



the **TREE LINE**

the official monthly publication of the **BONSAI SOCIETY of PORTLAND**

February 2014

Upcoming Events

Feb 23 2-5pm **Mentorship Meeting** Sunday at Apex Bonsai

Feb 25 7-9pm **BSOP Monthly Meeting** St. Marks 5415 SE Powell

Mar 1 10am - 2pm **Oregon Shohin Kai** St. Marks 5415 SE Powell

Mar 25 7-9pm **BSOP Monthly Meeting** St. Marks 5415 SE Powell

Oct 18 - 21 **Intl Bonsai Art & Culture Biennale**, Yokyakarta, Indonesia

Predictions of Early Spring

My previous prediction that spring was on its way has been derailed by a strong east wind with a bonus of snow and ice. I've always been overly optimistic, an important asset for any bonsai artist. Groundhogs may see things otherwise; I'm still banking on spring coming early.

When I had a greenhouse to protect my trees, I would scoff at this kind of weather as my larch buds defiantly began to show color and swell. Today, my larches are under snow and probably resenting their new life exposed to the elements. I've already given them the Vince Lombardi "toughen up" talk. I hope they listen.

There are plenty of other chores I could be doing. Every day I look at my downsized back yard. I mentally redesign and rearrange my benches to make the most of the space I have. So far, I have at least a dozen ideas. But, with snow and slush still covering everything, procrastination wins again.

One encouraging thing that keeps me going: I'll find empathy and encouragement at our next meeting. It's the enthusiasm of our members that keeps my bonsai spirits high when the weather does its best to dampen them.

I look forward to seeing you all at the next meeting and hopefully hearing of signs of spring among your trees.

Chas Martin, President

The 10,000 Little Things

As I write this, it's snowing, and it's six inches deep. I just took a stroll through my bonsai yard and the hardier trees are looking every bit the winter wonderland with pads of snow piled on the branches, nests of snowflakes caught in tufts of pine needles. Snow, as I said in a recent Facebook posting, simply freaks me out though. It transforms everything. It makes the neighborhood quiet. It changes street traffic from cars to sleds. It sequesters people. Like bears, we feel the impulse to retreat into our dens and snuggle up. Not what I grew up with in Southern California, that's for sure.

Something I recently observed in wonderment about snow is that all these tiny flakes, consistently landing on the ground or on various surfaces, quickly accumulate to a point of impactfulness. You can easily miss a single snowflake, but 10,000 of them clustered together? That's a ball of snow. There's a life lesson there: A thousand tiny accomplishments lead to a large or impactful accomplishment. So what, you may be wondering, does this have to do with bonsai?

Skilled bonsai practitioners never (for very long anyway) ignore their trees. Every day, there's a snip, a pinch, an observation. A wire removed, a pot acquired, a design pondered. Over time, this consistent attention produces real results.

Our February meeting, "Ryan, Scott, and Doug, Part 3" reflects this approach. So often when we see a bonsai demo, a tree is styled, sometimes raffled off, and never seen nor heard from again. But this program is different. A year ago Ryan Neil and Scott Elser arrived at our meeting, each with a Douglas-fir in need of a basic styling. We watched, asked questions, and learned from these two very accomplished bonsai practitioners. In the fall they came back and continued their work, and we saw the consequences of the styling and care decisions they had made. We learned from Ryan that styling a tree is like the opening line of a conversation. The tree answers back by deciding which branches, of the ones chosen by the bonsai practitioner, it wants to devote energy to, and which to let go. Then the bonsai practitioner picks up the conversation by working with what the tree has decided. With Douglas-firs, as in other "elongating species" conifers, you can see what the tree has decided by observing the quantity of buds along a twig.

Ryan and Scott will provide their next input as they repot these trees. It will be interesting to see what pots are chosen and why, to learn about soil, securing the tree in the pot, and what kind of aftercare will be provided.

Join us on February 25th at our new digs, St. Marks on SE Powell, upstairs in the Fireside room. It may be standing room only so arrive on time!

As for monthly care, by the time you read this the snow will hopefully have melted off. You can be preparing for March repotting. You can stock up on pumice and akadama, getting copper and aluminum wire, and finding the right pots for your trees. You can begin taking lessons with any of our local bonsai teachers. 10,000 small, fun things to do as we wait for the fragrance of that first Daphne bloom, the blush of the first plum tree celebrating the coming of spring.

See you soon,

Al Polito, Vice-President of Programs

February Mentorship Meeting

Date: Sunday, February 23rd, 2014 Time: 2:00pm to 5:00pm

Where: Apex Bonsai, Steve and Deb Wilcox house: please call them for address and directions Cell 503- 720-9028 Home 503-848-2638

Subject: Repotting: *knowing which way based on trees current needs*

What to bring: needed pots, soil, trees, repotting tools and wire, turn-table.

Trees to bring; deciduous, evergreens and pines. Hold off on junipers.

Bonus: Apex Bonsai will have soil as well as other repotting supplies to purchase should you have the need.

Let's start this off with some information on what took place at January's mentorship meeting. We met at the new location, St. Mark's Church on Powell Blvd. The amount of space we had was more than adequate and the lighting is fantastic with all the windows facing north.

We had good attendance and those that attended received a bonus of multiple gifts. All received a free black pine courtesy of Joanne Raiton. In addition, Joanne brought other free raffle prizes including a pair of wire cutters valued at appx. \$80.00. Each mentee took home a lot of free goodies. Joanne plans on bringing in other things to every mentorship meeting she attends and our other seasoned members are welcome to as well.

We had another great turn out of seasoned artists to assist the mentors: Joanne Raiton, Alan Taft, Ron Cascisa and Al Polito. Barbara Devitt was there for those who wanted to use the library and special thanks to Jan Hettick for walking me through the opening and closing of our new facility.

Repotting time is a fantastic time of the bonsai seasons. So much can be accomplished at this time of year to improve your tree's look and health. You get to see how the root system is doing, maybe choose a new pot, change the tree's placement, and introduce perhaps a better soil medium.

A lot of beginners might think that repotting is the same for all bonsai, but it is not. What I want to emphasize most this repotting season is the different repotting techniques used depending on many factors. Is the tree in a bonsai pot or a plastic pot? Is the tree pre bonsai or a garden nursery tree? Is it an established tree with lots of feeder roots or does it still have heavier roots and or a tap root? Perhaps it is a yamadori. And very importantly, what species is it and when is the best time to repot it.

All of these different factors and more need to be factored in when repotting. Come on over to the Wilcox bonsai house and let's have some fun learning what repotting is all about.

See

Recycle Wire

Please bring your used copper wire to the monthly meetings. Roger Case will have a five gallon bucket available to collect used copper wire to turn in for cash for the club. Take advantage of the fact that he has volunteered to do this for the club to generate income for BSOP.

Scott's BRANCH TIPS

BONSAI TECHNIQUE & PHILOSOPHY

Bifurcations

That's a really big, fancy word that sounds like something that you might do after too many beers. But what it really describes is the process of splitting in two – as in a branch that forks into two branches. We are more familiar with the word ramification – *a branched structure* – and its secondary meaning - *the result of an action or decision*. Put those two together and you have bonsai in a nutshell. We make a decision every time the scissors click together. But how do we make those decisions? Those pruning decisions are most critical on deciduous trees, and now is a great time of year to make them. Notice the “Bi” in bifurcation, as in bicycle –just two wheels. Just two. Not three, not more. So that's an easy way to remember how to prune our deciduous bonsai. The trees have made it through winter and our latest snowstorm and are ready to go for spring. The leaves of fall are long gone, so we can easily see the structure in our trees. If you were diligent at pinching and pruning through last spring and summer, you are perfectly set up to do some pruning. Now that we have grown all of that ramification, it's time to take stock and see what's usable and what's not. Not everything grew the way we planned – it might have grown too long, in the wrong direction, or too large in diameter. So let's take a look at how to handle these conditions.

Generally speaking, we always want to cut back to just two branches at any one node or junction. This includes the trunk too. So you might end up with a trunk and a branch, a large branch and a small one, or just two equal sized branches. If you have more than two at any location you will get an unsightly swelling and may have to eventually cut it off. So remember that prefix – “Bi.” Make sure to leave enough healthy buds. On a beech I have no problem cutting back to a single bud in the middle of winter, but on a maple I am more conservative, leaving two buds. Then I prune again to just one bud if it needs it in late spring, after passing the winter cold. Leave more buds for fine branched species like elm and zelkova. Ideally I would end up with two buds on every branch, but it just doesn't always work that way.

The first place to start is to identify the overall outline or silhouette of the tree. Are your trees there yet? Do you have a plan for them? More than likely you have some trees that are approaching their ideal size and structure. Once you have identified the shape that you are trying to achieve, prune anything that protrudes beyond that outline. If you have an area that is too short, make sure to leave more buds, and length to the branch. This might include all or more of the branch than you might usually leave. Allow the branch to grow out and thicken if needed and reevaluate next year. Make sure to balance the strength of branches too. I take beeches down to one bud in the crown, which are usually much larger than those on the lower part of the tree. Then I leave two on the lower parts, and maybe more on the interior where it is weakest.

Next, cut anything that goes back towards the middle of the tree. Be ruthless. It will be much better in the long run. Remember that the last bud you leave is the direction the branch will head next spring. This means that you may have to leave one more bud, or take one more depending on the situation. Don't leave two buds that are facing each other and will cross once

they start growing. Cut anything growing straight up or straight down. These are not usable, unless you are desperate and can wire them into position.

Branches that have too long of internodes are pretty easy to identify. The distance between nodes should get shorter as you move out to the tips of the branches. The actual length is going to vary with the size and the species of the tree. The size and structure of my large beeches is completely different than the shohin maples. Everything must be in scale and proportion. When cutting back make sure that you have a live, active bud to replace what you are cutting. Sometimes this means cutting clear back to the node that it started growing from last year. But if the branch is too long between nodes for the place they occur in the tree, they will never get shorter. Better to bite the bullet now than to have to cut more off in the future.

Now comes the harder part – both to spot, and to carry out emotionally. As you are pruning you may start to notice branches that have grown stronger than others, even though they are on the same main branch. This occurs no matter how many times you have pinched and pruned throughout the year. Since most of our trees are very apically dominant, these branches on steroids usually occur in the crown of the tree. It may have several twists and turns, but no real taper to it. It may be a great branch, and you may have been growing it for years. But it will only continue to get stronger and spoil the balanced ramification that you seek. Find a place that you can cut back to a live bud or smaller branch. You will see an instant improvement and the tree will look finer and more detailed.

And finally, make sure to leave lots of healthy buds on the tree. You might go through the checklist above and end up with nothing. That's not the point. We need to keep a healthy amount of foliage on the tree to keep it active and strong. If you need to make a really big cut, do it later in the spring when the tree is going full speed and has time and resources to recover.

Happy pruning! *Scott*



Beech buds







Snow on Bonsai

BEGINNER LESSONS

It's finally here. We now have lessons available for all those people who would like to learn more about bonsai at a beginning level. Alan Taft is offering lessons at the Multnomah Community Center in Multnomah (on Capital Highway south of Hillsdale). We meet most Thursdays from 6:00 to 9:00. This first class of eight is almost full but another could be started. The fee is just \$25 for three hours with Alan where you can work on your trees, ask questions and get great advice from a great teacher.

Maybe you would like to start out slow, just put your toe in the water. If so, we are also putting together a list of substitutes that can be called to step in when a student has to be elsewhere. Be sure to sign up and get a taste of how much you can learn, meet new friends and take your bonsai knowledge to the next level.

Just call Alan at 503-245-1927, email him at tafta24@gmail.com or, though this is not a club activity, catch him at a BSOP monthly meeting or Mentorship meeting. He can put you on the sub list or get a new class started.

Oregon Shohin Kai

Due to snow and ice, the February 8th meeting of the Oregon Shohin Kai was cancelled. Many have expressed disappointment about missing Barry Baertlein's program on bonsai soils, so we are attempting to reschedule for February 15th. As of this writing the schedule for the 15th cannot be confirmed, but notice will be sent out as soon as we know. Watch for an email or check the BSOP website (www.portlandbonsai.org) under the Groups tab. Barry's discussion considers various soils, explaining the properties of different components. He will talk about things you need to consider when you are preparing soil for the coming potting season, and spend a little time on fertilizer and fertilizer uptake. He is going to show us why some popular soils work well and why some others that are less popular could be the best for your particular situation. Everyone is encouraged to bring your standard soil mix to be tested for porosity (pore space). Also, feel free to bring your trees and your questions.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of OSK will be Saturday, March 1. The primary topic for this meeting will be Repotting Deciduous Trees, led by Dennis Vojtilla. He says the program will focus mainly on maples, but bring your questions about anything else, too. We'll discuss styling, shaping new growth, and transplanting. This will be mostly a "hands on" session, so bring lots of deciduous trees to work on. If the trees haven't leafed out yet, we'll do some re-potting, so bring your supplies (pots, screen, wire, soil, etc.). Heavy trees will need to be watered outside, but we will have some system upstairs for watering the small trees.

The location of the February 15th meeting is yet to be confirmed, but the March 1 meeting will be held at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, SE 55th and Powell Blvd, Portland. The second floor meeting room can be accessed by stairs or elevator. The light is perfect - huge north windows. Note: The chairs are metal, so bring a chair pad if you don't like hard seats. Also, there are no restaurants nearby, so bring your lunch.

If you have any questions, contact Jan Hettick at janhettick@comcast.net or 503-504-7760.

Jan

Organic Fertilizer For Sale

The Portland Rose Society Fertilizer will be available again this year. The present plan is make it available at the March, April and May BSOP meetings. If there is sufficient interest (ten bags or more reserved) it could be made available at the February meeting. The price is presently \$16 per 20# bag of 5-4-4 organic fertilizer with mycorrhiza. If you are interested, please order from Bill Hettick at bhettickco@comcast.net or 503-936-5629.

How to Renew Library Materials

If you have library materials checked out and will not be at the meeting when they are due to be returned, you can renew them. Simply call or e mail Jan Hettick at 503-504-7760 or janhettick@comcast.net BEFORE THE DUE DATE and tell her you want to renew your items. That's all it takes. Just say "renew" and you are good to go!

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Welcome to the Village



BONSAI SOCIETY of PORTLAND

P. O. Box 21271
Keizer, OR 97307

The Bonsai Society of Portland meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month except in summer, when other group outings are arranged.

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

5415 SE Powell Boulevard, Portland OR 97206-2953

Enter parking lot from SE 55th Avenue

Visitors are always welcome!

Board of Directors

President: Chas Martin 503 459-1009 Chas.Martin@InnovativEye.com

Past President: Eileen Knox 503 466-2964 eileenknox@frontier.com

VP-Programs: Al Polito 503 708-9394 politomail@gmail.com

VP-Membership: Margie Kinoshita youngkinoshita@msn.com

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Secretary: Karen VunKannon kvunkannon@gmail.com

Committee Heads

Librarian: Barbara Devitt 503 764-8242 bbd.jcgroup@yahoo.com

Mentorship: Lee Cheatle 503 312-4921 leecheatle@msn.com

Shohin Kai: Jan Hettick 503 540-7760 janhettick@comcast.net

Newsletter: Peter Pelofske 503 704-3891 pelofskepj@outlook.com

Webmaster: Chas Martin 503 459-1009

Chas.Martin@innovativeeye.com

Club Email: Arlene Sigourney 503 667-0148 asigourney@aol.com

Heritage Group: Manny Tavan 503 869-0872 etavan@gmail.com