



# The Tree Shrinker

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A MONTHLY BULLETIN

<http://www.eastbaybonsai.org>



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## East Bay Bonsai Society

**Meeting:** December 14, 2016 6:30 PM

### President's Note

2016 is nearly over and we've done so much. Our annual show, auction, clean-up day at the bonsai garden, monthly meetings, potluck, trip to Lone Pine and the list goes on and on. While I wasn't there, I heard that Mike Pistello once again did a great job at our November meeting, just like he did at our show. December brings us our annual holiday potluck and I am looking forward to seeing each of you as we celebrate our year through pictures and share our experiences.

Michael

### December Meeting



The December meeting is the annual event when we celebrate the holiday season with a potluck dinner in place of our usual meeting agenda. Do plan to come and make this part of your festive season. We begin the festivities at 6:30 pm with beverages and appetizers. Note that we start one hour earlier than usual. Doors open at 6:00 pm and we could use help in setting up.

The club will furnish ham and turkey as well as beverages. The rest is provided by attendees as follows:

Last name A-F Appetizer  
Last name G-L Salad  
Last name M-R Side dish  
Last name S-Z Dessert

The appetizer-people should plan to arrive early so food is available at the beginning of the evening. Please supply an appropriate serving utensil for the dish you are furnishing. Also, be sure to bring your own plate and eating utensils. A decorative place mat would make a festive setting for the meal. In past years, the dinners have been memorable due to the fine offerings of the many fine cooks in the club. Yes, we collectively have talents besides just growing trees. People are also encouraged to bring small bonsai decorated for the holiday season as table center pieces which greatly add to the ambiance of the evening.

The special highlight of the evening will be a slide show presented by Michael Hylton, and featuring the club activities during the past year, and focusing particularly on our recent show. Those of you who attended the holiday party last year were amazed and delighted by the splendid program that Michael put together, and we are eagerly looking forward to another superb program to cap off the evening.

### January Meeting



The January meeting will feature a presentation on the general care of bonsai by Jay MacDonald. His discussion will cover both deciduous and evergreens. Jay is adamant about using high levels of fertilizer and, judging by the results on his trees, it really works. Jay is also bringing a juniper for demo and raffle. He is a high-energy guy and his enthusiasm is infectious. We look forward to an evening of fun as well as an evening in which we learn the secrets needed to keep our trees healthy.

## November Meeting

The November meeting featured Mike Pistello presiding over JJ5, the fifth annual celebration of our annual Juniper Jubilee. Mike started the celebration by showing his Sierra Juniper which won the best of show award in the recent convention. While any of the fine junipers that we see were collected long ago and have been worked on for many years, a remarkable feature of Mike's tree was that it had been collected only five years ago. In that short time, Mike transformed the tree into a true masterpiece. It is a tribute to Mike's skill as a bonsai artist.

Mike used a small itoigawa juniper for the demonstration tree. This is a variety of juniper with finer foliage than is usually found in shimpaku junipers. The first questions he addressed are what branches can be eliminated, what can be moved, and to where? Mike emphasized that here you should think outside the box, beyond the usual shapes for bonsai such as formal upright etc. On inspection, the tree had two flaws. The trunk had reverse taper, meaning that it was wider above the base of the trunk than at the base. This is not necessarily a major flaw in junipers. The second flaw was that a number of branches all came from a single source. This was addressed by jinning most of these branches which involved cutting the end of the branches and then stripping the bark from the stub. Doing this on a branch that is alive allows the still soft and wet bark to be stripped off easily. Also, the wood at the end of the jin can be torn to give a more natural look to the jin rather than a flat cut. The best time to create jins is in winter.



Crotches where two or more branches originate are very weak and can easily be broken when branches are bent. The crotch needs reinforcing to prevent breakage. Mike recommends wrapping the crotch with raffia. An alternative to raffia that is easier to apply is grafting tape topped with a layer of brown electrical tape.

Mike uses copper wire for junipers rather than aluminum wire because of the strength of copper. Many people use aluminum wire because it is easier to apply, but Mike claims that with practice, copper is no more difficult to use than aluminum wire. The best time to wire junipers is in the winter. The main branches are wired first, and are placed where they are wanted. He then wires the finer branches.

Mike was adamant that junipers should not be shaped by pinching the tips of the branches. Branches should be allowed to grow, and then cut back to strong lateral branches. Cutting back to a weak branch will probably cause the whole branch to die. While there is an opportunity to create a shari on the trunk of the tree, Mike suggested that it should be small at first which is less shock to the tree. Next year the shari could be expanded if desired.

Mike deals with diseases by spraying his trees as a preventative, as well as for treating specific problems. He stressed that it is important to identify the disease to be able to treat it.



There are two main diseases that attack junipers and both are blights. The first is Kabatina which affects the growing tips causing them to turn brown. The second is Phomopsis which attacks older foliage and is not only more difficult to treat, but also severely threatens the life of the tree. Both blights can be treated with fungicides. Mancozeb and Dithane are best choices,

but Daconil and copper based fungicides are also effective. These products are available online from Amazon. A single application of fungicide is usually not enough to control the blight. Affected trees should be treated on a biweekly schedule until signs of the infection are gone.

The Sierra Juniper that won best in show at the GSBF convention was a collected tree, and Mike used this as an example about how to treat collected trees. The best time to collect is in the months of March and April when roots are beginning to become active after the winter. They are potted in a soil that promotes rapid root growth. In cooler areas of the bay area, pure pumice that has been washed to remove dust works well. In the warmer areas, east of the hills, a mix of 75% pumice and 25% akadama provides a bit more moisture retention. The newly collected tree is misted for five minutes three times a day. The rapid draining of these soils accelerates rapid growth of the tree. Once the tree becomes well established and is growing well, it is placed in a regular bonsai soil mixture which retains more water and slows the growth of the tree. Mike recommends a mixture of one third each of pumice, lava and akadama, and no organic components.

Both California and Sierra junipers have rather coarse foliage. This is not a problem in a large tree, but can be a problem on smaller trees. A solution is to graft itoigawa juniper, which has very fine foliage, onto a small collected tree. Mike commented that grafting itoigawa on to collected shimpaku junipers is very popular in Japan, although it is viewed somewhat critically elsewhere. One result is that all trees begin to look alike, and

secondly, it results in a monoculture. If the grafted itoigawa stock becomes susceptible to a particularly virulent disease, many trees could be lost.

Mike concluded his demonstration by applying fine wire on the tree. Each of the small branches was wired and positioned to develop pads. As a result, when he was finished there was a clear vision of what the tree could become in the future. This was a particularly noteworthy aspect of the demonstration because frequently demonstrators do not complete the fine wiring of the tree, but only the wiring on major branches. The tree was raffled and, as usual, Bob Gould was the lucky winner. Bob's secret – Buy Lots of Raffle Tickets!



### **Free Lunch**

On Sunday, January 29, the East Bay Bonsai Society is offering a free lunch to all members at the bonsai garden. What is more, the lunch will be catered by our very own master chef, John Nackley. The occasion is EBBS observing an obligation to perform service work each year at the garden. We will meet from 9:00 am to 12 pm to prepare trees for the mammoth bazaar fund raiser later in the month of February. Most of the preparation will be in the form of removing weeds from the trees, and whatever else can be easily done to make the trees more salable. It promises to be a fun morning as well as a chance to work with some really nice trees. You may have heard that there is no such thing as a free lunch, but here is the exception to the rule. After our morning of fun in the sun, all workers will enjoy a free lunch. Mark your calendar for this heartwarming event.

### **Congratulations**

Two EBBS members received recognition at the recent GSBF convention. Mike Pistello won the best of show award for his magnificent Sierra Juniper. Mike deserves our congratulations for the recognition of his beautiful tree. He brought the tree to JJ5 for us to admire. Thanks for sharing the tree with us.

The convention also delivered a pleasant surprise. Your very own newsletter was recognized as the best large format newsletter in the state. Our crusading editor, Janice Dilbeck, is the guiding light behind the newsletter and is responsible for the excellence of the newsletter. It was nice to see her efforts publicly acknowledged. Good Job, Janice.

*From your editor: The newsletter would be totally dry without the contributions of Tom Colby. We are very lucky that he shares his knowledge and insights through entertaining and informative articles on the why's, how's, and why not's of bonsai. Tom is the heart and soul of our newsletter. Thank you, Tom!*

### **Newsletter articles**

The newsletter is the voice of the club and that means that it is your voice. Articles on any aspect of bonsai from members as well as from outside the membership are enthusiastically welcomed. In particular, an area that would make the newsletter even more interesting is reports of events by others. For example, a lot of EBBS members went to the recent GSBF convention, and those who could not attend would like to know what they missed. If you be willing to share your experience at the convention with the rest of us or, for that matter anything else, jot it down and send it to our editor, Janice Dilbeck, who reserves the right to gently edit your offering. When your article appears in the newsletter, you can then tell all your friends that you are a published author.

### **Competition**

The recently completed Golden State Bonsai convention featured a judged competition for the bonsai community of California at large. Judging bonsai exhibits is not a totally new concept in that there have been occasional competitions in California as well as in the eastern United States for a number of years. The competition at the recent convention is an attempt to continue to make this a regular part of the convention, as well as in some selected bonsai shows. The objective of the competition is to raise the level of bonsai art in the community of bonsai clubs. An immediate benefit of competition is that outstanding trees are publicly identified and can serve as models of fine bonsai art for the rest of us aspiring bonsai artists. Winners are not only beautifully designed trees, but are also exceptionally well grown. Winning is a personal recognition of the skill of the owner in selecting the tree, designing the tree and then growing it to perfection.

The mechanics of judging a bonsai completion presents challenges. An immediate problem with judging the trees in an exhibit is how do you compare a fine formal upright styled pine tree with, say, a fine casually styled cascade maple tree? These trees have fundamentally very different forms. There are two basic approaches that can be used. One approach to judging is the emotional response of the judges to the tree. This is the WOW factor. The maple, for example, may be a fine tree but the pine really "knocks the judges' eyes out". This approach certainly can identify quality trees, but the

results can sometimes be a bit mysterious to those of us who are not judges. Also, the emotional response of one judge to a tree may be quite different to that of another judge.

The alternative to the emotional basis for judging is to evaluate the individual tree by a reasonably objective set of criteria in which points are given for trunk formation, ramification, appropriateness of pot and stand etc. and the winner is the tree with the highest score. This approach also has a problem. If you are judging a trident maple's trunk, there are a lot of other trident maples within the bonsai community and you can compare the trunk of that tree with the trunks of the many other trident maples. This is more difficult if you are judging a species of tree that is rarely shown and there are not a lot of examples to use as a comparison.

In spite of the potential frailties of the system that is used as a basis for judging, the trees entered in the competition at the convention certainly succeeded in the goal of bringing a collection of outstanding bonsai trees to the public attention. The results of the competition were high points in the bonsai careers of the lucky winners.

There are currently no plans for a competition or judging of the trees in EBBS shows. While there are usually some true bonsai masterpieces shown in EBBS shows, the show is open to all who want to enter a tree. The most honored participant in an EBBS show is actually the beginner showing a tree for the first time. Although the tree may be a humble juniper, this tree is the start of a journey in bonsai and the thrill in showing a tree for the first time is one of the high points in the beginner's bonsai career. A competition might well discourage a beginner from showing a tree. EBBS does not want to overlook this and, as a result, does not wish to institute completions in future shows.

### **Fall color**



One of the joys of growing bonsai is to see the beautiful fall color that some of our trees develop. Maples are especially attractive in fall color, although there are many other trees that are equally nice. Have you ever wondered why the leaves turn color? The University of California Botanical Garden has the

answer in an article in one of their recent publications which was based on a video from Scientific American. As with all biological processes the story is complicated. According to the article, when the day length shortens in the fall, veins in the leaves which carry water and nutrients respond by constricting. This reduces the flow of water and nutrients in the leaves. Water and nutrients in the leaves are combined with carbon dioxide to form sugars which fuel the growth of the tree.

The active agent in this transformation is chlorophyll, which is lost during the process. Water and nutrients in the leaf also regenerate more chlorophyll to replace that which is lost. However, when the veins of the leaves contract and the flow of water and nutrients is reduced, the chlorophyll is not replaced. The usual intense green color of the leaves is due to the presence of the chlorophyll, and this masks the underlying color of the leaves. Once the chlorophyll is gone, the underlying color can be seen and is usually yellow or orange.



The constricting veins in the leaves not only blocks flow into the leaves, but also traps sugars from flowing out of the leaves, into the tree, and a large amount of trapped sugars are responsible for the red color that some trees show. For these trees, the color depends on the fall weather. Warm sunny days and cold nights produce more sugars in the leaves of these trees and that, in turn, means more sugars trapped in the leaves and thus, more intense red color. The end of the story comes when the drier fall weather activates a hormone which causes the leaves to fall, but that story is for another time.

### **Bonsai Videographer wanted!**

The EBBS Board is interested in videotaping our monthly demonstrations, then providing edited video to club members and perhaps others. We need to video selected monthly EBBS demonstrations (with the presenters' permission) and then edit those videos. This can be one or a team of people. If you are interested, please contact Lisa Harper, [lisaharper@me.com](mailto:lisaharper@me.com) or 510-220-3339. We can even train you if you are very committed to the cause and motivated! Thank you!

## 2017 EBBS Board

At the November Board meeting, the Nominating Committee proposed and the Board accepted this slate of Club members to fill the 2017 Board and Officer vacancies:

Roger Brady, President  
Lisa Harper, Vice President  
John Nackley, Secretary  
Julie Holcomb, Director  
Roberto Prado, Director

The membership will vote on this slate at our December 14 Holiday Dinner.

Pat Cahill, Treasurer, and Directors Tom Colby, Bev Martinez, and Khary Dvorak-Ewell, will continue next year in their current posts.

The Board and entire membership sincerely thanks Directors Janice Dilbeck and Suzanne Muller who are rotating off the Board for their unflagging energy and effectiveness these past two years. And last but certainly not least, we all thank Michael Hylton, our tireless, multi-tasking fearless leader and President for the past two years, who is stepping aside from that post and will continue on the Board as Past President in accordance with our Constitution.

### **Bonsai Calendar**

- Sun – Move all trees into full sun.
- Watering – Adjust watering for winter.
- Fertilizing – Use low or zero nitrogen fertilizers.
- Repotting – Generally, not the time for repotting.
- Styling/Pruning – Trimming should be minimal. Prune maples before cold weather to minimize bleeding.
- Insect and disease control – Remove dead plant material. Apply dormant spray. Watch for and treat insect infestations.

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

### **Bonsai Instruction at Merritt College**

Instruction is in the form of workshops and is a splendid opportunity to learn how to develop your trees into first class bonsai. In these workshops, you work on your own tree under the guidance of an experienced bonsai artist. Two members of EBBS, Bill Castellon and Randall Lee lead the workshops. The workshops are open to all experience levels and are usually held at 7:00 pm on the fourth Monday of each month when the college is in session. Since the campus is closed on the fourth Monday in December, the workshop has been moved to the second Monday of December, the 12th.

The meetings are in the Landscape Horticulture Building at Merritt College which is located in the Oakland hills off Redwood Road. The workshops are free, except for a small parking fee. You can contact Bill at 510-569-8003, billcastellon@aol.com, or Randall at 510-846-0841, randallalee@yahoo.com.

### **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.

**December 3, Fresno, Fresno Bonsai Society:** 9th Annual Bonsai Yard Sale held at 736 West Browning Ave. from 8 AM till 3 PM. Bonsai, pre-bonsai, accent plants, new and used pots, stands, books, suiseki, and supplies. Everyone is welcome to buy, sell, or swap all things bonsai. For more information about the event visit us on our Facebook page or [www.fresnobonsaisociety.com](http://www.fresnobonsaisociety.com).

**February 19 - 20, 2017 Oakland, GSBF Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt:** The annual Mammoth Auction and Sale Fund Raiser will be held at 666 Bellevue Ave. (Garden Center Building). Saturday: Auction preview at noon with Auction starting at 1 PM. Sunday: Vendor Sales start at 9 AM, Plant Sales start at 10 AM, and demonstrations at 1 PM. The date for this year's event is a week earlier than in the past to let attendees and vendors participate in both the Mammoth and the Bonsai-a-Thon. You are encouraged to submit your bonsai for consideration to be included in the Mammoth Auction as soon as possible. Items will be considered on a first-come-first-considered basis. The Bonsai Garden will be open 10 AM to 4 PM on Saturday and Noon to 4 PM on Sunday, so you can check out the many changes that have been made this year. For more information or to sell trees, email [bonsailakemerritt@gmail.com](mailto:bonsailakemerritt@gmail.com) and visit [www.gsbflakemerritt.org](http://www.gsbflakemerritt.org).

### **Articles or Services for Sale (or give-away)**

Mike Pistello is selling two types of cut past at \$15 each. Contact him at 925-818-6116.



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.

**Wanted to Buy (or for free)**

Each membership household, free of charge, may

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<b>East Bay Bonsai Society—Schedule for 2016 - 2017</b>
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**Regular Meetings:** Second Wednesday, every month (except August and October) @ 7:30 pm

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

Visitors welcome.

Website for Bonsai Garden Lake Merritt: [www.gsbflakemerritt.org/](http://www.gsbflakemerritt.org/)

**Meeting Program**

**Nov 27** BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Tom Colby

**Dec 14** Holiday Party

**Jan 11** Plant Care – Jay McDonald

**Jan 29** BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Bob Gould

**Special Events**

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