



The Tree Shrinker

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A MONTHLY BULLETIN

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East Bay Bonsai Society

Next Meeting:

June 8, 2016 @ 7:30 p.m.

President's Note

Next month brings us our very own Rick Trumm talking and demo'ing on Pine trees. He always does a great job. That's followed by our annual July bonsai auction so bring your checkbook and cash and buy, buy, buy. It's an opportunity to purchase trees, pots, tools and supplies at good prices.

Finally, it's also important to acknowledge the contributions that Bill Castellon and Randal Lee provide to guide and assist us nearly every month (except for some summer and winter months) at the Merritt College bonsai workshops. I know a number of you show up each month, and I am one of them. We appreciate their guidance. Next fall when the workshops start up again, I suggest that more of you come to take advantage of their knowledge. Thank you, Bill and Randall.

Michael

June Meeting



Rick Trumm will present a program on pines for the June meeting. Pines are one of the most important trees used for bonsai and we all need to know how to grow them well. Their needs are somewhat specialized, and a program devoted to pines is always welcome. Those of you who have seen Rick's trees at the

annual potluck in August at his house know that he is a highly skilled horticulturalist. Rick has presented several well received programs in the past. We look forward to his program.

Because of the auction, the August potluck, the show and the holiday dinner, there are only three regular meetings left for the year. As a result, there is no regular sign up for refreshments for the remainder of the year since the fall meetings are so far in the future. If you have enjoyed refreshments in past meetings it is

your turn to amaze and delight the members with your refreshment offering.

July Auction



Our annual auction will be held at the regular July meeting. That still seems to be a long way into the future, but spring time is a great time for you to critically evaluate your bonsai collection when all your trees are looking their very best. Now is the time to identify trees that for any of several reasons do not quite meet your expectations and are auction candidates. There is no good reason for you to continue to grow a tree that does not please you, particularly since it requires the same amount of care as one that you really like. The July auction is a great way to pass your trees onto more loving and understanding homes, and you get 80% of the selling price to spend on more trees.

Trees eligible for auction must be worth an opening bid of \$10. Save the small seedlings and cheap pots for the sale at the show where these items sell like hotcakes. Note that other items besides trees are also good auction candidates such as stands, pots and scrolls. In fact, while most items are bonsai related, anything in good taste can be auctioned including the family dog, but not including ex-husbands and old girlfriends.

May Meeting

The May meeting included a talk by Ryan Bell who discussed bonsai pots in great detail including the history, where they are made and who are the makers. The first pots suitable for bonsai were made in China, and date to as early as the fourteenth century. There were six areas where pottery was produced and each had a different source of clay. Since the clays were different in texture, color and quality, the resulting ceramics reflected this with distinctly different looks. As an example, one area specialized in glazed pots because the available clay was poor in quality. The remaining areas had access to excellent quality clay, so the pottery from these areas was largely unglazed. Many of these areas still produce pottery today although, sadly, traditional sources of clay are running out.



Old Chinese pots long ago exported to Japan are treasured by the current bonsai community. As recently as twenty-five years ago, two thirds of the trees in a top Japanese show were displayed in antique Chinese pots. Currently, only about one half of the trees in that show are in antique Chinese pots.

Japanese pottery producing areas were established in about the sixteenth century and were started by Koreans. The products from six of the major areas were (and still are) mainly utilitarian in nature such as roof tiles and containers for storage of tea. Bonsai pots are a minor part of production. Products from each of the six areas are distinctly different. As examples, one kiln produces rustic ware and another specializes in pots with complicated glazes. A third kiln specializes in porcelain and celadon ware. Starting about 1900, the quality of pots imported from China declined which spurred the development of fine quality bonsai pots in Japan. Three potters emerged at this time who were considered the finest of the Japanese potters of the day, and their work is very much admired and copied today. Of the six kilns only one is producing bonsai pots today and that is the tokoname kiln. Many different potters make pots for tokoname and all their products are sold under the tokoname name. The ability of each of these potters varies widely and while some

tokoname pots are excellent quality, some are very much less so. The general trend in the Japanese bonsai pot industry today is for the potters to make less production ware and to focus on one of a kind commissioned pots which is very expensive. This is a reflection on the current availability of inexpensive and high quality pots currently imported from both Korea and China.

Bonsai pots are classified by firing temperature. Terracotta pots are fired to about 1000 degrees Celsius. These pots are porous and absorb water. The porosity of the pot will affect how you water the tree planted in it because the more porous the pot, the quicker the soil will dry out. In areas subject to freezing temperatures in winter the absorbed water may freeze and break the pot, although this is not a problem for most local EBBS members. Stone ware is fired to about 1200 degrees and does not absorb water. Finally porcelain requires special clay and is fired to about 1400 degrees and results in a glass like ware. Much of the porcelain ware is decorated with painted images.

The most appreciated quality of a well-made pot is a patina which develops over time. This is a buildup of microscopic particles which cannot be washed off. Oiling the pot removes larger particles which adhere to the pot but not the finer particles. Patina gives the pot a sense of age and nicely compliments the aged look of the tree.

Makers of quality pots sign them on the bottom with their name scratched in the clay before the pot is fired. The signature, called a chop, will be in Japanese characters and an essential part of reading the signature of the maker is to be sure that you looking at the characters with the right side up. Ryan lists a large number of chops on his web site, www.japanesebonsaipots.net, which is also an excellent source for further information about Japanese bonsai pots.

The program was packed with information about pots and especially Japanese pots, and was a rare opportunity to see pictures of so many fine antique pots. Ryan also sells pots through his web site. He welcomes emails and his address is gastrognome@aol.com.

Field Trip



The United States Post Office has earned the reputation for delivering the mail in spite of sleet and snow. Six members of EBBS, in the best tradition of the Post Office, braved the somewhat unpromising weather for the field trip to Lone Pine Gardens. All six had a good time, and some came home with new acquisitions for their bonsai collection. As advertised, there was certainly a lot to see. The society also benefited from the trip. A fine field grown larch tree was purchased as a demonstration tree for our fall show. If you missed the field trip, Lone Pine Gardens are regularly open for visitors and you can go there on your own. Check their web site (www.lonepinegardens.com) for location, directions and business hours.

Suiseki



EBBS recently devoted a program to suiseki. If you were amazed and delighted, or just intrigued by the subject, there will be a suiseki show in the Garden center on June 11 and 12. On Saturday, June 11, the show is open from 11 am to 4 pm. On Sunday, June 12, the show is open from 10 am to 4 pm.

The show is an opportunity to see a wide variety of suiseki, as well as an opportunity to see how

they are displayed. The key to suiseki appreciation is to ask yourself if the stone you are looking at reminds you of a geological feature you have seen, or of an object such as an animal that you may have seen in nature.

There will be suiseki for sale as well as suiseki related items. Occasionally stands are available for displaying suiseki and these also work well for bonsai. While there are a number of bonsai shows each year in the area, suiseki shows are much more limited so this show should be marked on your calendar.

Spotlight

The spotlight this month is focused on Janice Dilbeck, the crusading editor of your newsletter. Editors of the most influential newspapers in the country have been occasionally labeled as crusading because they have championed a cause that they view as being right. Janice has stoutly defended the cause that if your newsletter is not fun to read, no one will read it. The use of all the illustrations that appear in the newsletter truly makes it fun to read. Janice is ably supported by our photojournalism department consisting mainly of Suzanne Muller and Michael Hylton. Janice selects images that illustrate the topic at



hand and augments them with the funky little images that appear in each issue. Where in the world does she get them? Thanks for all you do, Janice. You deserve the title of crusading editor because you make the newsletter fun to read.

Little Trees

Most of the trees in our collections are a foot or taller and grow in pots that are a foot or more across. Although these trees present challenges to grow well, for the most part they do grow and thrive in our care.

EBBS shows have had displays of much smaller trees and will probably feature them again in our show in October. These trees are less than eight inches high. One would think that smaller trees would be half the trouble to grow well but the reverse is true. These trees are much harder to grow and, as a matter of fact, these trees are usually shown by only the most experienced growers. So what makes them such a challenge to grow?



All bonsai are subject to root rot which is usually fatal once it starts. This is the result of soggy, poorly draining soil. We can prevent root rot by using very porous soil mixtures which drain excess water quickly. The price of open soil mixtures is that it will dry quickly. If the soil becomes very dry, the fine roots which the tree depends on for water and nutrient uptake will die. The result is that we draw a balance between not too wet and not too dry. Generally, this balance is not too hard to maintain for most of our trees as long as we understand the needs of the tree.

The challenge of the smaller trees is to maintain this balance between soil that is not too wet and not too dry. For one thing, the pots are much smaller and shallower. On a warm day, the top half an inch of the soil mixture in a large pot may dry out. The rest of the soil mixture below the dry area is still moist, so the tree roots are fine. On the little trees, the top half an inch is all the way to the bottom of the pot, and when the top one half inch of this soil mixture dries out, good bye roots. Thus, the window between too wet and too dry is much narrower for the little trees.

The challenge of balancing the needs of the smaller trees is partially met by using a finer potting mixture than we use for larger trees. A coarse soil mixture that works just fine for a larger tree would dry out too quickly in a

small pot. The mixture for these trees still drains well, but retains some moisture.

Another crucial part of the story is more frequent watering. Most of our trees will be a little mad at us if we skip a day when we should water. In spite of hurt feelings, our trees will usually forgive us. Constantly checking the little trees for water needs is a matter of life and death for them.

The Japanese like to catalogue the various sizes of bonsai trees. In America we pretty much ignore this system with two exceptions. Trees less than eight inches in height are classified as shohin and trees less than three inches are mame. Most of the little trees that we see fall into the shohin classification. Mame class bonsai are rarely seen.

Those of us who visited the BABA show earlier this spring saw many very spectacular trees, many of which were either collected Sierra or California junipers. Once established, these trees are relatively easy to grow. The challenge for them is in finding the tree and styling it to compliment the features that the tree already had when it was collected.



As dramatic as these trees are, the most spectacular exhibit in the BABA show was so small that you probably missed it. It was a display of mame bonsai. The trees were common species that we all know, but the display of trees in thimble sized pots showed extreme horticultural skill. For most of us the challenge of trying to maintain the balance between too wet and too dry in shohin sized trees is very difficult. For the mame class trees, the challenge for most of us to keep them alive is overwhelming. The moral of this, if there is one, is to look carefully at all the trees next time you go to a bonsai show because the most spectacular trees may not be quite what you were expecting.

The rewards for the diligence required for growing the little trees are great. When our show comes around, take a moment to look carefully at the shohin display. Not only are the little trees themselves spectacular, but they are the result high horticultural skill.

Bonsai Instruction at Merritt College

The workshops at Merritt College are held only when the college is in session. Because the campus is closed for the summer, there will be no workshops until the fourth Monday of August when they will again resume.

Bonsai Calendar

- Watering – Water regularly. Don't over-water defoliated trees.
- Fertilizing – Continue regular feeding.
- Repotting – Not recommended at this time except for tropical and semi-tropical trees.
- Styling/Pruning – Rotate trees. Watch for wire cutting during this period of fast growth. OK to defoliate healthy trees in first part of month. Candle prune black and other hard pines.
- Cuttings – Root softwood cuttings on deciduous trees and Satsuki.
- Insect and disease control – Maintain defensive treatments for fungus. Watch for and treat insect infestations.

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.

June 4 and 5, San Mateo, Sei Boku Bonsai Kai: 33rd Annual Show at the San Mateo Garden Center, 605 Parkside Way (next to Beresford Park). Show hours are 10 AM to 4 PM both days, with demonstration by Dennis Makishima from Noon – 3 PM on Saturday (tree will be raffled off at the conclusion of demo). Sunday Dennis will lead an open view workshop from Noon – 3 PM. Large club member plant sale, vendors, door prizes and our always popular raffles. Admission is free. Dr. Bonsai will be available to offer styling and care tips. For more information contact Marsha Mekisich ateclectic.gardener@yahoo.com.

June 18 – 19, Livermore, Valley Bonsai Society: 8th annual show at Alden Lane Nursery, 981 Alden Lane. Show hours are 10 AM – 4 PM on both days with demonstration by an expert bonsai artist at 1 PM. The finished trees will be raffled off at the end of the demonstration. Member's sales table. Admission

is free. For additional information contact Charles Harder at bonsainut@comcast.net

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.

Wanted to Buy (or for free)

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

June 8	Pines – Rick Trumm
June 26	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Tom Colby
July 13	EBBS Auction
July 24	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Bob Gould Canceled
Aug 10	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – John Nackley
Sept 14	Oaks, John Thompson
Sept 25	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Janet Nelson
Oct 23	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Don Meeker
Nov 9	tbd
Nov 27	BGLM Introduction to Bonsai – Tom Colby
Dec 14	Holiday Party

Special Events

Aug 20	Potluck
Oct 8-9	Show
