



# THE TREE SHRINKER

East Bay Bonsai Society

Next meeting (in-person and online): **April 12, 2023 at 7:30pm**

## 2023 EBBS Schedule

### Regular Meetings:

2nd Wednesday, every month  
(except June & Oct.) @ 7:30pm

**Apr 12** - *Bonsai Pots & Pottery*  
with Michael Ryan Bell

**Apr 16** - *Nursery Stock to Bonsai*  
*Beginner Series* with Addison  
Galambos

**Apr 23** - *Introduction to Bonsai*  
with Michael Jensen-Akula

**May 10** - *Decandling Pines*  
with Rick Trumm

**May 28** - *Introduction to Bonsai*  
with Janet Nelson

**Jun 14** - **2023 EBBS Annual Auction**

**Jun 25** - *Introduction to Bonsai*  
with Tom Colby

**Jul 12** - *Japanese Deciduous*  
*Development* with Julian Tsai

**Aug 9** - *Bonsai Stands*  
with Tom Colby

**Aug 12** - EBBS Summer Picnic

**Sept 13** - *Accent Plants*  
with Lucy Judd

**Oct 14-15** - **Annual EBBS Club Show**

**Nov 8** - *Pygmy Cypress*  
with Bob Shimon

**Dec 13** - Holiday Party

## President's Message



Spring is here and our buds are turning into flowers and leaves and fruit! We're going to change it up this month and have a live streaming presentation. Michael Ryan Bell, one of the most highly respected Japanese bonsai pot authorities, will present a full 1-½ hour lecture on Japanese pots. I watched one of his presentations many years ago and I am excited to see this one. We will still be meeting in Oakland for this presentation and be broadcasting for those who cannot make it down, so if you can, come on down and join the party.

The count is in! The membership drive is over and we are at 100+ this year! I hope everyone will take advantage of our meetings and events. If you have an idea of an event you would like to recommend, please share it with your board so we can bring it to fruition! Also, take advantage of the [EBBS Members Facebook](#) page. If you are looking for help in any way, whether it be physical help with your bonsai or you need someone to water while you are on vacation, this is the spot to go.

In April (April 16), Addison Galambos will continue with the Nursery Stock to Bonsai Beginner Series. So those of you who have signed up will be able to take the next step in your training.

On the 4th Sunday (April 23), Michael Jensen-Akula will be instructing our Introduction to Bonsai series for beginners. Both of these workshops will be held at the Bonsai Garden workshop area.

April will be a busy month in the bonsai world as we finish repotting and start fertilizing, pinching and pruning. The trees should be beautiful in April, so come on down and bring a tree or two to show off at our monthly Show and Tell.

See you soon,

Bev Martinez

## EBBS Auction June 14, 2023

**The EBBS annual auction is just  
TEN WEEKS AWAY!**

The auction is a wonderful opportunity to acquire new trees to develop, and trees that have a head start to be in a future exhibit. This is also a good time to consider selling something in your yard that you would like to pass on to a new home. Look around and consider any trees, pots, stands, tools, books, or any other bonsai-related items that you may be willing to part with.

Consignment Sellers receive a percentage of the auction sale price, with sellers receiving 75% and EBBS receiving 25%. Or you can designate your auction items as a total donation to EBBS. Either way, EBBS benefits and you end up with more space to accommodate better items.

Mark your calendar for Wednesday, June 14. Auction items should be brought to the Lakeside Garden Center by 6:30 pm. Forms and sale tags will be distributed beforehand for sellers. Suzanne Muller and Janet Nelson are coordinating the auction again this year and may call you to help prepare and produce this event. If you would like to offer your services, or have questions, feel free to contact them: Suzanne at 925-890-0506 or [smuller@mbcf.com](mailto:smuller@mbcf.com), or Janet at 510-220-5303 [rjnj@pacbell.net](mailto:rjnj@pacbell.net).



## April meeting

Let's learn about pots! We're excited this month to have one of the foremost experts in the bonsai world on pots and pottery, Michael Ryan Bell! Michael (oft referred to simply as "MRB" online) began doing Bonsai seriously in 2008, and purchased his first quality container in 2010. After a few months trying to find information on that container, and others collected in the interim, he realized there truly was a lack of information available in English on Bonsai containers. He set out to rectify that situation through A Chop and Signature database and a website with container artist profiles and biographies.



At present, there are more bonsai specific pottery artist marks on the [japanesebonsaipots.net](http://japanesebonsaipots.net) Database than in any single publication, in any language, and it's still evolving. It is his stated mission to raise the standards of appreciation, awareness, and selection of quality bonsai containers in the community. Since beginning teaching about bonsai pottery, Ryan has lectured at the National Bonsai Exhibitions in America and the United Kingdom, the Golden State Bonsai convention as a co-headliner, and nearly 100 clubs and organizations, and also serves on the board for the American Bonsai Society.

As Bev mentioned, this will be an "live streaming" event, so we will have a regular meeting at the Garden Center and watch a live presentation onscreen together OR you can watch the presentation online at home!

**Refreshments will be provided by:  
Tom Colby, Tony Saraceno, Andy Chan**

## March Meeting Recap

by Lisa Harper

Addison and Alise traveled to Japan this February in order to tour Japan and view one of the most prestigious Bonsai Exhibitions in Japan, Kokufu. This was the 97th annual Kokufu where master-piece trees were displayed in over 150 displays. Kokufu takes place over two consecutive weeks. The entire display is rotated for new trees between the two weeks. The displays were made up of large tree displays, medium displays, shohin, mame and a Suiseki show.



Alise went to Japan along with the tour with famous American Bonsai Master, Bjorn Bjorholm. The tour stopped along significant Bonsai locations within Japan including Hoshunin Museum in Kyoto, Shunka En in Tokyo, and of course ending with a tour of Kokufu itself. Alise enjoyed a variety of shopping along the way and brought back multiple Suiseki as well as a signed copy of Kobayashi's book series. Alise shared photos of the small and medium trees at the exhibit that stuck out to her. Alise brought some of her excellent Suiseki for viewing at the intermission.

Addison went to Japan with a friend and spent fourteen days traveling around the country. The



main highlights outside of Kokufu were visiting the foreign apprentices studying in Osaka at Kouka En and at Shunka En in Tokyo. Addison's presentation focused on showing the viewing area within the Kokufu exhibition and the composition of many of the large tree displays. These large tree displays included the main tree, stands and an accent plant. Many of the trees showed impressive trunks, great ramification, and beautiful display elements. He also gave an overview of the main unglazed pot types seen at the show. Kowatari (Antique Chinese pre 1800), Taisho (1916-1926), and modern Japanese pots (1926-present) made up the majority of pots.

They both thought the trip was unforgettable and recommend bonsai enthusiasts make the trip to see amazing Bonsai and get some excellent shopping in at some point. Don't hesitate to reach out to them if you have questions about planning your own trip!







## Members Only Workshop

---

This month, we had the first members only workshop at the Garden! It was a pretty small group—about eight or ten people showed up with a tree to work on—but it was super fun to get together and style some bonsai as a group!

As you know, we did a member survey last year. The most frequent request that was made, was for more opportunities to roll up our sleeves and work with other club members on bonsai. Several folks expressed they miss the Merritt College workshops we used to have in the evenings once a month, so we hope this becomes the first of many and a new tradition for the club!

The space at the garden is not available for workshops until August, if you have a suitable location, please [let us know](#) and we will coordinate another workshop with you!

*Note, a few people told us that they thought this was for Addison's beginner class, but these workshops are for all members who want to learn or teach others!*



## Is Lava Good For Bonsai?

*by Michael Hagedorn (originally published on his [Crataegus blog](#))*

This is a legitimate question. My master Shinji Suzuki never used lava (aka scoria), preferring just akadama and pumice.

On coming back from Japan in 2006 I continued using the akadama / pumice mix and have always had strong, fine root growth with dense root masses.

Several lava stories have stuck with me over the years. Joe Harris III reported very high levels of boron in lava at Iseli Nursery in pots with poor root growth. David DeGroot then had root growth issues, and a lab found what they called “toxic levels” of boron traced to the lava in the mix. Mr. Suzuki’s simple akadama / pumice mix has served me well and these stories don’t warm me to lava.

Last year I was in conversation with my former apprentice Andrew Robson who does a lot of traveling and repots more bonsai in various soil media than I do, and he’s developed negative opinions about lava, particularly red. Here are Andrew’s observations:

*As a bonsai professional who travels to work with students across North America and with a large collection of my own, I end up*

repotting several hundred bonsai each repotting season. One thing I've noticed is the effect of different soils in different locations across North America, and with different skill sets. While the professional bonsai community has come to the consensus that volcanic soils work best in a bonsai pot for optimal root growth, I've observed that lava grows worse roots than pumice and akadama alone.

I don't utilize lava for many reasons, but the first and foremost is the root systems I routinely see in it. Almost without exception, every bonsai I've repotted where lava made up at least 30% of the soil mix has had poor roots. Oftentimes when I take these bonsai out of the container, much of the soil just falls away because there isn't the fine root mass to hold it all together. In my experience, and now the experience of my students and clients, lava isn't creating the root systems that we're looking for. The same exact bonsai, switched to an akadama and pumice mixture, grows roots that are far superior in a much shorter period of time.

There's a few other reasons I can't stand working with lava. Other than the poor root growth I see in it, it's extremely heavy compared to the alternative (pumice). It can add a lot of weight to a bonsai pot, especially a large bonsai. Lava is also hard and will destroy the sharp edge of bonsai tools with just a few repottings. Plus, it's one more material to source, purchase, sift, and mix up for our bonsai. For all these reasons, I avoid lava with a passion.

Year after year I continue to see the same thing as I repot bonsai across North America: poor roots, heavy trees, and dull tools when lava is over-utilized in the soil mix. Many of the top bonsai gardens in Japan go without lava for some of the most valuable bonsai on the planet, and if those trees can thrive without it ours definitely can as well.

If you take your bonsai out of the pot after many years and all the soil falls away, or you cut the circling roots and all the soil falls away, it's probably not a soil mix that is working.

I always encourage bonsai practitioners to keep doing what is working well for them even if it's not something I teach or practice. But over the last several years I've moved away from using lava in my own and my student's bonsai pots, and we couldn't be happier with the results.

—Andrew Robson

As an aside, Mr. Suzuki used 2/3 akadama, 1/3 pumice, which is prohibitive for many Westerners. I use 1/3 akadama, 2/3 pumice for conifers, and 1 / 1 for deciduous. Most of this has been an economic decision based on the expense of akadama. I'm exploring 100% pumice as it is cheap where I live, and find very good root growth, though the root structure is different than in akadama. I'll report in another post about that.

Lava, however, may create anemic root structures. The source of lava may well be implicated here, some perhaps problematic and others benign. Sometimes it creates good root structures, other times poor. If your source is working for you, use it. If not maybe compare to pumice some year.

Lava can work—a few nurseries in Japan use it in high proportions, but those are the exception. In Indonesia it is often the major soil component. Here in North America I have my doubts all sources are safe. Much of the observations of Andrew come from Texas and the Midwest, and I'm not sure where that lava is sourced from.

That some sources of lava are OK doesn't move me to be unconcerned. Given the few lab results we have and the pure empiricism of Andrew's findings (and my own observations over the years), this seems worthy of a conversation and more testing.

---

**To lava or not to lava? That is the question!  
Got an opinion about lava to share? Email the editor (that's Adam) at [adam@tractionco.com](mailto:adam@tractionco.com) and I'll publish your thoughts next month!**

## Upcoming Bonsai Events

### **American Bonsai Association, Sacramento** Apr 8 - Apr 9, 10am - 4pm

3330 McKinley Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95816. The American Bonsai Association, Sacramento's (ABAS) 63rd Annual Spring Bonsai & Suiseki Show and Sale will feature headliner Todd Schlafer of First Branch Bonsai. Demonstrations will take place both Saturday and Sunday at 1:30pm.

### **Modesto Bonsai Club Show** April 15, 10am - 4pm

Stanislaus Agricultural Harvest Hall, 3800 Cornucopia Way, Modesto, CA 95358, USA

Join us for our 40th annual Bonsai and Suiseki show. We will have sales of trees, pots, tools, and other bonsai related items throughout the day. A demonstration will be presented by Sam Adina at 1:30pm

### **Kusamura Bonsai Club** April 29, 12pm - 4pm, Apr 30, 11am - 4pm

Addison School, 650 Addison Street (Entrance at 1045 Webster), Palo Alto, CA, Demonstrations both days at 1:30pm - Michael Greenstein on Saturday. More at [www.kusamurabonsai.org](http://www.kusamurabonsai.org)

### **San Diego Bonsai Club Show** April 29, 12 - 5pm

Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, San Diego, CA, USA. For more information contact Ignacio De La Torre at [igdlit@att.net](mailto:igdlit@att.net)

### **The Sacramento Bonsai Club's 77th Anniversary Show** May 06, 11am - 4pm

2401 Riverside Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95818. One-Day Only! Free admission/donation, raffle drawings, large members' sale of bonsai-related materials. Demonstration at 1:30pm.

### **Santa Cruz Bonsai Kai** May 13, 10am - 4pm

2555 Mar Vista Dr, Aptos, CA 95003. Join us for the Show & Sale but stay for the Demonstration at 1pm.

[www.santacruzbonsaikai.co](http://www.santacruzbonsaikai.co)

### **Bay Area Satsuki Aikokai & Yamato Bonsai Kai's Show** May 20, 10am - 3pm

Lakeside Park Garden Center, 666 Bellevue Ave, Oakland, CA 94610. These two clubs joint show offers Azalea in full bloom and fine bonsai in formal displays. BASA Demo: Sat, May 20th 1-3pm Yamato Demo: Sun, May 21st 1-3pm

### **Sei Boku Bonsai Kai Show.** June 3-4, 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

San Mateo Garden Center, 605 Parkside Way, San Mateo (at Beresford Park). Come celebrate Sei Boku Bonsai Kai's 38th anniversary. David De Root demo and open viewing workshop at 1pm each day. More at [www.seibokubonsaikai.org](http://www.seibokubonsaikai.org).

### **East Bay Bonsai Society Annual Auction** Jun 14, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Lakeside Park Garden Center, 666 Bellevue Ave, Oakland, CA 94610. The East Bay Bonsai Society's in-person bonsai auction on will start at 7:30pm with a preview at 7:00pm. More? [mhylton@rocketmail.com](mailto:mhylton@rocketmail.com).

### **REBS 37th Annual Bonsai Show** Aug 26 - Aug 27, 2023, 10am - 4pm

5401 Snyder Ln, Rohnert Park, CA 94928. The return of the Redwood Empire Bonsai Society hosting its 37th Annual Bonsai Show. Featuring the international renowned bonsai artist Ryan Neil as guest demonstrator.

### **Sierra Bonsai Club Show** Sept 23 - 24, 2023, 10am - 4pm

3192 Boyington Rd, Penryn, CA 95663. The Sierra Bonsai Club will display bonsai and suiseki in the temple as well as outdoors in conjunction with the Placer Buddhist Church Food & Cultural Festival Bazaar all weekend.

### **Yamato Bonsai Kai Show** Oct 14, 11 AM - Oct 15, 5 PM

32975 Alvarado-Niles Rd, Union City, CA 94587. Demonstration trees will be raffled off as grand prize each day. For more info and updates find us on Facebook by searching "Yamato Bonsai Kai" or [irishfishboy@yahoo.com](mailto:irishfishboy@yahoo.com).

### **GSBF Rendezvous** Oct 20 - Oct 22, 2023, 10am - 4pm

13070 CA-33, Santa Nella, CA 95322. Bonsai Sales • Auction • Workshops • Lectures • Community

### **Capital City Bonsai Show** Oct 21 - Oct 22, 10am - 3pm

Sacramento, 3330 McKinley Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95816. This group show features tree and suiseki displays from participating area clubs

Get events invitations and updates at <https://www.gsbfbonsai.org/events>.

## Newsletter Contributors

---

**Editor:** Adam Kleinberg

**Contributors:** Adam Kleinberg, Addison Galambos, Bev Martinez, Michael Hagedorn (with a quote from Andrew Robson), Janet Nelson

**Photography:** Adam Kleinberg, Addison Galambos

Want to tell us about your bonsai adventures? Want to share your expertise with your friends in the club? Have an opinion you want to express about Bonsai? You can! Email Adam, our newsletter editor, at [adam@tractionco.com](mailto:adam@tractionco.com) to submit content!

## Member Ads

---

Want to tell us about your bonsai adventures? Want to share your expertise with your friends in the club? Have an opinion you want to express about Bonsai? You can! Email Adam, our newsletter editor, at [adam@tractionco.com](mailto:adam@tractionco.com) to submit content!

## Beginner Series Update

The second meeting of the beginner series will be happening on April 16th at the Bonsai garden at Lake Merritt. We will be meeting at the garden at 12 PM. This class is full so we can't take additional signups. In this class, registrants will be taking the next step with the nursery stock plant they purchased earlier this year and getting some initial styling in. We will first learn about how to wire trees and then work on our trees. Please bring your \$10 class fee to the class in the form of cash or check.

---

### Join the conversation!

---



Join the NEW Facebook group just for active members to at [www.facebook.com/groups/ebbsmembers](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ebbsmembers). Just click on that link and request to join!

---

### Follow us!

---

[facebook.com/groups/ebbs](https://facebook.com/groups/ebbs)

[facebook.com/groups/ebbsmembers](https://facebook.com/groups/ebbsmembers)

[twitter.com/EastBayBonsai](https://twitter.com/EastBayBonsai)

[www.eastbaybonsai.org](https://www.eastbaybonsai.org)