



December 2009

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Calendar of Events

January 13- MSGCBS meeting, MSGCCC, Long Beach

January 22nd - Ben Oki Presentation. *Workshop at the Garden Center, Mobile, Al.*

February 26-28 – Patio and Garden Show, MS Coast Coliseum and Convention Center, Biloxi.

March 20 – Day of Bonsai, Mobile – *Program details and times not available as of this date.*

Notice – There is no scheduled meeting for the month of December



*Here's hoping you and yours have
a safe and Happy Holiday Season.
See you in January. Patrick L.*

In this last newsletter issue of 2009 I'm reminded of the season changes, the temperature changes and the priority changes. Our trees do not celebrate or observe Christmas, Hanukah or the ringing in of the New Year. They are not purposely indifferent or unaware. They are older than any religion, worship, or any man made tradition. They are wild things confined with intent on survival and procreation. Tethered to our care.

Unable to understand our lifestyles or protect themselves from our whims, vacations, business trips and distractions.

More than one bonsai artist has said, correctly, **"bonsai don't die, we kill them"**. I might add to that, by a large number of means. Here are twelve means listed here. Can you name some more?



Photo by Patrick La Nasa

December 5, 2009. This juniper raft in Diamondhead waited and waited for the predicted dusting of snow.....well, maybe next year?

Twelve ways and means to kill or avoid killing bonsai trees-

1. Adhering to an arbitrary schedule of watering, winter or summer. Climate may be barely arbitrary, weather is not. Dry winds, cold or hot accelerate the need for irrigation. Low temperatures decrease the need for watering and vice versa. When a learned visiting bonsai artist strongly suggests "water your trees everyday" hopefully he means to say "check your trees for water daily". Either that or he has no trees.
2. More than any other it seems December is the least active month for working on bonsai. For good reasons. Transplanting (almost my favorite activity for this pastime) is risky. So is pruning. The coldest weather is yet to come and new succulent, tender growth is the most susceptible to freeze damage. Be patient, the time is near.
3. Weather predictions. We have weather prediction capability from the local TV and radio stations, the local newspaper and several internet sites. Their predictions vary and are sometimes contradictory. Which one or two will we depend on? Sad experience may teach us to finally accept the advice as a guide and not a prediction of things to come. Especially forecast rain, rain amounts, wind speed and direction, high and low temperatures beyond the next few hours. The aft casts are pretty accurate though.

4. Protection. We protect our family and home. We safeguard our wallet and hopefully our future. Regardless of the many distractions, ersatz priorities we need to protect our trees consistently from cold and wind exposures, heated rooms and careless traffic.
5. Here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast we pay dearly for home insurance to protect us from hurricane wind and flood damage. Considering your past successes and failures in keeping bonsai alive, how would a "Bonsai Insurance company" evaluate your premiums? Protecting our trees from freezes when overnight weather predictions advise only temps in the mid thirties is a start.
6. Having a dependable person to water our measurable investment while we enjoy a week or two away ranks high on a bonsai insurance discount list.
7. Usually, less than an act of killing is maiming. But still, in this list of kill or not kill trees let us not forget wiring from the archives of August and earlier months. Hopefully, in this least bonsai activity month, we have time to gently remove the metal stranglers before the patient, uh, tree is permanently maimed.
8. We may be easy on ourselves when we dismiss this as good intentions – gathering more and more bonsai to our collection – to learn and experience the exotic trees, enjoy the differences in sizes, temperate and tropical types, transformations from vine and shrub to definite tree forms. Too many trees, at some point, lead us to a state of neglect or worse, burnout. Either leads to eventual tree decline and eventual death.
9. This next one is a two step killer. You heard or read that some exotic tree does not survive in this climate zone for very long. Then in a casual conversation one day you hear a trusted bonsaist claim they know sometime (implied master or advanced artist) who has had one of "those" for years. Next, you see that tree on sale from a national bonsai nursery. The rest is more predictable than the weather. Solution- verify.
10. Mad Scientist experiments. Before making life or death decisions for our fragile dependants regarding cold protection think it through. A vague understanding of microclimates, a half hearted application of techniques and strategies read or heard about will surely end in casualties by winter's end. Take it slow and take notes.
11. By the end of December when we often experience days of cold, days of wet we forget. We may forget our duties as we visit our trees less often. Growth seems to have stopped on evergreens, the leaves are off the maples and elms. Nothing happening here. Yawn. In truth it's neglect and neglect kills.
12. I misspoke. Listed above are eleven common traps in bonsai keeping I've experienced. Do you have a 12th that you experienced?

Patrick LaNasa

Newsletter Editor