



the **TREE LINE**

the official monthly
publication of the

BONSAI SOCIETY of PORTLAND

Upcoming Events

March
2024

Monthly Meetings:

- March 26 6:00-9:00pm BSOP Monthly Meeting, Local Spring Seasonal Highlights
April 7 9:00-1:00 Mentorship 101 class, Oregon Grape Room, Milwaukie Center
April 7 1:30-3:30 Mentorship 102 Lab, Oregon Grape Room, Milwaukie Center
April 23 6:00-9:00pm BSOP Monthly Meeting, John Eads, Left Coast Bonsai
May 5 9:00-1:00 Mentorship 101 class, Oregon Grape Room, Milwaukie Center
May 5 1:30-3:30 Mentorship 102 Lab, Oregon Grape Room, Milwaukie Center
May 28 6-9 pm BSOP Monthly Meeting, Master Ceramic artist, Mr. Kakuzan,
Tokoname, Japan

Greetings BSOP,

I hope everyone is have a great repotting season. We've been busy repotting deciduous bonsai here at RAKUYŌ as buds break open from their winter dormancy. A few things to keep in mind with recently repotted trees:

1. Keep them out of the wind.
2. Don't let them freeze or be exposed to frost.
3. Wait a few weeks before applying chemicals.

Broadleaf evergreen bonsai and junipers can be repotted fairly late in the season, so for now focus on pines, other conifers and deciduous that are breaking bud.

Hope repotting seasons treats you and your bonsai well, it's so nice to enjoy plants as the wake up from dormancy!

Cheers, *Andrew Robson* BSOP President

BSOP Programs Update

February was a month to remember as we were treated to an unforgettable styling demonstration by none other than Ryan Neil and the Mirai crew. Ryan's expertise, drawn from his time spent immersed in nature among ancient trees, offered us a profound insight into his personal artistic influences.

I hope each of you took away at least one valuable piece of information from Ryan's presentation. For me, his discussion about the angle and front of the tree was particularly enlightening. By reflecting on how nature shapes the elements present on a tree, we can create a more realistic representation of the species—an invaluable lesson for every bonsai practitioner.

I'm thrilled to report that the February program drew significant attendance, with many of us lingering beyond our usual meeting endpoint, captivated by the discussion and final remarks on the styling. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all who attended and encourage those who missed out to mark their calendars for future events. With an action-packed lineup throughout the year, there's something for everyone on the horizon.

Looking ahead to our March program, I want to remind you that the bulk of our repotting work should already be completed by the time we convene. Therefore, our presentation will focus on spring seasonal work, offering a valuable refresher for all members. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just starting with your first tree, there will be something for everyone to learn and apply in their bonsai endeavors.

Finally, I want to express my deepest appreciation to all the volunteers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make each general meeting a resounding success. Your dedication and passion are the bedrock of our community, and we are immensely grateful for your contributions.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the next meeting!

Best regards, *Benjamin MacBeth*, vp-programs@portlandbonsai.org

BSOP Library News

Introducing a new acquisition for the library: *Satsuki Azalea Bonsai: A Fundamental Study*, by Rick A. Garcia. Published in 2021, this book celebrates the Satsuki azalea, a highly prized bonsai that offers breathtaking displays of spring flowers.

To paraphrase the cover, the book takes a unique approach and explores fundamental plant behaviors that are specific to Satsuki azaleas. It combines time-tested practical techniques with an intuitive approach to the care of Satsuki azaleas. This is a highly recommended book that answers questions such as: When is the ideal time to repot? How often to water? What is the best sun exposure, etc.

If you'd like to reserve the book, log onto the BSOP website Members Only section (under Services) and use the Library Reservation Form. Make reference to barcode, BSOP1910. Reservations will be honored in the order received. The book will be shelved in the Azalea section of the library with a gold label marked GAR.

Remember, library hours are 6:00 to 6:45pm on meeting nights.

Jan (janhettick@comcast.net) and *Michael* (mikexc@msn.com)

February Monthly Meeting

Ryan Neil gave a presentation that started with slides and videos of old majestic trees in high country remote locations. Ryan described how the effects of climate change challenge trees that have stood for hundreds or even over a thousand years.



Ready to begin wiring.



Wiring partially completed.



Before.



After.

Ryan Neil responds to a question about styling this incredible yamadori. Note that the direction of the top has been reversed to be congruent with the base and its exposed root mass.



February
tokonoma
display



Dramatic
windswept
design



There is a pot or more for everyone



Standing room only.

Photos courtesy of Jim Baggett

Scott's BRANCH TIPS

BONSAI TECHNIQUE & PHILOSOPHY

Repotting Goals

The task of repotting our bonsai trees is in general a rather linear process. We can go down a checklist and perform each function with a fairly predictable outcome. Following these protocols leads to success. Every successfully performed task adds to the success of the repotting operation. Each detail adds to our margin of success. Our goal then, is to get to 100 percent. A successful repot is one creates the aesthetic image that we are striving for in the marriage of tree and container while setting the tree up for healthy growth and the ability to carry out our developmental goals. Some operations are riskier than others, so we have to do all we can to keep the momentum of the tree moving forward. Surviving is not a good measure of success. Thriving is. If the pot looks great and the tree dies or takes a year or two to recover, it's a failure. If the tree grows well, but looks ugly, that won't work either.

This article is not meant to go over our checklist again, but to set out our goals and help us decide if we were successful. But, be sure to check out the repotting articles that have been published previously. These can be found on the BSOP website under Instruction, Scott Elser's Bonsai Skill Series. Topics for repotting include Bonsai Soil Mix and Components, Step by Step Guide to Successful Repotting and Tree Anchors. All are available as free pdf downloads.

We have well established reasons for repotting a tree. Let's revisit them briefly.

1. Design – a change of angle or orientation, change pot, change size.
2. Loss of percolation – water no longer passes through.
3. Water retention – holds too much water and stays soggy.

At this point, we have determined that we have a good reason to repot, and we are armed with the checklist, tools, trees, pots, soil, etc... How do I know that I have accomplished the aesthetic and horticultural goals? Did I set the plant up for maximum success? That's what we want to talk about. I really can't stress enough that if you have not studied repotting with a professional, or semi-professional bonsai practitioner, you really don't know what you are missing.

That is one thing all of the books and magazine articles or convention demos could not demonstrate for me. Is this root healthy or not? How much can I cut off? How do I anchor the tree into this crazy position with little or no roots? All great things you can learn by studying with more technically proficient folks. And even though we have this great step by step guide, I find that every single tree has its own peculiarities, so the more experience I can get with a professional, the better.

I started studying with Boon Manakitivipart twenty years ago now. It completely altered my approach to bonsai, and more specifically to repotting. I got to work with very highly developed trees. It was the first time I came into contact with Japanese style bonsai soil, what we call "Boon" mix now. All we had previously here at BSOP was fir bark and lava rock. I remember jaws dropping at my first BSOP demo sharing the new technology. I had repotted a black pine the previous year, changing out one half of the soil to Boon mix in a bare root operation (Not my current method, but not bad). There was an audible gasp when folks saw the difference in root production in the old soil compared to the new. Now we were off to the races and doing bonsai. Then I went to study with Ryan Neil and I was floored at the technical prowess used in repotting and what it could do for my trees.

This was especially true for my collected native trees. Two huge leaps in climbing the bonsai ladder. It was a great one two punch that built on each other. So let's talk about what a successful repot looks like.

1. Did we maintain a balance of water and oxygen?

Before we are all done outfitting our tree with a new set of duds, the first thing that we must do is make sure that the tree is set up for horticultural success. What that means is that we have optimized the growing conditions for the current stage of development until the next repot, likely two or more years away. If your tree is in a refinement mode, or even preparing for a show, that might look quite different than a tree early in its development. If we are building a trunk and trying to grow the tree "Up" by increasing the girth, branching, or overall size of the tree, planting it into a shallow bonsai container is going to be the worst thing you can do, at least if you want the tree finished in this century.

However, the core idea here is that the amount of foliage that the tree has on it must be balanced with the amount of moisture that the soil system holds. If the tree is unable to utilize an adequate level of moisture from the pot, the tree's roots will stay too wet and inhibit growth. Maybe even kill the tree. We can always supply more water if needed, but watering more than once or twice a day gets to be too much for most folks. When you are at that point, then heat events can be traumatic.

On the other spectrum, it is much harder to keep a soil mass drier with all of the rain we get. Better to choose a smaller pot and have a smaller reservoir of water to deal with. We have a combination then, of elements that we can juggle to maintain a balance. Besides our day-to-day watering regimen, we have the foliage mass of the tree, the size of the pot (both depth and diameter) and the soil composition that we can work with. Let's looking at those last two.

A. Finishing Pot

When the tree is in a development stage, where we are building trunk girth, branching, and foliage mass, a simple nursery plastic pot, Anderson flat, or high-fired terra cotta container might be your best bet. That makes our number one goal, maintaining a balance of water and oxygen, pretty straight forward.

The depth of a nursery pot creates a taller water column which allows the pot to dry out quicker, pulling oxygen into the system as water drains out. It also means that you can use less expensive soil materials that will actually allow the tree to grow faster. This is all borne out by the success of the wholesale nursery industry in our area. You can use organic matter, such as peat or coco coir, along with perlite, pumice and any variety of potting substances on hand. Even regular potting soil.

As your tree progresses getting closer to your development goals, and usually into a shallower container, you can begin to introduce the particles that you will use in an actual shallow bonsai container – likely akadama, pumice, and maybe lava. I think that I have really made a big mistake in the past by using just Boon mix for trees in development. I could have saved a few years, or accelerated growth, with more organic matter. That's what I do now.

You might be on the flip side of all of this, in that you are taking a much bigger tree and making it into a smaller one. Still in development, but now your task is growing secondary branches, or maybe even putting the brakes on and slowing the tree down. That means that you might be looking at a transition container, like a larger, deeper bonsai pot that provides more resources to the roots and allows the tree to grow more aggressively for a period of time while you continue building the tree. It also helps maintain a taller soil column allowing the free exchange of water and oxygen.

B. Refining pot

If putting a tree into a nursery container is fairly easy and risk free, moving it into a show worthy bonsai pot is a whole different matter. Growing trees in shallow pots is not natural. It's our man-made aesthetic that we think is so cool, and it is, but we are going to have to make some accommodations to make the tree successful. No matter what repotting or after care skills you possess, selecting the right container size and shape from the start is critical. Think of it as going from your everyday commuter car to a Formula One race car. You are going to have to do more regular maintenance and pay closer attention to what is happening. The tolerances are tighter and margin for error less. The tree must be provided with enough available moisture for the size of the foliage canopy without staying too wet.

Many people (myself included) make the mistake of using too large of a container, which means that the foliage mass cannot consume all of the available water, so it stays way too wet. We have a lot of factors coming into play here. Species type, age of the tree, your growing conditions, like amount of sun and wind exposure, and the foliage mass. For instance, Japanese maples can take a shallower pot because they like a lot of water. Our intuition tells us that a shallow pot is going to be dryer, but that is not the case.

Let's go back to the water column height. In a shallow pot, there is very little gravity pulling the water out of the system, so it stays wetter. By contrast, a deeper pot allows more water to drain out. That's why we see more success for conifers, pines especially, in deeper pots, because they like overall dryer conditions. That is also why you never see a Japanese tree in any pot that is deeper than it is wide. Cascade and semi-cascade forms are in pots with equal proportions of height and depth (Square, from the side). The tall, narrow, inexpensive pots you see are tree killers – it can be difficult (not impossible) to keep them hydrated. For that you can adjust soil, but that will introduce other issues.

C. Soil particle size

One of the critical aspects of maintaining that critical balance of water and oxygen for your tree is soil particle size. We are by and large using an aggregate (rock) soil substrate, screened free of dust. We can vary particle size by sifting. The smaller the particles we use, the more moisture is retained.

For a large white pine that wants to be on the dry side, we might use 1/4 - 1/8 inch particles, but for a shohin maple we would use only particle sizes from 1/8 - 1/16. A larger maple or hemlock might use a wider range particle size from 1/4 - 1/16, so we keep the smaller size in the mix. At that point, we can vary the type of particle. More akadama, with a high nutrient retaining capacity for the maple, and less for the hemlock.

2. Is the tree stable in the pot?

Is the tree secured in such a way that the roots will not move? If the roots are allowed to move, they won't grow. So that means having the tree well secured into the pot. For a tree like a Japanese maple with a broad, well developed root base this is pretty easy. For a tall or leaning tree, and especially a semi-cascade or full cascade it can be a challenge. If the tree wobbles, we have failed and might as well take it apart and start over. If we don't, we are setting up the tree for future failure.

Did we nail the angle, either inclination or rotation? It can be so frustrating when you have a tree wired in, soil worked around the roots and you realize that something has shifted on you. Sometimes a second set of hands is needed to make sure things go right. Or sometimes you just need an increase in skill and technique to make it happen. Do you know how to use square roots (wood blocks) or other props below the soil line to help out under-developed roots?

This is an essential skill when working with collected specimens. How many different methods are you able to employ to anchor a tree to a pot? Every tree is a variation on a theme, or a whole new technique. Study with those that are more experienced to build your skills.

3. Did we identify any problem areas and clean them out?

These are usually areas that have old field soil, mountain soil, or compacted bonsai soil. The soil may be black or stinky, gooey or dry, but not many viable roots are growing in them. That means that few important roots will be impacted by our work, so we are safe to clean out this area. It happens to the central core of collected trees over time. Is the soil above compacted so that no water is getting to that portion of roots? Can I fix that with my watering technique (more passes) or do I need to clean that area out too? Use your top growth as a guide. If the tree has begun to weaken a little with no explanation, it's likely a root issue and now is a time to sleuth out the problem area and fix it.

4. Have we chosen an aesthetically pleasing container?

This is going to be a subjective decision, based on tree size, style, species, and container availability, and quite often, our budget. A better container is always out there, for the above reasons, so we will likely compromise to one degree or another. We could write a whole book on this subject, but notice that I place this lower down in importance. We are always in search for a more appropriate container, and that container will change with growth of the tree. I have countless trees now, that have existed as bonsai for decades that have outgrown their containers several times. I can't use the same one if I wanted too. So, we have to change and adapt. By the way, I frequently get asked where I find my pots. My answer is, everywhere, whenever. I am opportunistic when it comes to pots. You have to invest and seize opportunities. Unfortunately, the selection of pots available to us at any one time is very limited. We don't have any Pot Shops, so to speak, to draw from. And as you get larger and better trees, that is a bigger investment, but so worth the effort. Choosing pots is one of the things that I love most about bonsai, because a tree changes instantly, in a moment. It's the old movie theme where they take some bum off the street and give him a shower, shave, haircut, and new set of clothes and now he's a prince. That's what repotting is for me. It's magic.

Recent examples

Shohin Crabapple

This tree is an air layer that I made from a larger bonsai about 15 years ago. It has been slow to develop, but is starting to click now. Two years ago I put this tree into a Max Braverman pot that was a bit deeper but narrower than what you see here, but of roughly the same volume. The pot pictured is a brand-new design by our own Nao Tokutake, with a beautiful glaze. I just love this pairing of pot and tree, but it is going to cost me. I have to stay right on top of watering. In fact, since it has started leafing out, I have to water it every couple of days (it is kept safely out of the rain for the first few weeks after repotting). Those leaves are pulling the water out of the system and it has to be replenished.



Red Plum

After following this tree through several owners over the last 30 years, it found a new home in my garden this last year. The tree was substantially grown by its first owner, Leonard Grateri, a long time BSOP member. It was likely just a seedling that was pulled out of a ditch somewhere. Back in the early days of BSOP, that's what you had to do (and I still do). I am guessing that he grew the tree for about 30 years. After he passed, the tree entered the garden of Anne Spencer who cared for it for several years until she passed in 2011. At that point, care passed on to Roger Case, and it already had the crusty black bark that shows extreme age. More recently care passed to Alan Taft. Last year he repotted it into a largish, unglazed container.

My usual practice is to repot a new acquisition as soon as practical to ascertain the quality of the roots, the soil system, etc... What I found on this occasion were very healthy roots in a very coarse Boon mix. There were no particles less than 1/8 inch so that there was plenty of oxygen and water entering the pot. However, when I dug in further, I saw why. There was heavy, compacted soil on the interior. He obviously saw that the roots had been severely impacted and needed a recovery strategy. Nice work Alan. Since I knew that the tree overall was now very healthy, I was able to attack and remove the heavy soil, while leaving the new healthy roots intact. After cleanout, the tree was placed in a new Nao Tokutake pot of the same depth as the previous pot, but a little narrower, and with a lovely glaze color. The soil used was of a smaller particle size, with grains from 1/4-1/16 inch in size, 50/50 akadama and pumice. It was already budding out when it was repotted, but the photo is from several weeks later.

So here we have two different trees with two different objectives, repotted and all dressed up for success this coming grow season.



The following is not a BSOP sponsored event.

Bonsai Pottery and Plant Sale

March 16 & 17, 10:00-3:00

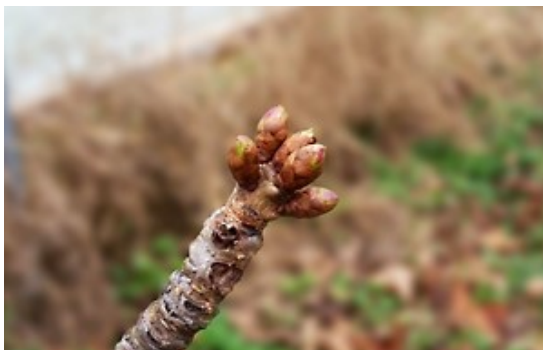
3626 SE Taylor St, Portland

Pottery New and Vintage *from*

Mark Vossbrink and Tony Hackenbruck

Plants from River Rock Nursery

Penjing Demonstration on Sunday at 1:00



Cherry buds



Japanese plum buds

Haiku

Cold winds are blowing
Chilling rain falls day and night
Yet buds are swelling

PRE-BONSAI PLANTS · BONSAI TOOLS

High-fired Pots • Mica & Plastic Training Pots

Wire • Organic Fertilizers

Mazama Pumice (1/16-3/8")

Diatomite Rock from Nevada, USA

Superior Black Compost • Red Cinder Rock (1/4-5/16")

Est. 1978



25321 NE 72nd Avenue
Battle Ground, WA 98604

Phone (360) 687-5641

D Burnett

Need supplies?

Call ahead for delivery
at BSOP meetings.



I'm protective of trees. In a Secret Service kind of way.

Jose Rivas champions the trees, landscapes and property investments of the customers in his care. And he's one of the many reasons we've become the premier scientific tree and shrub care company in the world.

503-722-7267 | bartlett.com/portland-or



BARTLETT
TREE EXPERTS

SCIENTIFIC TREE CARE SINCE 1917

LTE #063
The F.A. Bartlett Tree Expert Company

EVERY TREE NEEDS A CHAMPION.

Portland Bonsai Supply



Order Online

Local Pickup, Delivery & Shipping
Order Delivery at BSOP meetings

Joshua Roth & Ryuga Tools
Authorized Dealer

Soils— Wire—Tools— Pots
Supplies— Fertilizer



portlandbonsaisupply.com



9240 SE Philips Place, Happy Valley, OR 97086

The Bonsai Society of Portland meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month.

The Milwaukie Center

5440 SE Kellogg Creek Drive, Milwaukie OR 97222

Enter parking lot from Rusk Road

Visitors are always welcome!

Board of Directors

President: Andrew Robson

2nd VP-Membership: Patrice Morrow

Secretary: Jeffrey Robson

1st VP-Programs: Ben MacBeth

Treasurer: Brandon McMullin

Past President: Joe Johanesen

Committee Chairs

Ambassador pro tem: Jeffrey Robson

Auctions: Dane Burrell, Toni Martin

Audio/Visual: Reid Parham

Facilities Coordinator: Brandon McMullin

Fall Show: Lee Cheatle

Formal Display: Scott Elser

Heritage: Steve Leaming

Hospitality:

Library: Jan Hettick, Michael Babbit

Mentorship: Joanne Raiton

Newsletter: Peter Pelofske

Portland Nursery Show Reid Parham

Photographer: Jim Baggett

Raffle:

Social Media: Scott Tice

Spring Show:

Summer Picnic:

Vendor Coordinator:

Volunteer Coordinator:

Webmaster: Karl Holmes

Contact information is on the BSOP website www.portlandbonsai.org under Services/Members Only/Membership Directory