



## Monthly Meeting Recap

No monthly meeting due to social distancing.

## Show and Tell

Since we can't meet in person, here are some show and tell pics and info submitted by members.

By Lowell Tilley

This is an American elm that has been in my collection for about 10 years that I brought to a meeting last year. As usual I have some examples of what not to do and attempts to correct my mistakes.



These pictures show the surface roots exposed with soil eroded away, leaving underneath the roots exposed to air. That will kill and prevent any feeder roots growing down into the soil, thus stunting the

root's growth. For a tree to look old, the surface roots should be limited to about four or five. You never see an old tree with a large number of small surface roots at the base. A good bonsai will have a root system with large surface roots tapering and branching with many feeder roots under the soil. The more feeder roots closer to the trunk, the more efficient and better.



I am correcting this by putting muck around and under the exposed roots so they will grow new feeder roots, then mulching it with pine bark or sphagnum moss. This will prevent the top of the soil from drying out and protect the surface roots from sunburn. It may interfere with the weed growth, but that's okay.



The next picture shows the deadwood I made at the top of the tree to divert the viewer's eye from the trunk's reverse taper due to letting it grow too much at the top. I cut away some of the trunk to make it smaller, but I left branches at the bottom longer to

encourage more bottom growth of the trunk. I may wire some of the branches upward to increase the bottom growth later.

The next picture shows it after I trimmed it and wired some of the branches in place. I like to start trimming at the top by cutting each branch back to 2 or 3 leaves. At each leaf there is a bud I am hoping will sprout to produce a new branch, but sometimes only the end bud will break. Trimming the entire tree at once will increase the probability that two buds will break, creating two branches from one. By getting more branches, it will create more leaves making them smaller. Also, letting in light to the inside will keep the inside branches growing well and keep the tree compact, so I can prune back the branches again next year to improve the taper. Creating more taper in the trunk and main branches, plus growing more little branches, will add age to its look.



It's a little early to start leaf pruning, but if the tree is healthy and growing well, I like to start partial leaf pruning now by cutting off the largest leaves to let more light inside to help the interior growth. The more leaves removed, the more back budding, but also the more it stresses the tree. Only do leaf pruning on vigorous bonsai. If you remove all the leaves, it will back bud in undesired locations and you will have stressed it for no good reason. By partially defoliating, you get just the back budding in the right locations, increasing the number of small branches, thus increasing the number of leaves, and reducing the leaf size.

On refined bonsai, you should trim the branches when they reach the desired diameter, pinch the growing tip when the branch's internodal distance is correct, and prune the leaves just enough to let light get inside.

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By Catherine Altazan



Not only is it still living after your trim last year, Lowell, my Star of David is blooming!

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By Marla Thompson

Sweet little Barbados Cherry (Malpighia) in bloom. Last year it produced a crop of small red cherries which the birds promptly devoured.



## **Another American Elm**

By Lowell Tilley

Pruning, trimming, pinching, and defoliating bonsai techniques are used to improve structure and looks of the bonsai. Pruning is cutting off branches where they connect to another branch or the trunk and is done to develop branch structure to get the style of bonsai we want. Trimming is where cut off part of the branches to encourage back budding to start new branches. Pinching growing tips at the end of the branches is to control distance between leaf nodes (internodes). Defoliating is to let light get to the inside branches.

Even though you can do pruning anytime, it is usually better to do the pruning when the leaves are off. It allows you to see the structure of the tree and place wire needed to reposition branches for the next stage of growth. So, I am going to postpone the pruning discussion until later in the growing season. Now is the time to be trimming, pinching, and maybe doing some partial defoliation.

First thing to remember; you want to trim and defoliate to promote the small growth toward the bottom and close to the trunk, that is the future of your bonsai. If that part doesn't grow, your bonsai will have to get bigger.



This picture is an American elm before any trimming was done. I like to start trimming at the top of the bonsai and work down. When the branch to be trimmed has the desired diameter you cut it back to two or three leaves. You want

small branches at the top so the branch will only be long enough to have four to six leaves. As you move down the tree, you want the branches closer to the trunk to be larger, so don't trim them until they reach the desired diameter. Trim the branches at the outside like the top branches. Then cut off any big leaves that are totally shading the inside growth.



This picture shows it after it is trimmed. As you can see there are some more branches that need wiring, but it is open so light can reach all parts of the tree. As you can see, it needs many more small branches to reduce the leaf size and is a long

way from being ready for bud pinching. Maybe we can see improvement after the next trimming in about four to six weeks.

This last picture is this bonsai in November 2017. As you can see the top is being redesigned.



### From the President

The virus has thrown a “monkey wrench” into our club plans. I really appreciate how everyone has come forward to help with doing more online. Our mission is to “help you enjoy the hobby of bonsai” and I would like to thank you for stepping up to help with the mission. It proves Robert Reed’s saying “None of us are as smart as all of us”

I believe the virus infection rate has leveled off and maybe starting to decline, so I am hoping we will be able to meet together soon. Bonsai is a hands-on activity, so I plan to start doing small private workshop/study groups classes at my house outside when we decide it is safe enough. This is a first step in developing a club training program for our members.

At our next bonsai show (when and where is unknown), we would like to have a special display of all the trees that were given to members in January that have been styled to illustrate all the different ways of starting and developing bonsai.

When the country gets back going, we should look into getting a world-renowned bonsai expert come and do a bonsai lecture demo/workshop to help our members. David Easterbrook, retired Montreal Bonsai Collections Curator, is one bonsai expert of many who come to mind. There are several bonsai experts within a day’s drive of Baton Rouge who are excellent bonsai artists that we can get to do more bonsai workshops.

Please let us know your suggestions. It is time to start planning the next Midwinter Bonsai Seminars/Workshops.

### Advice Snippets from Dawn and Lowell on the Googlegroup Forum

**Bar branches** are branches that are directly opposite each other on the trunk or main branch. Bar branches are not only unattractive to the eye but can cause a trunk swelling there called a reverse taper. The section is larger/wider than the section below it.

In nature, opposite branches (bar branches) is a form of redundancy. Both are feeding the trunk and roots when it is young, but as it gets older, when one out-grows the other, the growth regulators will stop the growth on the smaller one and it will eventually die. This may take more than a hundred years and we don’t want to wait that long. So, we may leave it on just long enough to fatten the trunk or main branch, then cut it off before it gets big enough to leave a scar that will take a long time to heal.

You use **bud pinching** on deciduous trees to control the distance between the leaves and you trim to control the diameter of the branches and promote back budding. Don't worry about distance between leaves until you have enough branches with the correct diameter. Since you have more small branches at the top, you will need to bud pinch on the top of the bonsai much sooner than the bottom branches. The bottom and inside branches usually grow slower than the top so you trim and bud pinch less often or maybe not at all this season. You may leave branches you don't want to grow upward, wild to fatten up some of the bottom branches then prune or cut them off at the end of season.

If some of the branches in the top get too big, you should cut them off. Sometimes it becomes necessary to cut the top out and grow a new one. Be sure to cut leaves and/or branches to let light into the interior branches to keep them growing. Cutting with scissors to one or two internodes or 1-2 leaf pairs, pinching more for very new shoots that are very green. Normally in Maples you pinch the new growth just as it grows from the first leaf pair to make twigs in very developed trees.

Just remember that evergreens don't like to bud back on old wood. It is my experience that evergreens bud back when they are growing well.

**Crape myrtles** are very top dominant, so don't cut anything off the bottom until it blooms. The growth will help fatten up the new top. Then when it gets through blooming this fall, after it goes dormant, cut the top off about two to four inches above the old cut and seal good. It will probably have multiple sprouts at the top when it puts out in the spring. Save two of the best sprouts and pinch the growing tips when they get about four to six inches long. Then when they back bud, trim them back to the first two branches, then keep repeating the process, making the new branches shorter each time. You want to make a broom style top. Then repeat the process on each of the lower branches as they grow to about four to six inches. Hopefully, this will balance the growth all over the bonsai. You could start that process now, if you are happy with the diameter of the new top. If you do it now, cut the top down to about one to two inches above the old cut. Either way, you will be trimming the top more often than the bottom branches.

**Fertilizing** Many of you have heard me say that over fertilizing is similar to looking off a cliff at a scenic overlook; the closer you get to the edge, the better the view, but step too far and it is all downhill. The more you fertilize, the better your bonsai will grow, but too much and they will decline very rapidly, and if they live, they will look banged up.

I have some suggestions to help you get closer to the edge without going over. Use a combination of liquid, organic, and chemical fertilizers. First,

healthy vigorous bonsai can use more fertilizer than less healthy bonsai. If a bonsai is having problems or recovering from re-potting or any root problems, don't fertilize with anything that can damage new tender feeder roots. A little organic or time release fertilizer can be applied to the top of the soil to start being available when the roots are ready to absorb it but give the roots at least a two-week head start.

You can apply liquid fertilizer to most bonsai from spring to the end of summer, but not too much. In other words, use weak fertilizer solutions weekly. Liquid works faster because some of it is absorbed directly by the leaves. Too much liquid fertilizer can cause the bonsai top to grow and develop faster than the roots. The granular is slower because only the amount that the bonsai can get must go through the roots. If too much fertilizer is there, the excess builds up in the pot and that can damage the roots. Too much chemical fertilizer will cause chemical salts to build up which will raise the pH too much. Organic fertilizer will lower the pH. By using both together can cancel some of the effects. Organic will also feed the bacteria and fungus growing in the soil and roots. The bacteria and fungus (mycorrhiza) can be good or bad depending on the species of plants. Using too much organics at one time can affect the soil aeration and grow the wrong bacteria (root rot) and fungi.

You can tell if you are using too much fertilizer by watching the new leaf growth, the leaf color, and weed growth. After you have heard from the weeds, lose them. If they are growing very vigorously, consider reducing fertilizing just a little. As summer heats up and growth slows down, reduce the fertilizer. Using mulch on the top of your bonsai soil can help prevent weeds, protect surface roots from sunburn, and keep the top of the soil from drying out thus promoting better surface root growth.

### **Just For Laughs**



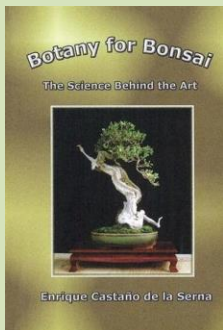
## Tip of the Day: How to Keep Squirrels Away From Your Bonsai Pots

By Lowell Tilley

Moth balls should work. Use the crystals on the soil surface so it is harder for the squirrels to throw them out. I sure hope the squirrels don't find out they can remove them!



## Websites for Bonsai Supplies



This is a good book to have in your collection.

### **Botany for Bonsai: The Science Behind the Art**

by Enrique Castano. Stone Lantern has the book on sale for \$12.95; was \$22.95.

Understanding how trees grow and develop is essential to developing healthy bonsai. When you can predict, and to some extent control growth over the weeks, months, and years, it is easier to plan and design superior bonsai. Unfortunately, many bonsai enthusiasts have little understanding of how trees survive and grow, and how to use this knowledge to their advantage.

<https://stonelantern.com/collections/books/products/botany-for-bonsai-the-science-behind-the-art-haskill-creek>

Check out the good sales on high quality tools and other supplies at: **American Bonsai Tool and Supply Co.**, <https://www.americanbonsai.com/> **Stone Lantern**, <https://www.stonelantern.com/>. (Some are up to 50% off.) You may want to consider buying high quality individual tools that will stay sharp longer for the ones used most often, such as concave cutters, knob cutters, root cutters and shears.

Also, locally, **Underhill Bonsai** in Folsom, LA, sells tools <https://underhillbonsai.com/>, if you like to look at and handle the tools before buying.

## Displaying with Accent Plants

By Marla Thompson

Excerpts from [www.bonsaiempire.com](http://www.bonsaiempire.com) and the Internet

The accent plant is added to a display to accentuate the season, flow, and style of the Bonsai.

Kusamono, and Shitakusa are a potted collection of plants designed to be viewed either in accompaniment with bonsai or alone. Normally, the term Kusamono (kusa="grass", mono="thing") is used when the planting is displayed as the center of attention, while the term Shitakusa (Shita="under", kusa="grass") is used for smaller plantings that accompany bonsai displays. Kusamono and Shitakusa are displayed in special pots, driftwood, or even stones, separately.

A third type of display is Kokedama (koke="moss", dama="ball") in which the plants/grasses are wrapped in a ball of soil/muck and covered with moss. They may be displayed alone or in a grouping, either with or without a low container/tray.

- **Season:** the accent plant should resemble the current season. This means the color of leaves and the presence of fruits or flowers is of great importance.
- **Style and size:** Bonsai trees that resemble a struggle to survive (like a windswept or a growing in a rock styled tree) should be accompanied by a not too luxuriantly growing accent plant. Taller styles, like the literati, can be displayed with a tall grass variety. The accent needs to resemble the story the tree tells.
- **Contrast:** Bonsai trees with flowers or fruits should be contrasted by non-flowering accent plants, and vice-versa.
- **Origins:** when combining several plants to create one accent plant, make sure these come from similar origins as we want to resemble nature.
- **Pots:** companion plantings can be placed in small glazed or unglazed pots, but also on a tile or slate. In the latter case, moss should be grown around the soil to create a mature looking plant.

## Examples of Shitakusa



A beautiful example of Kusamono is this nurse log collected and designed by Bonsai artist Michael Hagedorn and displayed on his website recently.



<https://crataegus.com/2020/04/10/nurse-log-imagination-hemlock-huckleberry-and-salal/>

He explains in his blog the term ‘Nurse Log’ as: “large fallen timber colonized by young trees. The Pacific Northwest forests of the future—the seeds of Western hemlock and Western red cedar—often get their start in the rotting wood of nutrient rich, moist nurse logs. And sometimes these big fallen trees expose their root systems, with soil still attached, offering a place for a cornucopia of plants to germinate”.

## Examples of Kusamono



## Examples of Kokedama





### How to Make Kokedama at Home

- Step 1: Make and Form Soil Balls. Mix peat moss potting mix and bonsai soil together in a 7:3 ratio. Slowly add in water and mix until a cohesive consistency develops.
- Step 2: Form a ball of the mix around the plant roots.
- Step 3: Wrap carpet moss around the soil ball.
- Step 4: Wrap twine or fishing line around the moss and tie it.
- Step 5: Squeeze it gently to remove most of the water.

You can suspend for a hanging display or set it on a table. Be careful not to set it on a wood surface as it will be wet. You can set it on a decorative tray or saucer.

You can find many videos on-line that show you exactly how to make and care for them.

I found some great sheets of moss on the north side of the house and made these 2 Kokedama yesterday with some plants I had. I think I will next make one with an African Violet.



### Proposed Coming Special Events

~~**May 2**~~ 10a.m.-5p.m. GCBF Bald Cypress Class, Waddill Outdoor Education Center. Call Lowell to check the status of the class. **Canceled**

~~**May 22-24**~~ Brussel's Bonsai Annual Rendevous, Olive Branch, MS. **Canceled**

~~**May 22-24**~~ 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Bonsai Societies of Florida Convention, Orlando FL- **Canceled**

**July 21** 7-9p.m. Kim Naquin Tool Sharpening Class, BR Garden Center

**August 6-9** (Rescheduled from May) Lone Star Bonsai Federation Bonsai 2020 Convention, by San Antonio Bonsai Society, San Antonio, TX. Please check the website or Facebook.

**September 29** 6-9p.m. Jennifer Price Workshop, BR Garden Center

**November 14-15** 11a.m.-4p.m. LBS Fall Show, BR Garden Center

**December 15** 7-9p.m. LBS Member Potluck Christmas Party, BR Garden Center

Please stay home and stay safe everyone.