



*Mississippi Gulf Coast
Bonsai Society*

*July
August
2009*

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Calendar of Events

- July 8 - MSGCBS Meeting - MGCCC, Multi Ed Bldg. Long Beach. 6:30, Program- Tree Critique
- July 11 - Bonsai Trunk Preservation workshop/ Seminar
- August Meeting for MSGCBS - none scheduled
- September 9 - MSGCBS Meeting- MGCCC, Multi Ed Bldg., Long Beach, 6:30, Program- TBA
- October 10, 11 - The 14th Annual Carolina Bonsai Exposition, Ashville, N.C.
- October 14 - MSGCBS Meeting - MGCCC, Multi Ed Bldg, Long Beach, 6:30, Program - TBA

Bonsai Trunk Preservation

On July 11 at 9-4 on the Waddill Wildlife Refuge, 4142 North Flannery Rd in Baton Rouge Joe Day will present a seminar/ workshop on developing and protecting bonsai trunks. Areas of interest and concern for bonsai enthusiasts include preventing problems before they start on both nursery material and newly collected bonsai stock, tools and materials for the process, creating jin and shari, treating and preventing rot.

The costs will be \$90 if paid by July 1 and \$100 at the door. Lunch included. Send payments to Joe Day at 960 Wesley, Av, Mobile, Al 36609.

Tree Critique at the MSGCBS Meeting

At our last meeting the president, Mitch Thomas asked each of us to bring a tree for discussion or restyling or both. **Tree** being pre bonsai or bonsai potential for sometime in the 21st century.

If you anticipate removing, restyling branches suggest you bring appropriate tools.

If we put some effort into this it could be a learning seminar for most of us. Someone could bring raffia (wet) and learn the procedure of protecting branches for wiring. Someone else could bring 1.5 mm aluminum wire and demonstrate making and using a turnbuckle to bend branches.

Learning about bonsai at meetings sure can't hurt membership.

Critiquing trees

There are any one of several reasons we choose a particular tree for a critique workshop.

One, we may be dissatisfied with the tree's progress from a potential bonsai to our vision of the "Star of the next bonsai display/ show".

Ramification is still woefully lacking or "it just doesn't look right". That is, not like the photos in the bonsai magazines or books.

Possibly we're having second thoughts on where the "front" is or the ultimate height we picture in our minds. We may lack the confidence to whack off a branch we watched, pinched and pruned for years or maybe it just seemed like years. After all, once it's gone, it's gone.

Our judgment calls, which should be based on learnt aesthetic values, are often shrouded by parental protectionism and sentimental memories.

We value our trees and talk freely when comments are made and questions are raised.

Courteous visitors to our collections compliment or say little. Some well intentioned but opinionated peers 'critique' without prompting. As a friend told me recently some because they expect all bonsai to look like bonsai all the time. Therefore any tree that doesn't deserves unsolicited advice.

But that's the way of the backyard. After a number of years we begin to expect that pattern to repeat itself faithfully.

But, bringing the tree to a critique we expect, or should, candid, valuable information. We expect to see and hear a perspective, a view we lacked with this specimen. The measure of this expertise from learned club members or visiting bonsai artists from outside our "circle".

The tree's owner is not obligated to take the advice. Not obligated to agree with the opinion. What is expected is to take the advice with grace. A thank you wouldn't hurt either. If you accept the counsel proceed with confidence. If you don't research your doubts. Even if your objection feels right, you could be wrong. No harm, no foul if you sleep on it. It's your tree, your responsibility.

Ideally the person doing the critiquing is open minded and sees the tree as a future "show stopper" or (to borrow a slogan) at least "the best that the tree can be".

Some artists have their scissors or concave cutters at the ready and some folks unfamiliar with

workshop practices take on the look of kids getting their first haircut from a cold, uncaring barber. It's best to know the game you're in before you play.

One night in a well lit garage in Huntington Beach, Ca. I watched a man some twenty years older than I tear up when Harry Hirao cut a large primary (and seemingly well placed) branch on a two foot high juniper he was critiquing. When it fell on the floor the gent complained it was his favorite branch on that tree. Without hesitation Mr. Hirao picked it up off the floor and laid it on the lap of the tree's owner. We laughed like some cruel children do sometimes. We were glad that tree wasn't ours and hoping we'll have better luck when it's our turn.

We go to doctors when our bodies need help. We go to better bonsai artists when our trees need help. Artists with the "eye", a vision to see the art in the tree, its aesthetic value enhanced a little or hopefully a lot.

So bring a tree to the next meeting. Bring tools and wire if you want. Just don't tear up when it's your turn.

Sun or Shade

(Joe Day wrote the following article for the ACBS 7/09 Newsletter. Reprinted here with his permission)

Any species we grow as bonsai along the coast could grow in full, all day, sun..... if it were growing in the ground. We grow bonsai in containers that have exposed sides and not enough soil to buffer the heat, good air circulation that dries the soil quickly. The Pine bark in the soil is the moisture holder, the lava rock or turface promotes air circulation. The air circulation is very important to the health of the tree. It cools the soil as moisture evaporates and it prevents fungus growth in the soil. The same channels that allow the air to flow from the drain holes to the top of the soil also allow water to flow deep into the container. When you water during the summer and the soil is almost dry you can often smell the old air that is flushed out of the soil as the water pushes it out of the air channels. This flushing and replacing of the air is a major factor in soil health. Place your bonsai where they don't look stressed at the end of the day and they will be OK. **Joe Day**

Bonsai in July and August

What bonsai activity is there to do in the two hottest months on the Mississippi Gulf Coast? Transplanting? Pinching, pruning, grafting? How about fertilizing? Or wiring?

Thumbs down on the above. Thumbs up on watering, inspecting our trees for insect and disease damage. Let's not forget the wire we wrapped some branches with way back when. Could be biting through the bark by now. These are the activities that come to mind in July and August.

What else? We could look at photos in past issues of bonsai magazines and wish we had one these and one of those. Or reread bonsai reference books.

Sometimes a light bulb goes off over our heads (this must be real as I've seen the graphic too often in the best comics) as we come across a solution to a problem or question we've yet to solve. Right there in John Naka's book(s) Or Deborah Koreshoff's classic "*BONSAI, It's Art, Science, history and Philosophy*"

Or, we could collect something relating to bonsai. Facts and figures can be mundane and easily overwhelm us as we gather mountains of information on say.... fertilizing. Weeks of reading, studying the benefits, side effects, good and bad, on just nitrogen or potassium. Also phosphorous and all the micro nutrients.

All of us have similar interests in bonsai but we also have different curiosities regarding the art and related fields which then lead to dissimilar interests. Some growers specialize in mame or shohin class bonsai. Others go for the larger sizes, up to 48" and consider smaller bonsai as young, underdeveloped and generally a waste of time. To each his own.

Still some go for flowering bonsai, saikei, Chinese landscapes, forests, kusamono and some want one of each in all the categories.

Nothing wrong in any of these categories. Hopefully the pleasure of this 'hobby' is beyond a collecting craze during all the scheduled and unscheduled chores, tree collapses and expenses.

Instead of continually blazing new territories- growing a wide range of different species, families, the total list of bonsai sizes, conifers and deciduous trees, temperate and tropical stock, some bonsai growers *specialize*.

Too regimented? Too boring? Seriously crowding our freedom of choice(s). Maybe. Especially if our interest is temporary or crowding our other interests, pastimes- bowling, guns, golf, stamps, coins, etc.

Curiosity could be viewed as a child's wonder. Wonder is innate in all of us but watered down as we grow older. Discouraged by well meaning adults- some teachers and some parents.

This curiosity in us asks why? How? Does this or that work. Relate? Or, how do you do bonsai? Can I do that? That wonder, that curiosity is the ticket, the open gate to a new, vast experience that will never be fulfilled.

So, even with a small collection of a few varieties there are challenges, timely decisions, records, schedules, researching verbal, virtual and hardcopy (books) for more information.

Big or small, how do we improve our bonsai collection during these months of July and August? We could-

Organize our trees with the aid of a computer, recording present and earlier events for each tree- wiring dates, pesticide usage, fertilizer trials and transplant dates. Take progress photos. So far, I have one foot in the age of steno pads and loose leaf binders and another in the electronic world. Critique our trees. Admittedly a tricky task. If we were already aware of a tree's faults what value is there in seeing the same thing? Two approaches help me, sometimes. One is total solitude and unhurried time to really study the tree. Another is a turntable. Having a few wedges handy for tilting doesn't hurt. And last, a good reference book dealing with style. I like Francois Jeker's book "*Bonsai Aesthetics*".

Sometimes pleasure is not throwing a party but achieving fulfillment in better bonsai practices.

Unless noted all photos and articles are the credit or blame of the Newsletter Editor.

Patrick La Nasa