



The Tree Shrinker

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A MONTHLY BULLETIN

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East Bay Bonsai Society

Meeting: November 8, 2017 7:30 PM

November Meeting

The November program will feature Randall Lee showing us how to manage a group planting, as well as how to grow trees on a slab. Group plantings are a presentation of several trees in a single composition. Many group plantings are grown on a slab of either rock or pottery rather than in a pot, and they require special techniques to be successful. Randall's program will kill two birds with one stone, a group planting on a slab.



Both group plantings and growing trees on a slab have been a bit neglected in recent years, and so it is an opportunity to refresh our memories on just how easy and rewarding it is to make a spectacular group planting.

We are also privileged to have Randall as our presenter. Many know Randall as one of the leaders of the monthly bonsai workshops at Merritt College, and many more know Randall from the superb demonstrations he has given at regular EBBS meetings. Don't miss the November meeting. A fine speaker on a great subject is a combination that is hard to beat.

December Meeting

Our annual holiday dinner which will be held on our regular meeting day, December 13. Circle your calendar for this date as the holiday dinner is the festive climax of the year. It is a potluck dinner with the club

furnishing ham and turkey for the main course, and beverages. Members bring side dishes and trimmings. Last year Michael Hylton provided the entertainment of the evening by assembling a spectacular program of images taken throughout the year, including our show. We are hoping that Michael will once again present a stellar program this year.

You are aware of the many fine people who comprise the membership of EBBS. If you looked at the splendid bonsai exhibited at the recent show, you also are aware that there are many good bonsai artists in our midst. What you may not know is that in the club there are many superb cooks, and the holiday dinner is where they showcase their skills. The great food, fellowship and Michael's program all will make the evening special. See you there!



Show

This year's show was another great success. It was truly a group effort, and thanks are due to all those who pitched in to help make it one of the best shows yet. It was amazing to see the large number of fine bonsai that were shown by the members of EBBS. Thanks to all that showed trees, and special thanks to those who showed a tree for the first time.



Our headliner, Peter Tea, led an informative critique of the show on Sunday morning. His demonstration on a juniper was very well received, and his workshop was a valuable experience for all who attended. The headliner provides a real learning experience for all of us, and Peter delivered in spades. During his demonstration, he made a particularly telling comment. He was in the process of styling the juniper, and he paused and said that the most important thing in approaching a tree is that it is a healthy tree. If the tree is not growing well, delay any styling until the tree is in robust health. The health of the tree is more important than the work you were planning to do on it.



Many people deserve recognition for their efforts to make the show a success. First and foremost on the list is the chair of the show, Lisa Harper. And what a great job she did to make it all run smoothly. We all owe Lisa a big thank you for all her hard work to make the show a success.

Special thanks are due to all the committee chairs who had the job of organizing and supervising volunteers. It was particularly gratifying to see that many of the committee chairs were filled by relatively new members of the club.

Last, but by no means least, thanks to all who volunteered to help with the show. "It couldn't have happened without you" may be a bit trite, but none the less is certainly true. Willing help is what makes it all go smoothly.

Each year the show is a major financial venture for the club. Major expenses are the cost of the headliner and food. Income is derived from plant sales, the silent auction, raffle of the demonstration tree and workshop fees. It would appear that the show this year was a financial success. The final report will be completed shortly.

Mention must be made of four commercial companies who made donations of food for the hospitality table of our show. These people went out of their way to support our show and we should return the favor by going out of our way to support them. Trader Joes on Lakeshore Blvd, Peet's Coffee on Lakeshore Blvd, Safeway on Grand Avenue and Noah's Bagels on Mountain Blvd in Montclair Village all deserve thanks for their generous donations.

Members of the bonsai community were also generous and also deserve our thanks. Tim Kong, Janet Nelson, and Bob and Polly Gould all donated items to the silent auction. Tim also donated four large trees to the plant sale.



The show this year featured, for the first time, a kid's corner where little kids got to pot a tree and to learn about how to care for it. Lisa Harper spearheaded the event, and Linda Soliven helped her. The event proved

to be highly successful. Sessions were held both days, and a total of 28 kids of all ages attended. Clearly a kid's corner will be an event to be considered for our show next year. Thanks Lisa and Linda for making a new idea a spectacular success.



Spotlight

This month, the harsh light of the spotlight shines on Bev Martinez. Bev has been very active in EBBS doing a large variety of things quietly behind the scenes.

EBBS manages the monthly sessions at the garden, which are introductions to bonsai for people new to the art. Bev is currently serving as the person from EBBS who sends reminders to people who have signed up for one of the monthly sessions.



Did you like the skirting of the tables at the show? Did you notice how nice the backdrops looked? Bev was behind this and coordinated getting them all ironed before the show and during set-up so they would look their best for the show.

How about the EBBS library that is bought out at each meeting for member's edification and enjoyment? Bev is the person who makes it happen. She is currently soliciting donations of quality books on bonsai to strengthen the collection.

She is also a member of the EBBS board of directors and makes significant input to the business of the board.

As you can see, she is very active in EBBS and sets a high standard for the rest of us. Thanks, Bev for all you do for EBBS.

Wire workshop



EBBS is again sponsoring a wire workshop led by John Doig. We all know that John is a superb teacher and has lead several EBBS workshops in the past.

These have received much praise and general acclaim from all who have participated. It is astonishing that there is still one space

left in the workshop as of when this newsletter is published. For some lucky person, this is the last chance to sign up for the wire workshop. If you want this space, contact Roger Brady at Roger@BradysR.USEBBS soon. It is an opportunity that should not be missed.

The workshop will be on Saturday, November 11 from 12 to 4 pm at the Bonsai Garden Lake Merritt. Bring your own tree to the workshop, and the club will supply aluminum wire. The cost is a mere \$20, an outrageous bargain for all that you will learn.

The Root of the Matter

Here is a pearl of wisdom from the orchid growing world. An old and wise orchid grower once said that if you want beautifully grown orchids, grow beautiful roots and the all the rest will take care of itself. Bonsai people don't think of this explicitly when they grow their bonsai, none the less, this pearl of wisdom applies to us too. We do, in fact, go to great lengths to grow a fine root system on our trees even though we don't use these terms.



For example, we grow our trees in little rocks. Sure, we give the rocks fancy names like lava and pumice, but to paraphrase Gertude Stein, a rock is a rock is a rock. Why do we choose such an apparently unwelcoming soil mixture when a good garden soil appears to be a much better choice? It is simply to prevent root rot.



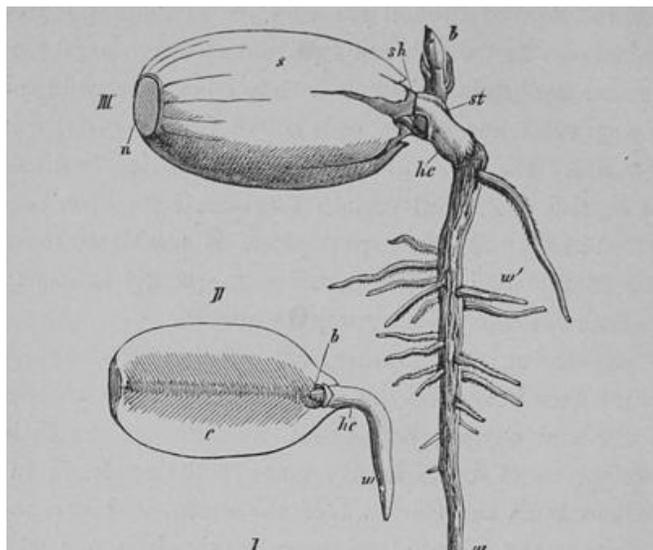
As a matter of fact, older Japanese books on growing bonsai recommend using garden soil in the soil mixtures for bonsai. Yes, you can use garden soil, but you need to be very, very careful with watering to avoid root rot problems, about the same level of care that you need when removing a rattlesnake from your swimming pool.



On the other hand, we also need to be vigilant with our watering. If we allow the pot to become completely dry, we risk letting the delicate feeder roots die, and then our tree becomes essentially a cutting. It is then a race between the tree growing new roots and the death of the tree. The man in the black cloak with the scythe usually wins.

The bottom line is that we use little rocks for a potting mix to avoid root rot, and water this well-draining mix copiously to keep the feeder roots alive. This keeps the roots healthy, and that, in a nut shell, is the most single important thing you need to know about good bonsai care.

It is worthwhile to take a brief look at roots themselves. We use the plural for the word root because your tree hopefully has more than one root. It is less obvious that the tree also has more than one kind of root. Imagine that you plant an acorn, and about two feet away, you install a magic window so you can see what is going on in the ground. At first you don't see anything, and then, as the little oak tree grows, you begin to see a flush of fine roots. These are the feeder roots, and their job is the slurp up water and nutritional goodies that the growing tree needs.



The feeder roots are special structures at the ends of the roots. As time goes by, the roots grow past our magic window and those roots that we still can see in our window, are changing in character. They are looking more and more like the trunk of the tree, even growing bark. Their function is exactly that of the trunk, i.e. they become a pipeline to transport water and goodies to the leaves of the tree, where all chemical



reactions take place to generate the energy that the tree needs to grow.

As the little oak tree grows, the roots form an ever-widening circle around the trunk. Forestry people say that as a rough rule of thumb, the root tips are as far from the trunk as the top of the tree is from the ground.

Let's do a second thought experiment and plant an acorn in a one gallon can and leave it there. Soon the acorn sprouts and we have a little oak tree. Over a long period we see that the tree is growing ever more slowly, and after a few years it is in severe distress. What is happening is that the roots are continually trying to grow out, but they hit the walls of the can and can only grow around the edge of the can. Over time, the roots fill the container. Further, the process of the roots changing their function is in full sway.



The net result is that there are fewer and fewer feeder roots to support the growth of the tree, in part because there is no room left for them to grow. The end of the story is usually a sad one. The little tree will die. We can see this story in action when we buy nursery plants. When they have been left in their containers a bit too long, the roots are growing around the edge of the container and the plant becomes "pot bound". To successfully establish the plant, we need to straighten out the roots when we plant it.

OK, so now we need ask, why can we grow a bonsai for many years in the same sized pot, and it is still a healthy tree? What is the difference between the bonsai and the nursery plant in a container? The key is that

when you repot your bonsai, you trim the roots near the edge of the pot. There are enough feeder roots in the interior of the root ball to sustain the tree until new feeder roots sprout from the ends of the roots that you have cut. This leaves space for the feeder roots to grow for the next year or more, depending on how fast the tree is growing.



Young trees, as well as trees that grow vigorously, probably should be repotted every year. But older and more mature bonsai that are growing more slowly can be left for two to as much as five years before repotting is necessary. Newcomers to bonsai frequently have the impression that bonsai are kept small by pruning the roots. Trimming the roots when we repot our bonsai serves a significantly more vital function than keeping out trees small. It is what allows them to have long lives in the same sized pot.

Looking back to our orchid growing friend, his point is well taken. If we grow beautiful roots on our bonsai, all the rest of the health of the tree pretty much takes care of itself. Fortunately, growing great roots is not all that hard.

Bonsai Instruction at Merritt College

Instruction is in the form of workshops and presents a splendid opportunity to learn how to develop your trees into first class bonsai. You work on your own tree under the guidance of an experienced bonsai artist. The workshops are open to all experience levels and are free. Workshops start at 7:00 pm on the fourth Monday of each month when the college is in session and are held in the Landscape Horticulture Building at Merritt College which is located in the Oakland hills off Redwood Road. There is a gate across the road leading to the parking lot that will automatically open when you pull up close to it. Leading the workshops are two members of EBBS, Bill Castellon and Randall Lee. You can contact Bill at 510-569-8003 or Randall at 510-846-0841 for further information.

Bonsai Calendar

- Sun – Move deciduous trees into full sun. Rotate all trees at least once a month.
- Watering – Adjust watering for winter.
- Fertilizing – Use low or zero nitrogen fertilizers.
- Repotting – Best done when plants begin their dormant period and continuing warmth encourages root development, often this month.
- Styling/Pruning – Shape both evergreens and deciduous trees.
- Insect and disease control – Remove dead plant material. Watch for and treat insect infestations.
- Propagating/Collecting – Continue root cuttings.

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

December 2, Clovis, Fresno Bonsai Society: Tenth Annual Bonsai Yard Sale at the Clovis Botanical Garden, 945 North Clovis Ave. Fun starts at 8 AM and ends at 2 PM. Everything bonsai for sale: pre-bonsai, finished trees, pots new and used, books, soil, stands, accent plants, suiseki and more. Everyone is welcome to buy, sell or trade bonsai related items. Small-town bargain prices. Coffee, donuts, free admission, lots of parking; join old friends for this annual ritual and come early for the best selection. For more information, contact David Soho at sohofive@yahoo.com.

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 2017 - 2018

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.gsbf-lakemerritt.org/

Meeting **Program**

Nov 8 Slab Planting – Randal Lee

Dec 13 Holiday Dinner

Jan 10 Styling Raft Hornbeam - Part 3 – Kathy Shaner

Jan 27 Introduction to Bonsai at BGLM – Bob Gould

Feb 14 Plant Biology and Development – Lisa Harper

Special Events
