



The Tree Shrinker

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A MONTHLY BULLETIN

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East Bay Bonsai Society

February Meeting: February 10, 2016 @ 7:30 p.m.

President's Note

January is here and we're already one meeting into 2016. And it was a doozy for those that attended. We had Jay MacDonald talk about deciduous trees, and did he hit it out of the park. Jay puts his heart and soul into his bonsai trees and it showed by the dozen or so trees he brought to the meeting to show attendees, and by his compelling presentation!

Speaking of clearing the bases (baseball metaphor), next month we have back Kathy Shaner, the first westerner and first woman to be trained as a bonsai master in Japan. She will bring the Hornbeam that she started working on a year ago. Hope you attend to see in-person the transformation.

Along with the rainy weather for our trees, 2016 is starting out great!

Look forward to seeing each of you at our February meeting.

Michael

Feb meeting

The February meeting will feature Kathy Shaner demonstrating how to create a fine bonsai from challenging material. The tree will be the same hornbeam that she used as a demonstration tree last year. Kathy feels that a single demonstration on a tree misses the element of how the appearance of the tree can change over time. She would prefer to use a single tree for several demonstrations



over a long period of time to show how the tree responds to styling decisions. This is particularly cogent when the tree is challenging at the outset. It will be interesting to see what has transpired over the past year for the tree while in the hands of an accomplished master.

Thanks in advance to Pat Cahill, Brenda Handy and the Nackleys for offering to bring refreshments to the meeting.

March Meeting



The March meeting will feature a presentation on suiseki by three of our club members, Bob and Polly Gould and Tom Colby. Suiseki are stones which illustrate the natural landscape and are compatible with bonsai because bonsai are also an illustration of the natural landscape. Because of this common link to nature, suiseki are welcome additions to the display of bonsai. As an introduction to the meeting, be sure to visit the suiseki display described below at the Oakland Museum.

January Meeting

Jay MacDonald presented a program on deciduous trees. He made a pitch that we are, in his words, "buried in junipers", meaning that we focus on junipers at the expense of other trees. If we are to have a good representation of all the possibilities that bonsai can offer, we need to include some deciduous trees in our collection. He brought ten of his trees to demonstrate just how impressive deciduous trees can be, particularly in winter when all the leaves have fallen, leaving the trunk and finer branches as a winter silhouette. Depending on the species of tree, the spring would bring flowers and later fruit which would add yet another dimension to the trees. Each of his trees was presented as it would be shown in a bonsai show, complete with

top dressed soil and stand. Collectively they certainly made a positive statement about the potential of deciduous trees.



Jay is a strong advocate of heavy doses of fertilizer. He fertilizes his trees every two weeks from the middle of February to the middle of October with readily available Miracle Grow fertilizer, diluted as advertised on the package except for the last two feedings of the year which are diluted to one half the strength listed on the package. He also sprinkles Apex solid fertilizer on the surface of the soils each spring and repeats this in the middle of summer when the Apex is presumably exhausted. Apex slowly releases fertilizer with each watering and also contains trace elements which are critical for growth. The heavy fertilizer schedule is more than is generally recommended, but his trees have clearly benefitted and it is hard to argue with the results Jay obtains. Note that Jay's schedule uses frequent applications of fertilizer made as directed on the package and not stronger solutions of fertilizer. Jay uses Miracle Grow fertilizer for acid loving plants for Azaleas and Camellias but reduces the feeding to one time per month because these trees are not as robust as most of the other trees.

Care of deciduous trees includes using soils that are one half akadama and lava. Pumice is not included in the mixture based on appearance. The white color is distracting on the surface of the soil.

Usually one styles a tree by first removing unwanted branches and then wiring whatever is left. Jay advocates styling a tree by first totally wiring the tree and then cutting off unwanted branches as the branches are arranged. His rationale is that it is very difficult to see in advance what can contribute to the ultimate shape of the tree, and what cannot and should be removed.

Most deciduous trees benefit from defoliation. Most of the energy of the tree goes into the flush of spring growth. If all the leaves are cut off, the next growth will produce leaves that are much smaller because the tree has expended most of the available energy on the spring growth, and the smaller leaves are more in

keeping with the scale of the tree. Defoliation also encourages the growth of side branches, increasing the twiggy character of the tree. Defoliation should be completed by no later than the middle of July. Japanese maples are an exception and do not take kindly to defoliation, but it can be cautiously attempted by only removing a few of the leaves.

Jay commented that one of the joys of deciduous trees was their twiggy form, called ramification. A trident maple and a hornbeam were among the trees that Jay brought to the meeting as examples of superior deciduous trees. Both trees were densely ramified and Jay said that both were started from trees with little or no branching a short time ago. Jay recommended both of these species of trees as a wonderful place to start for your first venture into deciduous trees because of their rapid development into fine bonsai fit for any show.



The evening with Jay was extraordinary on several levels. The outstanding trees that he brought were an inspiration to us all. His emphasis on fertilization is food for our thoughts on bonsai culture, and his folksy asides made for an enjoyable presentation.

Dues

Some of us are now feeling very smug because they have already paid their dues for 2016. The rest of us need to be reminded that the time has come for dues renewal. The yearly dues are \$30 for single memberships and \$40 for couples.



Membership includes a subscription to our always entertaining and informative newsletter, The Tree Shrinker, by email. If you would like to have a hard copy sent to you by snail mail there is an additional charge of \$5 to cover the cost of postage. Our treasurer, Pat Cahill, will be delighted to receive your check for dues at the next regular meeting. Dues can also be mailed to: EBBS Treasurer, 4933 Cochrane, Oakland, CA, 94618-2701.

Suiseki Show at Oakland Museum

There is a unique show which just opened at the Oakland Museum and is an opportunity to see many outstanding suiseki stones presented in an unusual way. The show is entitled **Found Art**, and attempts to show suiseki in a fine art setting. The show title reflects the fact that the stones are presented for the most part exactly as they were found, usually in river beds. The stones on display are breath taking and they are presented in an excellent setting, augmented with beautiful lighting. Several of the stones are owned by our very own Bob and Polly Gould who also participated in the show set up.

The show is scheduled to run until the end of April and is very much worth your while to visit if you haven't already seen it. A display of the superior quality stones found in this exhibit is a splendid opportunity to develop an appreciation for the beauty of stones and should not be missed.

Introduction to Bonsai

EBBS along with all the other bonsai clubs in the area have an obligation to support the bonsai garden. Many of our members give generously of their time as volunteers at the garden, acting as docents or participating in the hands on work required for maintaining the trees and the facilities, or performing administrative tasks. When you visit the garden you will most likely see these folks in action. Incidentally, this is not an exclusive activity. If you are not already helping out, you would be most welcome to join with the other EBBS members who are active. Much of the work does not require a deep knowledge of bonsai care, so you do not have to be a bonsai master to participate.

EBBS also participates in an activity that perhaps you are not aware of. On the fourth Sunday of each month a class is held at the garden called **An Introduction to Bonsai**. It is aimed at people with no previous experience with bonsai and generally covers what bonsai are and a bit about maintenance and styling of the trees. The classes are intended to enhance appreciation of the trees on display in the



garden as well as to encourage further interest in bonsai. Typically there are a half a dozen to as much as a dozen students. Most have already visited the garden and are loaded with questions. A few bring trees that they have either been given or have purchased and want help on what to do next.

These classes are part of an outreach program by the garden to cultivate interest in the garden by the community. EBBS supports the program by supplying an instructor for each class. Members participating are Tom Colby, Bob Gould, John Nackley, Janet Nelson and Don Meeker. Of course, if the students would like more information about bonsai they are encouraged to join EBBS.

Global Warming

We live in an amazing world filled with plants and animals and they live in harmony with each other. Animals breathe in oxygen to provide the energy required for life. They eliminate carbon dioxide as a byproduct of their nutritional processes. Plants, on the other hand, require carbon dioxide for their life functions and eliminate oxygen as a byproduct, closing a perfect loop. For many millennia the amount of carbon dioxide given off by animals has exactly balanced the amount required by plants. This is not a small undertaking. It has been estimated that in the entire world plants consume an astounding total of 10 billion tons of carbon dioxide each year.

In recent times, the burning of fossil fuels has generated more carbon dioxide than plants can gobble up and scientists tell us that the result of the excess carbon dioxide in the air is global warming. If you



are concerned about global warming, and well you should be, there is a step you can take to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the air. It is a small step but a positive one and one that we all are able to take, and that is to own and grow more trees.

Fortunately there a solution at hand to the problem of owning more trees. Each year the bonsai garden at Lake Merritt holds a giant two day fund raiser. The event this year will be held on Saturday, February 27 and Sunday February 28 at the garden center. Precise details of the event are given in the **Events by Others** section of this newsletter.

Saturday afternoon features an auction. Most of the items to be auctioned are bonsai trees, and there are usually other bonsai related items offered such as pots, stands and suiseki. The projected prices of the trees vary from inexpensive trees needing a lot of love to nearly finished bonsai which are projected to sell for really big bucks. There will be something for everyone regardless of budget. The auction is always an exciting event and is usually a real test of will power so that you don't spend more than you wanted to for that tree that has caught your eye. If that does happen, just remember that it is all in the name of reducing global warming.

Sunday features a sale of items on commission and everything imaginable shows up, and generally at attractive prices. Here is a wonderful place to add to your bonsai collection as well as to secure pots and stands. You can sell plants and other bonsai related

items at the sale on Sunday. The garden takes 25% of the selling price as a commission. If you are interested, contact Bob Gould for details. Sunday also features vendors who generally offer a wide variety of high quality trees and bonsai accessories. Sunday afternoon will also feature a demonstration by Kathy Shaner.

Mark your calendars for the weekend of February 27 and 28. The Mammoth Fund raiser is an event that you should not miss. Even if reducing global warming is not on your agenda, there is a lot to see.

A Chemistry Lesson

When we buy fertilizer we are confronted by a series of numbers like 10-5-8. These are not, as you might expect, fancy football plays, but refer to the composition of the product. They are the percentage of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium respectively. To understand why they are important for the health of your plant you have to understand what they do.



Let's do a mental experiment in which we plant an acorn. A few months later, if all goes well, a slender green shoot will appear. If we come back a few centuries later, the green shoot has grown into a mighty oak tree weighing many hundreds or a few thousands of pounds and containing many board feet of very hard lumber. This all comes about by the action of chlorophyll, the green pigment in the leaves. The roots of the tree supplied water to the leaves. The pores of the leaves supplied carbon dioxide from the air. Sunlight powered the chlorophyll to convert the carbon dioxide and water into products that eventually became the lumber in the tree. A detailed look at the process, which is called photosynthesis, reveals a large number of very complicated and interrelated chemical reactions to make this happen, but all we really need to know is the bottom line. Without the presence of chlorophyll this whole process grinds to a halt and your tree stops growing.

Each year deciduous trees lose all their leaves and the chlorophyll contained in the leaves. Each spring the tree needs to produce more chlorophyll in the new leaves. Trees we do not usually think of as deciduous, as for example pines, all push new growth each spring and the new foliage needs chlorophyll. Further, pines slowly lose needles which contain chlorophyll which the tree must replace if it is to continue to grow. Chlorophyll is a very large and complicated molecule which is about six percent nitrogen. If all of these trees have no source of nitrogen they cannot make chlorophyll and that would bring growth to a halt. Here we have the simple explanation of why it is so important to fertilize our trees with products which contain nitrogen.

Urea and ammonium sulfate are compounds used in fertilizers to supply nitrogen and are 47 and 21 percent nitrogen respectively. Would it be enough to

use only either of these to fertilize our trees? Here is where the other components of commercial fertilizers are important. Both phosphorous and potassium play important, though less obvious roles in the health of the tree. Phosphorous is required for a number of vital activities of the tree including preparing the tree for slowing growth during the colder days of winter and preparing the tree for blooming and setting fruit in the next year. Potassium is an important component in the process where the tree manufactures chlorophyll.

Many people use fertilizer schedules where high nitrogen products are applied in the spring where the tree is actively needing more chlorophyll to grow and using a high phosphorous fertilizer in the fall when the tree is preparing for winter. Understanding the roles of the components of the fertilizer provides the reasoning behind a schedule like this.

Now that we know about what fertilizers do, what do we use for our trees? There are basically two choices. Inorganic products like Miracle Grow are made up of an assortment of chemicals. Organic products such as fish emulsion, on the other hand, are natural products. Each type of fertilizer has its passionate following, but your tree is just looking for nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, and really doesn't care where it gets it. So you can expect superior results with either type of product.

A practical matter in your decision into which to use is that Miracle Grow can burn the roots of your tree if you make the concentration too strong, whereas it is hard to overfeed with fish emulsion. If you fall into the group that thinks that if a little is OK then a lot should be much better, and to work best, your fertilizer solution should be really really strong, beware of Miracle Grow.

Roster Updates

We have two new members in the club. Please add the following people to your roster:

Karen Stritzinger at (843) 290-4237. Her e-mail address is karenstritz@gmail.com

Valerie Ross at (925) 785-8889. Her email address is vastros94@yahoo.com.

Please introduce yourselves to them to at our next club meeting.

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. 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.

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. Leading the workshops are two members of EBBS, Bill Castellon and

Randal Lee. You can contact Bill at 510-569-8003 or Randall at 510-846-0841.

Bonsai Calendar

- Watering – Reduce watering, but ensure plants receive sufficient water
- Fertilizing – Feed with 0-10-10.
- Repotting – Repot deciduous trees and junipers
- Styling/Pruning – Do heavier pruning. Cut large limbs on pines.
- Graft – All species

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

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.

January 1 – April 24, 2016 Oakland, Suiseki Society and San Francisco Suiseki Kai: are featured with the work of sculptor Jedediah Caesar at Unearthed: Found + Made, a new exhibition at the Oakland Museum of California, 1000 Oak Street. The Suiseki, all found in California, share a process with Caesar who imitates geological processes in making his sculptures, sometimes encasing found objects from the urban environment in clear or colored resin. For further information go to <http://museumca.org/exhibit/unearthed-found-made>

February 5 – 7, Santa Nella, California Shohin Seminar @ Hotel Mission de Oro Feb 5: Registration 10 AM – 5 PM with demonstrations from Noon – 6 PM, Exhibit and Vendor areas set-up 11 AM – 5 PM;

everyone is invited to share their treasured Shohin Bonsai in the Exhibit. Feb 6: Exhibit opens for Registration, Viewing, Vendor Sales, Workshops, Raffle & Benefit Drawing 8 AM – 5 PM. Feb 7: Exhibit Open 9 AM – Noon with demonstrations, and business meeting. Registration Forms available on the website. Attendees who only want access to vendor and exhibit may purchase a day pass. For more information see our website: <http://www.calshohin.org/>, email: calshohin@yahoo.com, or phone: Randi Keppeler (650) 598-0127.

February 27 – 28, Oakland, GSBF Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt: The annual Mammoth 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 Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt will celebrate the many bonsai clubs who have created and support the Garden by inviting Bonsai Clubs from all over Northern California to showcase their best bonsai display and promote their club activities. Attendees will be eligible to vote for their favorite display. Bonsai Garden will be open 10 AM to 4 PM on Saturday and Noon to 4 PM on Sunday. For more information or to sell trees, email bonsailakemerritt@gmail.com and visit www.gsbflakemerritt.org.

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.

East Bay Bonsai Society—Schedule for 2016
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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: <http://www.gsbf-bonsai.org/lake-merritt/NewHome.html>

Meeting Program

Feb 10 Hornbeam raft, revisited – Kathy Shaner
Mar 9 Suiseki – Tom Colby, Bob and Polly Gould
Mar 27 BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – John Nackley
Apr 13 Deciduous Trees Care and Culture – Peter Tea
Apr 24 BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Janet Nelson
May 11 Bonsai Pots – Michael Ryan
May 22 BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Don Meeker
June 8 Pines – Rick Trumm
June 26 BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Tom Colby

Special Events
