17/defoliation-energy-balancing-for-strong-bonsai/> It contains a detailed discussion on defoliation, a technique used to reduce the size of leaves and to increase the “twigginess” of your tree.

## GSBF Scholarship

The Golden State Bonsai federation is sponsoring a scholarship which is named for Harry Hirao who is one of the early bonsai artists in California. This is a wonderful opportunity to increase your bonsai knowledge. The scholarship is a onetime grant of up to \$1500 and is intended only for use to study with a recognized bonsai artist. Applicants must submit a 500 word essay on why the scholarship is important to them, what they intend to accomplish and who they will study with. The applicant must be a member of a GSBF club (such as EBBS) and be willing to submit an article to Golden Statements describing his or her experience at the conclusion of their study. Applications may be sent by July 15 to George Haas, 707-762-9154, or by email to: [gwhaas@comcast.net](mailto:gwhaas@comcast.net). George can also supply further information to anyone interested. The scholarship is one more example of the desire of GSBF to make education about bonsai more available to the member clubs.

## Tidbit for during the Drought

Our weather has been forebodingly beautiful, as we experienced another month of almost no rain. Climatically, challenging times face us again. The drought we had in the seventies came to mind recently as I was working with my trees. Then I used divining rods to select drilling sites for water on our property. It did make me feel industrious in face of hard times. Now as I spread sphagnum moss over the pot's surface to reduce evaporation, I started to reflect about the seventies. Except for the fond memories of my growing children, there is little I can cherish of the times. I realize that the maple in my hands was a youngster of a tree then, just as many of you reading this were. It made me think how young my bonsai are on the average, having worked at this art for only ten years. Then it occurred to me that unlike humans, the society of trees prefer their elder's appearance over the youngster's. Well, there is some justice among trees.

A spread of Sphagnum moss can substitute for the more expensive Japanese mountain moss as a soil cover for most bonsai when appearance is not as critical. Shredding of it through a quarter inch screen improves its appearance when packing the moss down,

although the latter does not seem necessary to achieve its goal of helping our trees through this drought.

The Student

## Bonsai Instruction at Merritt College

The bonsai instruction is in the form of workshops which are a splendid opportunity to learn about how to develop your trees into first class bonsai. In these workshops you will work on your own trees under the guidance of an experienced bonsai artist. The workshops are open to all experience levels.

The workshops are held at 7:00 pm on the first Monday of each month when the college is in session. **However, in May, the workshop will be on the second Monday, May 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm because the campus is closed on May 25<sup>th</sup>.** The meetings are held in the Landscape Horticulture Building at Merritt College which is located in the Oakland hills off Redwood Road. Leading the workshops are two outstanding bonsai artists, Bill Castellon and Randall lee and both are members of EBBS.

For more information, contact Bill at 510-569-8003 or Randall at 510-846-0841. The workshops are free (except for a small parking fee) and are a wonderful learning experience. All you need to take advantage of them is to just show up with your tree.

## Bonsai Calendar

- Watering – Water regularly to keep root ball moist, not wet, and never dry.
- Fertilizing – Start regular feeding of deciduous trees after first flush of growth is completed. Continue regular feeding of conifers.
- Repotting – Not recommended at this time.
- Styling/Pruning – Rotate trees. Watch for wire cutting during this period of fast growth. Start defoliation. Shorten branches on fruiting trees. Pinch junipers, spruces and cedars.
- Air Layering – Deciduous trees may be air layered if new growth has hardened.
- Insect and disease control – Maintain defensive treatments for fungus. Watch for and treat insect infestations.

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

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## Matt Reel Workshop - Early June

Matt Reel, our headliner at last year's EBBS show, has been invited by the San Francisco club to conduct a workshop and has offered to our club members either a group or individual workshop prior to or after the weekend of June 6th. The workshop will be limited to 5

or 6 people, which means a slightly higher per person cost. If interested, please contact Eric Schrader at [eric@phutu.co](mailto:eric@phutu.co).

### **Events by Others**

GSBF's Bonsai and Suiseki Garden: open Tues. - Fri. 11:00 am – 3:00 pm, Sat. 10:00 am – 4:00 pm, Sun. 12:00 noon – 4:00 pm Enter at gate across from Boat House.

May 16 – 17, Sacramento, Satsuki Aikokai of Sacramento: Annual Bonsai Show will be held at the Shepard Garden Center, 3330 McKinley Blvd. Hours are Saturday 10 AM – 5PM, and 10 AM – 4PM, with demonstrations at 1 PM on both days by Yuzo Maruyama. Satsuki information booth, vendors, raffles, etc. For more information contact [satsukiaikokaisac@sbcglobal.net](mailto:satsukiaikokaisac@sbcglobal.net) or Ronn Pigram (916) 428-8505.

May 16 – 17, Oakland, Bay Area Satsuki Aikokai: 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Satsuki Bonsai Exhibition at the Lakeside Park Garden Center, 666 Bellevue Ave. Hours 10 AM to 4 PM, both days: demonstration on Saturday at 1 PM by bonsai artist and teacher Johnny Uchida with demo tree to be raffled. Educational forums throughout the day Sunday. Colorful azaleas in full bloom, many imported from Japan. Experts on

hand to talk about the trees and answer questions. Plant sales. Free admission, public invited, parking available. For further information, contact George Haas at [gwhaas@comcast.net](mailto:gwhaas@comcast.net).

June 6 – 7, San Mateo, Sei Boku Bonsai Kai: 32nd Annual Show at the San Mateo Garden Center, 605 Parkside Way, next to Beresford Park. Admission is free. Hours are 10 AM to 4 PM; with Bonsai Master, David Nguy, conducting a demonstration Saturday and open viewing workshop Sunday from Noon – 3 PM, both days. Raffle and door prizes will be drawn both days at 3pm. Vendor sales, and member plant sales will be featured. Dr. Bonsai will be available to answer questions regarding bonsai care. For additional information contact Marsha Mekisich at (650) 477-4761.

### **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 two 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.

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## **East Bay Bonsai Society—Schedule for 2015**

**Regular Meetings:** Second Wednesday, every month (except August and October) @ 7:30 pm

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**

<b>May 13</b>	Bunjin – Bill Castellon
<b>May 24</b>	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Bob Gould
<b>June 10</b>	Frolic in the Garden
<b>June 28</b>	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – J D Lin
<b>July 8</b>	Auction
<b>July 26</b>	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – John Nackley
<b>Aug</b>	Picnic
<b>Aug 23</b>	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Janet Nelson
<b>Sept 9</b>	Tropicals – Jerry Carpenter
<b>Sept 27</b>	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Don Meeker
<b>Oct 14</b>	No club meeting due to proximity to show
<b>Oct 25</b>	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Tom Colby
<b>Nov 11</b>	Juniper Jubilee – Mike Pistello
<b>Nov 22</b>	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Bob Gould
<b>Dec 9</b>	Holiday Dinner

### **Special Events**

**Oct 10-11** Fall Show – Ryan Nichols