



VANCOUVER ISLAND BONSAI SOCIETY

February Newsletter

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Our Next Two Meetings:

Monday Feb 20, 7:30 pm
Monday Mar 19, 7:30 pm

Garth Homer Society
Auditorium
813 Darwin Avenue
Victoria, BC

2011-12 VIBC Officers

President	Bob Taylor
Past-Pres	Randy Kowalchuk
Treasurer	Judy Horsland
MallShow Coordinator	Vacant

Monday February 20, 2012 ...

Topic: Repotting and Pruning Maples

Bring in your maple for styling and pruning. We will also be discussing Potting techniques and soils used.

Show & Tell: All kinds of maples

Raffle Table - We will hold the usual raffle, please bring in your donation.

**Coming in March - Bonsai Techniques for Pines.
Elections**

Blanche Cole



It is with much sadness that we announce that Blanche Cole passed away unexpectedly in December.

Blanch was a long time member who was always striving to learn more about the hobby she loved. Blanche was also a very valuable resource when it came to various methods of propagating new trees. She will most certainly be missed.

Upcoming Activities.....

March 17 - A tentative bus trip to Lower Mainland. A visit to China Pottery Trading Limited in Richmond and a trip out to White Rock to see Tak at Japan Bonsai. Costs, sign-up sheet, and details to be announced at our February meeting.

April 15 - Our annual Field day will be held out at Highcroft Farm. Details will follow in upcoming newsletters.

Society Name Tags

You have an opportunity to purchase a personalized name tag for \$6.00. The name tag will have the society logo and your name engraved on a green background with white lettering and a magnetic back. We are taking orders, so if you are interested please sign up at the next couple of meetings. You can also contact Sharon MacDonald at ssmac@telus.net to place your order.

All members whose 2012 membership fees are paid for by the February meeting will have their name tag included in the 2012 membership at no additional cost.

Light On The Subject

Many of us living in cold climates assume our bonsai are totally dormant in winter. But research has shown that some conifers can be active during winter - they're not totally "asleep".

Although deciduous trees lose their leaves and wait out winter, it's a different story for some conifers - they can perform photosynthesis during winter. Although photosynthesis is greatly reduced in winter, it can proceed if temperatures are not too low.

Keeping our conifers in a totally dark environment is common practice in winter but maybe we should rethink this tactic - we might want to shed a little light on conifer winter dormancy.

Annual Mall Show

For a long time, somewhere around 25 years, we have held our annual show at the Hillside Mall. Unfortunately we have been informed that due to the mall's renovations we will not be able to book space for 2012 and possibly for 2013. We are now looking for alternative venues. If you have any ideas please pass them on to one of your board members.

2012 Membership Fees

We have decided to raise the annual dues by \$5.00. This additional revenue will help to cover the increases we have seen over the past few years in our hall rental fees. At present our membership fees we take in does not cover the cost of hall rental for the year.

All members who have paid their 2012 dues by the February meeting will be entered into a draw for the beautifully done, Dan Robinson book, *Gnarly Branches, Ancient Trees*, graciously donated by George H.



Imagine & Create

PNBCA Bonsai Convention 2012

September 14th-16th
Vancouver, Washington

Hosted by
The Bonsai Society of Portland
www.portlandbonsai.org

The Chopstick as a Bonsai Tool

Thanks to Ken Schultz of the Columbus (Ohio) Bonsai Society for bringing our focus on the usefulness of that little stick so often used in our remarkable hobby. He opens his article on the subject by calling attention to how often members tease one another when setting up for a club dinner with the words "Don't forget to take your chopsticks."

Just yesterday as I was cleaning up the surface of a show tree that had become covered with pine needles sifting down into winter quarters under my benches. My first step was to grab a chopstick that I know rakes better than my thickish thumb and forefinger at such a job. As I thought about it I realized, that I tend to have chopsticks handy wherever I may be working to help me with all sorts of minor jobs. Here are Ken's thoughts:

Use 1: Repotting. The chopstick is the ideal tool to use in doing all sorts of root work such as loosening up the soil when removing a tree from its pot, again, to help remove old soil from the root ball then to spread rejuvenated roots out, "into a more radial arrangement for symmetry as recommended".

Use 2: As a Wedge or Spacer. Small pieces of a chopstick can be use to fix a comfortable space between rootlets or even branches. "The beauty in using a piece of chopstick is that it may rot away before cutting in".

Use 3: As a moisture Meter. One of Ken' s bonsai friends, Mike, " uses a chopstick rather than a moisture meter to tell him when a tree in a larger pot needs to be watered. Because most chopsticks are natural wood , moisture is attracted to its surface and you can see the dampness". While I think I will hang on to my moisture meter for while, at least until my sense of touch is more highly developed. So, my supply of sharpened chopsticks will find many other ses in the bonsai world.... Thanks for the good words, Ken.



Great Bonsai Trees Require Great Trunks

Details Written by Jelle Ferwerda



The title being a given, the question that quickly arises is; “What makes a trunk great?” and only marginally second comes the question: “How do we create a great trunk?”. In order to grow great trunks and have some control over the shape, taper and thickness one should have some basic understanding of how plants grow, and in particular, the function of the trunk. Note that this article is an in-depth extension to the introductory bonsai trunk article.

What makes a trunk great?

A great trunk in bonsai is a trunk that has a weathered look (in other words: That looks old), is firmly settled in the soil with a nice Nebari [*root flare*] and has nice taper [*thinning of the trunk towards the highest point*]. Good Bonsai will not have inverse taper (the trunk getting thicker when moving up in the tree). Most often Bonsai are grown in a style in which a solid old tree as seen from the ground is simulated. This position normally causes a distorted view of the trunk, where the tapering is extreme. In bonsai, a rule of thumb is: The diameter of the trunk at the lowest point determines the maximum height of the tree. If the diameter is for instance 5 cm (2 inches) the tree can be 6-12 times the diameter, in other words 30-60 cm (1-2 foot), high. The canopy of the tree typically starts at about 1/3 of the height of the tree. In this example that would be at roughly 10cm (4 inches) above the soil. Side-branches should not be thicker than 1/3 of the thickness of the trunk at the attachment location.

In summary, a great trunk consists of:

- Strong Nebari [*root flare*]
- Nice, regular taper [*thinning of the trunk towards the highest point*]
- No inverse taper
- 1:6 / 1:12 ratio in diameter at the thickest point to height of tree
- Dominance in thickness compared to branches

Why do trees have trunks?

The function of a trunk is twofold. First, the trunk supports the rest of the tree, and any forces upon it due to weather variables. It will therefore grow stronger with more external forces on the plant. As the roots develop with the same function (keep the tree up) the same goes here: To create a great Nebari, allowing external forces to affect the tree works wonders.

Second, the trunk is there to transport water and nutrients to the leaves, and move carbohydrates formed in the leaves to the roots. To do this, the bark has a layer of veins that carry the fluids up and down the trunk. In the resting period of the tree, the veins shrink, and partially close off. This forces the tree to create a new layer of veins when growth restarts. In temperate species this causes very clear annual growth rings. Each individual branch is connected to the veins below the branch. The growth of an individual branch therefore results in the thickening of the trunk below that branch. This can be used when creating taper. The more foliage the tree needs to support, the more veins are required to bring all the nutrients and carbohydrates up and down the trunk. Also, for more foliage, more roots are needed. Therefore, in mature healthy trees the roots and foliage are carefully balanced. More leaves means more roots.



From left to right: Tapering of a Bonsai trunk, a Nebari [root flare] and pruning a side branch that was left in place previously to enlarge the trunk.

How to make great trunks?

The first thing to remember is: Trunks will only fatten up when the plant gets a lot of growth. Bonsai trees in small pots where we effectively limit the growth will not show a lot of growth in trunk thickness. Growing trunks mean growing your tree. This is one of the main reasons why—as a rule of thumb—serious bonsai growers will start off by worrying about the Nebari and trunk, before growing a canopy. Effectively, you start building a tree by creating a good root structure, then a good trunk and then the branch structure.

Cut-and-grow

This brings us to the fastest method to grow a thick trunk: The tree is planted (e.g. on top of a buried tile to create a nice flat root-ball) in full ground or a large container, and left to grow for a few years. When the trunk has 2/3rds of the desired thickness, the tree is cut off, at 1/3 of the height of the desired final tree height (see image 1 below, left). The tree may be as tall as 3 meters (10 feet) tall before cutting it for the first time! The cut leaves a stump of only 10 centimetres tall for a tree with max height of 30 centimetres (4 inches stump for a 1 foot tall tree). This is once again left to grow out.

Because of an imbalance between roots and canopy, one can expect explosive growth in the first year after cutting it down. Soon after the tree starts to grow branches from the stump select the one you would like to create the next section of trunk from. This branch is tied as vertical as possible. The rest of the branches are kept smaller, and any branches that show a clear trend to grow up are clipped. Branches growing lower on the trunk are left to grow, as they add to the thickness of the trunk below the point of attachment, and therefore to the taper of the tree. Once the new leader has reached 2/3 of the thickness of the trunk just below the cut, a new cut is made, at 1/3 of the remaining height above the first cut, and the procedure is repeated. Repeat the cut-and-grow procedure as often as you want. A minimum however is 3 cuts, to create a realistic effect.

Advantage: A thick trunk with strong taper is created in the shortest amount of time

Disadvantage: The cuts leave big scars which take years to heal over, and will never completely disappear. Also, the newly formed main trunk is not in line with the old trunk, creating slight bends in the trunk, undesirable for formal upright or broom-style trees.

Species: This works on trees that easily create new buds on branches without leaves. Typically these are deciduous trees. Pines will not easily re-sprout and you may kill pines with this method.



Left: A trunk cut aggressively (cut-and-grow technique)

Right: A trunk created by yearly pruning (annual-trim technique)

Annual trim

With this method you let the plant grow out as much as it wants for the year. In winter the plant is trimmed, removing most branches, and cutting the main stem back to just a cm above the point where it started in spring (see image 2 above, right). This is repeated until the trunk has the desired height. Side-branches are removed as desired, but are not allowed to grow for more than 2-3 years. Although they add to the taper of the tree, older branches will increase in thickness very quickly, and may dominate the whole plant. The scars after removing these branches will be very big and require a long time to heal.

Advantage: The scars on the trunk are smaller, and will heal in just 2 or 3 years. If treated properly with a branch cutter, the scar may be virtually invisible after healing.

Disadvantage: The trunk grows a lot slower than by the cut and grow method. Taper is not as extreme. Also, the newly formed main trunk is not in line with the old trunk, creating slight bends in the trunk, undesirable for formal upright or broom-style trees.

Species: This works best on species that easily create new buds on branches without leaves.

Side-branch extension

This method is similar to the cut-and-grow method. However, instead of growing out the leader of the tree, here we keep removing the growing point from the leader, and stimulate side-branch development. By allowing 2 branches to grow out and keep the rest of the trunk thin, tremendous taper may be achieved. After 4-5 years the individual side-branches are removed, and may be used to create uro [Trunk-hollows] for deciduous, and yin for narrow-leaved evergreens, as the resulting scars often don't heal over properly.

Advantage: This method results in very strong taper, and scars are on natural-looking locations. Particularly for some evergreens, this is the only way to get trunk thickening without spending decades waiting.

Disadvantage: Large scars on the trunk will not heal properly. Creating a realistic-looking Uro is a challenge for beginners.

Species: Particularly suitable for trees that do not back-bud well.



*Left: A trunk grown thick by using the bend-and-grow technique
Right: A trunk created by the Bonsai trunk merging technique*

Bend-and-grow

Here, young plants are allowed to grow a strong leader during the growing season. Towards the end of the growing season, the leader is bent down. This is done in a way that the attachment of the first side-branch of the year is in the middle above the trunk. The major part of the old leader is trimmed off (all except for the part required to keep the leader bent is removed). The side branch is wired straight up, as to form a continuation of the trunk (see image 1 below, left). Next growing season, this will become the new leader. This process is repeated for several years. Side-branches are allowed to develop and grow for 2-3 years each, to assist in adding taper and thickness to the trunk.

Advantage: Small scars on the trunk. It is possible to develop a near-perfect straight trunk.

Disadvantage: The trunk grows a lot slower than by the cut and grow method. Taper is not as extreme.

Species: This method works for all species

Trunk merging

Although not formally a way to get a trunk to become thick, it is a way to create a tree with a thick trunk in the shortest time possible. Here we start with a series of young saplings, which are tied around a supporting cone-shaped object. The saplings are placed as tight against each other as possible. With tape, or thin rope, the saplings are fixed in place (see image 2 above, right). The whole set is then brought to a vigorous growth. With growth come an increase in thickness of the saplings. With no place to go, the trunks will merge, and become visually one plant. Merging may take place within months after tying them together. In order to avoid die-back of a complete section of the new tree, the saplings are ideally interwoven a little. That way veins will grow across multiple saplings and can help support a sapling when individual root-systems fail.

Advantage: The fastest way to get a thick trunk from a batch of your cuttings, with very limited scarring.

Disadvantage: This is not straightforward and the resulting trunk is hollow, leading to potential trouble as the tree gets older (Insect infestations).

Species: This works well with fast-growing species, particularly ficus. But most trees are capable of merging cambium with other individuals of the same species.

Bonsai Inspiration Photo Contest

There are many things that inspire us when we are creating a bonsai, from other bonsai we have seen, roots on a boulevard tree, trees in the forest or on the golf course, yes just about anywhere a tree might grow. Mother Nature is the master of all bonsai masters.

Over the next 3 months, as we head into spring, we will be holding a photo contest of images which inspire you to create. Samples of the submitted photos will be posted in the newsletter as we receive them and they will also be posted to our website. The judging of these photos will be based not only on the quality of the composition of the photo but also on what the image inspires in you.

You can submit as many entries as you like. Please enter the following information on the back of the photo: your name, where the photo was taken, when the photo was taken, name of the tree or trees in the photo, and finally what about this image inspires you.

We look forward to many entries and the final judging will be done at our June meeting. Prizes will be awarded for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place.

Vancouver Island Bonsai Society

Membership Renewal /Application Form for 2012

I wish to renew my membership _____ or I wish to apply for membership _____ (New member)
Attached is \$25.00 for single membership ___ or Attached is \$30.00 for family membership ___

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City, Province _____ Postal Code _____

Phone Home: _____ Phone Work: _____

Email : _____

If you are mailing this form, please mail to:

Vancouver Island Bonsai Society
PO Box 8674
Victoria, BC. V8W 3S2



JAPAN BONSAI
GARDEN ART

TAK YAMAURA
Owner/Consultant

16164 - 24th Ave.
S. Surrey, B.C.
V4P 2S3 Canada

Phone: (604) 536-9220
Fax: (604) 536-8799
www.japanbonsai.com

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