



Fujii Notes

Newsletter of the Phoenix Bonsai Society

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Reflection of the Bonsai Trip to California

Each spring when we travel to California to visit with the Masters, attend the opening of the show at the Huntington Museum, and tour the various bonsai nurseries our members have a wonderful experience. Those who have made the trip multiple times continue to find new surprises and learn more about bonsai. Those who make the trip for the first time have no idea what to expect. Their experiences provide an interesting reflection of our yearly travel to California. Last year Stella Rogers made the trip for the first time and wrote a short essay about her experience. Since we have just returned from the California trip, it seems timely to provide this reflection of a first time traveler.

My Bonsai Education: My First Bonsai Trip to Pasadena by Stella Huerta Rogers

I have been very excited about going on this venture I know nothing about and seems out of my reach, however, I shall go where I have never gone before and absolutely try my best to learn how to select trees so that I can turn them into beautiful and graceful bonsai that I can be proud of. We proceed on our way to California, having gotten up on the ungodly hour of 2:00 am and boarded the bus at 6:00 am in order to arrive in Pasadena and start tree hunting like you hunt for Easter eggs. I get more excited as we get near our destination. All of a sudden we are there and as the bus stopped, everyone scattered out of the bus, headed in all directions, and I 'm left standing in a whirlwind of dust like a tornado just hit me.

I looked where everyone is heading and I thought, what am I standing here for? So I decided I would do the same, and I followed the gang and ventured into the San Gabriel Nursery. I could not believe my eyes. I was struck at all the pots and plants on display here, there and everywhere. I have never seen so many plants in my life just in one place. I was just spellbound, I could not move. I stood imagining all the bonsai trees I would take home with me.

So after I gathered my wits about me, I sheepishly also scattered and stared to look and pretend I knew what I was doing. I saw some trees that I thought looked like bonsai trees and decided on one. I viewed it up and down and sideways like you view a tomato at the grocery store and thought, this one looks like a good specimen. I got more courage and proceeded to pick another tree, then another -- after all this is what I came here for. Well, I felt like I was in the league of experts, and before I knew it, I had a total selection of about 15 trees. I then appointed myself an expert in the span of fifteen minutes since arriving in Pasadena and thought, what is so hard about selecting bonsai trees? This is a piece of cake. I then decided I should consult an expert from our club to flatter me with ooh's and aah's to tell me what great choices I had made in my

selections. I was gloating from ear to ear. After all, I considered myself an expert now, knowing that I could recognize a good bonsai tree when I saw one. I would pick right and left with no regard for what I was spending. In the first place, I enjoy shopping, so I was having a good time and told myself, what's one more tree?

Well, in my rush to appoint myself a bonsai tree expert, the expert members informed me that the selection I had made were not the best to be turned into bonsai trees because either the trunk was not good or too scrawny, or the foliage was too fragile, so consequently I had to return some of my selections to their rightful places. So then, in my excitement in thinking I was an expert bonsai tree selector, I figured I had to back up and start from the bottom. I learned my lesson to not appoint myself an expert until I have earned that degree with more experience. I was told by a member of the club that my eyes would bug out of my head in seeing so many plants that I would not know what to select. Well, he was right, not just my eyes bugged out but so did my budget.

So the moral of this story is: Don't let too much of a good thing go to your head! And don't count your chickens before they hatch. I had a wonderful trip to Pasadena, and am anxious to go again.

Terms You Will Hear at GSBF Conventions and From Various Masters

When you attend various Bonsai activities and events you will often hear Japanese terms to describe the styles of Bonsai trees. The Japanese-American masters frequently use the Japanese terms to name the styles of trees. It is advised that you review these terms should you attend a conference as it is very likely at a dinner conversation, or during a hallway conversation someone will refer to a tree as a "Kengai" or a "Moyogi." These terms are presented for your future reference.

CHOKKAN formal upright style	MOYOGI informal upright □ style
SHAKAN slanting trunk style	FUKINAGASHI windswept □ branch style
HOKIDACHI broom-shaped style	KENGAI cascade or overhanging style
HAN KENGAI semi-cascade □ style	SHIDARE-ZUKURI weeping □ branch style
BUNJIN literati or abstract style	NEAGARI exposed upward growing root style
SEKI-JOJU root-over-rock style	ISHI-TSUKI planted-on-rock style
SOKAN twin trunk w/one being larger	SANKAN triple-trunk planting
KABUDACHI multiple-trunk planting	NETSUNAGARI root-connected □ trees
YOSE UE forest or group planting	SAI-KEI Japanese landscape planting
PEN-JING Chinese landscape planting	SHARI deadwood on the trunk □
JIN deadwood branch stripped of bark	SABAMIKI split-trunk □, decayed or hollow
NEBARI trunk base of exposed surface roots □	TANUKI "Phoenix" graft of living on deadwood
YAMADORI collected material □	SHOHIN small bonsai under 7" in height
MAME small bonsai under 4" in height	SUIBAN shallow water tray for rock display
SUISEKI Japanese viewing stone	TOKONOMA traditional Japanese display alcove

An Introduction to Bonsai Soils

The following material is from an excellent web site, Bonsai4me.com. This is the web site of Harry Harrington. He is a bonsai artist in the United Kingdom. The majority of the text below is comprised of the work of Mr. Harrington. I have removed some text that does not apply to us in the desert and have made a few minor additions to his text.

One of the most widely debated subjects for most bonsai enthusiasts is soil composition. Ready-mixed soils can be bought from bonsai nurseries and garden centers, but these tend to be relatively expensive and as a result most enthusiasts learn to mix their own soils.

There are a large number of soil ingredients that can be used when mixing your own soil; different enthusiasts with varying degrees of success use different mixes. For the beginner, choosing which soil mix to use can be a daunting choice.

This article is written as an introduction to Bonsai soils, it does not discuss every soil ingredient or mix that is available or possible, nor does it tell which soil mix is the 'best'. The individual enthusiast can only answer that question after experimenting over time with his own trees, his care routines, and his garden's microclimate(s) including his trees' exposure to winds and to the sun's movement. □

The Basic Requirements Of Bonsai Soils

A bonsai is confined to a relatively small quantity of soil throughout the year on which its very existence depends. Through the soil in the pot, the tree must be able to obtain water, nutrients and gases in order to grow. For this reason, a bonsai must be planted in a good quality bonsai soil.

The quality of the soil that is used, directly affects the health and vigor of the tree. The soil needs to be able to hold and retain sufficient quantities of water to supply moisture to the bonsai between each watering.

Good drainage is vital. Excess water must be able to drain immediately from the pot. Soils lacking good drainage are too water retentive, lack aeration and are liable to a build up of salts. For us in the desert this prompt drainage is most important.

The particles used in a bonsai mix should be of sufficient size to allow tiny gaps or air pockets between each particle. It is important to the health of the roots that they have access to oxygen. A particle-based, well-structured inorganic soil allows fast drainage of water and allows fresh air to continually enter the soil. A compacted organic soil that lacks any structure also lacks aeration and drainage and this can lead to ill health in the roots and tree and root rot.

Organic or Inorganic Soils

Soil mixes are described as being either organic or inorganic. Dead plant matter such as peat or leaf-litter or bark is described as being an organic soil component. Inorganic soil mixes contain little to no organic matter; instead, they are made up of specially formulated soils such as volcanic lava, calcined (baked) or fired clays.

These materials are more difficult to locate than organic materials, but can be found in garden centers, bonsai nurseries, and in the case of some fired clays, supermarkets and hardware stores. □

Organic Soil Mixes and Components

In past decades, Western bonsai enthusiasts tended to use organic soil mixes, using a large proportion of peat, bark and leaf-litter mixed with grit to aid with drainage.

As time passed, our knowledge and understanding of bonsai in the West increased, it is now acknowledged by most enthusiasts that organic soil components such as peat are not conducive to the good health and vigor of a tree.

Peat and other organic soil components have many disadvantages; they can be too water retentive, leading to the soil being continually sodden, particularly during periods of rain. Conversely, during periods of high temperatures, dry peat can be difficult to thoroughly water, leaving dry spots inside the rootball of the bonsai.

Possibly the most serious problem with organic soils is that though they may consist of appropriate sized particles when the bonsai is first planted, they continue to break down in a bonsai pot and become compacted. As the soil compacts it becomes airless and drains poorly. Such waterlogged and airless soils soon suffocate the roots and can lead to rotting roots and ill health in a bonsai.

Inorganic Soil Mixes and Components

The advantage of inorganic materials is that they hold their open structure for a long time without breaking down into mush. Inorganic materials retain a certain quantity of water and any excess is immediately flushed through the bottom of the pot; it is difficult to 'overwater' a bonsai planted in a good inorganic bonsai soil mix.

Akadama is Japanese baked-clay which is specifically produced for bonsai and imported into the West; it is normally only available from bonsai nurseries and therefore difficult to locate. There are a number of grades of Akadama available including 'Double Redline' which is more costly but is of premium quality and less likely to break down.

Akadama is the soil of choice for many Japanese bonsai Masters and enthusiasts. This is partially due to its relatively low price in Japan where it is also easily obtainable.

However, while Akadama might be considered a good quality soil, in my opinion it is no better than the cheaper and more easily obtainable fired-clay soils that are produced in the West.

Furthermore, Akadama can break down into a solid mush within 1 or 2 years. This old soil must therefore be washed out of the roots every one to two years. For this reason it is not recommended for species that will not tolerate regular bare-rooting (Pines, for instance).

Mr. Harrington indicates in his article that in the U.K. it is common to use Kitty litter as a bonsai soil since it is basically composed of fired-clay materials -- but not the kinds with deodorizers or similar artificial properties. I do not recall reading previous articles referencing using this material, and this is likely a good topic for future consideration. We commonly do make use of Chicken Grit as material in our soils as it promotes drainage and provides the needed spaces to prevent compaction of the soil.

If you have bought a bonsai from anywhere other than a well-respected specialist bonsai nursery that will care about the quality of the trees it is selling, do not assume that the tree is planted in a good soil. Trees you purchase should be carefully inspected, as it is highly likely that the soil will not be appropriate for the Arizona desert. You will most likely need to re-plant a purchased tree when the season is appropriate for that given specimen.

Summer Care

With summer approaching it is time to pay some additional attention to the needs of your trees. With increasing temperatures and decreasing humidity you will need to provide supplemental moisture and shade. It is advised that you closely monitor your watering schedule, as you may need to begin to water more frequently. In addition, providing supplemental humidity is strongly recommended. You may want to develop humidity trays to put your trees on. These trays contain fine gravel or Chicken Grit and are kept moist. Do not allow your trees to sit in water, only on the moist grit or gravel. If you cannot use humidity trays, then try to keep the area near your trees as moist as possible. Anything you can do to provide supplemental humidity is recommended.

At this time of year you also need to monitor the amount of sun each tree receives. Some of your trees will continue to need ample sunlight; others will need to have more shade. Just be sure to frequently monitor the leaves to determine if you are getting damage from the sun and high temperatures.

In addition to the heat and humidity concerns, the summer is the time of year when we see new pests, particularly white flies and spider mites. It is advised that you frequently and carefully spray your trees with water to remove dust and wash off these small pests. Conversely, you need to take care not to get pines too wet, as they are then susceptible to various fungi.

Later in the summer the monsoon presents some relief to the humidity concern. During the monsoon season you can repot various trees. Consult information on the Web for advice about repotting during the monsoon.

OTHER ARIZONA CLUBS

* Bonsai of Scottsdale (est. 2000) meets at 1:30 p.m. on the First and Third Saturdays of the month at the Granite Reef Senior Center, Room 6, 1700 N. Granite Reef Rd. in Scottsdale, Cross streets are McDowell and Granite Reef. Contact Patricia Mitchell for more information (480) 575-5649, patmitchell2003@yahoo.com.

* Tucson Bonsai Society (est. 1972) meets at 11:00 a.m. on the Third Sunday of every month at the Tucson Botanical Gardens' Porter Gardens facility, 2150 North Alvernon Way (near Grant) in the Educational Building (second gate from main building). Contact David Meyer @ (520) 722-2000.

* Southern Arizona Bonsai Enthusiasts (est. 2001) meet the FIRST SUNDAY of each month at 12:30 p.m. For information contact Doris Cavanaugh, doris.c@worldnet.alt.net / (520) 290-0522 , Pat & Thelma Patterson dezertrats@aol.com / (520) 825-9685 , or Kurt simonsk@pop.mindspring.com / (520) 321-4173.

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This newsletter is named in recognition of Hideo "Leroy" Fujii (1925-1998), student of bonsai for nearly fifty years, a founding member of our club, and our sensei / teacher for more than twenty-five years. Our club logo, courtesy of grandmaster John Y. Naka (1914-2004), is based on one of Leroy's trees. Two pages of some of Leroy's other fine creations can be found on our web site at <http://www.phoenixbonsai.com/LeroysTrees.html> .

"Learn from your trees: they are a reflection of you."

-- Leroy Fujii

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