



American Bonsai Society

# Bonsai in America

Written & Published by Dave Bogan

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## Mid Summer

### Tree Work

There are some that claim you can work on your trees in mid summer. This is true with some species but you must know what you are doing. During mid summer, many of our trees actually go into a semi dormancy. This can be used to our advantage. Deciduous trees are a good example. While the growth is slowed they can be removed from their pots, roots trimmed and some soil changed. At issue here is after care. With the tree already experiencing slow growth, after root work, the tree will need to be watched daily. It must be placed in a semi shaded area and it is best to also guard against wind. The trees water needs will be changed. In some cases, there will be little visible growth. The tree will just set there. You need to keep the soil just slightly moist. Never simply flood the tree with water. You must determine its water needs every day and only water if it is slightly dry. Do not attempt to feed it and if possible do not use insecticides or other treatments. Wait and in a few weeks, you should see some growth and you will know the tree is surviving the work.

## The disorientation of trees

By Andrew Smith



Chipmunks will be the topic of this column, though I'll get to them later.

Sometimes, when I buy transplant permits from the Forest Service they also give out transplanting instructions that direct me to ribbon the north side of the tree and then plant it in it's new home so the original north side of the tree is still facing north.

I guess the thinking on this is that then the tree can find its way back home during the fall migration. Who did they pay to dream this up? Although this might make good sense if you're an obsessive/compulsive neatnik, in that case it would also make good sense to wash and comb your lawn after you mow it. In reality it's pure malarkey. I don't know what malarkey even is exactly, but beef malarkey sounds like some sort of stew and is making me hungry already. Gin malarkey sounds like a cool, minty drink. Anyway, the color of socks you wear when you dig the hole will have about as much effect on tree survival as making sure the needles are correctly aligned with magnetic north.

If there's a kernel of truth to be had here, it's that trees do, in fact, have an orientation that matters to them.

A few years ago I showed my mom whatever bonsai picture book I had with me at the time, probably one of the "Best of Bonsai in Europe" series. She looked through it for a bit but then frowned and pointed to a picture of a cascading pine. "Those ones that are falling out of the pot almost make me feel sick," she said. "I don't like them!"

Although cascade and semi-cascade trees are one of the more popular

styles for coniferous bonsai, she thought of trees as things that grow upward, toward the sun and sky.

And she's right. In nature you will very rarely find a full-size cascading tree. Almost never, but of course, never say never. I have seen a couple, after examining millions of trees over many years.

And, like my mom, I also abhor cascading bonsai trees. But I like the way they look and I have more than one, though I abhor them. My objection is functional – they are hard to transport, to ship and to overwinter. Birds land on the cascading branch and sometimes knock the whole pot over.

On the other hand, most of my trees seem to be their healthiest when I plant them in a deep cascade pot. The tree might want to go up, but the roots most definitely want to go down and are happiest if they have room to do so.

When I was a tree-planter, many years ago, the cardinal sin of planting was to plant the seedling so it had a J-root, with the root tip pointing upward, rather than down.

Anyway, although cascades may be beautiful, disorienting and unnatural, trees can grow that way in perfect health for a very long time as long as balance issues are resolved.

It's not the direction the trunk is oriented that matters to a tree, it's the direction the foliage is oriented. Specifically, the direction the foliage is oriented in relation to the sun. Trees gobble up sunlight like it was beef malarkey. They need it to make food and to know which way to grow.

Some species, like pines, are extremely sensitive to this. The buds on a healthy pine tree will always face the direction where they can get the most sun – usually upward. If you see a pine in the woods with the branch tips hanging downward that's a sure sign that something is

### Note,

Remember all articles, suggestions, tips and procedures may differ in your area or not be true for all species. Always think through any technique and ensure it is appropriate for your individual trees or area.

## ABS News

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### Continued By Andrew Smith

wrong. It doesn't even look natural and you don't have to know anything about trees to pick up on this.

I have found when I collect a pine tree that if the new planting angle does not orient the buds towards the sun there is a good chance the tree will die rather than grow. Even if it does grow, the downward pointing bud will have to turn around to face the sun and grow upward through the downward facing needles, creating a mess that will take years to straighten out. In this case the best thing is to wire the branches right away and get the buds so they are facing the sun again. That's my bonsai tip for the week: Forget about north and south, just get the green side up!



Now here's the thing with chipmunks: I like them and I like seeing them race around, tails up, between the greenhouses. But for years I've noticed piles of dandelion seeds on my bonsai pots, which leads to dandelions growing in my bonsai pots, which seems a sign of disorder to me. And I abhor disorder like I abhor cascading trees.

It's the chipmunks! They eat dandelion flowers. But before they do they haul them up onto one of my bonsai pots and use the pot for a lunch table. Why do they do this? There are millions of places for a chipmunk to sit and eat a dandelion that would be safer and more comfortable than on top of a bonsai pot. I don't understand it.

Luckily for me, I don't have to understand it. I live in the middle of a full-sized forest, yet feel compelled to grow miniature forests in pots, and I don't understand that either. I just enjoy watering trees, I guess.



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### Summer

We are now in the middle of Summer or in some areas late summer. Seemingly the off season for bonsai but we must stay vigilant. By now, many have or soon will experience the ever present mites. Especially with their junipers. Mites love the hot humid weather and they multiply faster than any thing. If you see signs—dull foliage, lack of color or even fine webs, start spraying. Always use an insecticide that specifically states it is useful against mites. Mite infestation is not limited to junipers. They can attack just about any plant. I had a very old hornbeam that they obliterated in just two days.

Notwithstanding insect or disease problems we must watch our trees daily. Even though most growth has slowed or stopped, our trees still need our careful eye. Of course watering becomes a big issue now. Judging water usage and the need to water is always debatable to many. You first need to know the type of soil used since some retains more moisture than others. Secondly you need to know your trees health and how tight the root system may be. I always water my trees based on all the above. Some trees will get saturated every day and others may get only a slight watering. Never simply rely on how dry the top soil or moss is. When in doubt, scratch the soil down about 1". If you see moisture, it may not need water or may only need to be lightly watered based on when you will again water. Some like to believe you can cause root rot by overwatering but I have never seen a case of root rot in summer. Now, come winter this may be a different subject. Honestly in mid summer with temperatures above 90 and direct sun, my trees get well watered every day. If it gets even hotter many may get watered twice a day.

Weeds. What a never ending chore. We work very hard at keeping all types of

**Tropicals:** The time is right to prune and or leaf prune your tropicals. I've seen many sparse or leggy ficus and other tropical species. This is due to a lack of bright sun and the lack of pruning, Ficus are no different than say a maple. Allow it to grow untouched and it will be come leggy and over grown. Prune now and prune often.



## Calendar of Bonsai events



**FOR THE LOVE OF BONSAI September 12-15, 2013** Learning Seminars  
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## Tips, Ideas & Techniques.

weeds out of our trees but at some point it seems like a losing battle. I have heard of some attempting to use weed killer like round up on their trees. I just can't imagine anyone being this lazy and taking a chance of harming their trees instead of pulling some weeds. The best time to remove weeds is right after you have watered and the soil is wet. I typically keep a pair of stainless tweezers on my benches and remove weeds a few each time I water. Using the tweezers I scratch around the base of the weed exposing the base below ground. Once exposed, I can usually grasp it with my fingers or tweezers, pull it slow and steady and in most cases, I remove the weed with most all of its roots. If you simply pull the weeds many will break off and leave the root system behind. Soon, you will have the same weeds growing again.

Moss this time of year is either lush green (if you have had rain) or dry, dull and maybe brown if you have not had rain. In either case, leave it. There are those that used to say if your moss is lush and green, you are over watering. Now, there is a little truth to this but, we do like having lush green moss. Simply watch your watering and don't consistently over water. In mid summer when it is extremely hot, I cover many of my trees with white towels. This helps reduce soil temperatures and it also helps keep my moss green. To allow good air flow, after watering in the evening, I do remove the towels for the night.



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 a non-profit organization  
 promoting Bonsai in the  
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 individual practitioner as well  
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### My Bonsai Journey Carolee Bier

Almost forty years ago, I visited a family owned garden center in Southern Illinois. The proprietor displayed his personal bonsai collection in one area. I had never seen bonsai in person before, and I became enraptured. One tree, I can still picture in my mind, was a trident maple with a trunk diameter of more than four inches. At the time I didn't know it was a trident maple, but I remembered the shape of the leaves for many years, and today, I have more tridents in my collection than any other tree. Unfortunately, the bonsai collection disappeared when the owner sold his nursery, not long after I had seen the bonsai. There was no one in the area that sold bonsai, and as far as I knew there was no clubs.

My first tree was one that came with a kit. I killed it. I bought the Sunset Book on Bonsai, and read it. I bought other trees, and killed them. About the same time I had two babies within three years, and I was working full time. So I decided that I couldn't do bonsai and babies at the same time. I chose to focus on the babies, but I always knew I would return to bonsai some day.

I started again in the early 2000's. This time, the internet was a great resource, and I started reading everything I could. My husband bought my registration for the 5th World Bonsai Conference (2005), as a birthday present. Although I enjoyed the exhibit, attended one workshop (yews), and bought quite a few tools and small trees (I was flying home to the Midwest), I didn't really know how to learn from the conference, much less the workshop. I still have the yew (it has suffered many indignities, including falling and breaking the major branches), and of all the trees I bought, I still have the dawn redwood (*Metsequoia glyptostroboides*), after growing in the flower bed (both in Illinois and in Maine), it was finally potted last year. However, I

Some will remember, I'm not a big advocate of using wound sealers but I do occasionally use a sealer and I use simple white glue. The white glue (like Elmer's) will temporarily seal the wound and as the wound heals, it will actually push off the white glue coating. Thus it doesn't grow into the wound if forgotten.

## ABS Correspondence Course

The American Bonsai Society is proud to offer a mentor monitored correspondence course for all who wish to learn the art of bonsai. This course was written by bonsai artists Tom Zane and is offered through the ABS Book Service. Each bonsai student has the opportunity to learn the art of bonsai at his or her own pace in the comfort of his or her home

No previous bonsai experience necessary

The American Bonsai Society realizes that a hands-on course of study with a recognized bonsai teacher is a preferred way to learn bonsai. But many of us do not live near a well-known teacher or nursery.

ABS's Introduction to Bonsai: a Correspondence Course, written in English, instructs the student in the fundamental concepts of the art of bonsai and is especially suitable for isolated bonsai enthusiasts or beginning bonsai students who prefer to learn at home.

What's most remarkable about this home-based correspondence course is that you have proficient help as you learn

Visit the ABS Web site for additional information

<http://absbonsai.org/book-service/correspondence-course>



### Joshua Roth

#### New Talent Contest

Would you please alert your club members with fewer than 10 years experience to this contest and encourage their participation.

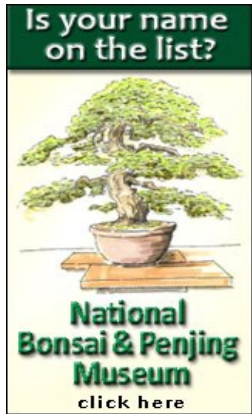
Information about the contest is available online at <http://absbonsai.org/> or contact me

John Wiessinger  
directly

at [natureetours@gmail.com](mailto:natureetours@gmail.com)

Information about the **Saratoga Springs** learning seminars is available at:

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**If you are a new member or an older member, it is so important you keep your e-mail address up to date . An incorrect email address can prevent you from using the web-site, receiving this newsletter or any other notices the ABS may put out.**

haven't found its final pot yet. It needs some carving, but I'm taking the workshop by David Knittle, at this year's ABS Learning Seminar before I do any carving on it.

Luckily, the web led me to a club in Evansville, Indiana. Although it was more than two hours away, I started going each month. Everyone will tell you that a club or study group is the best way to learn, and that is absolutely right. Dave Bogan, editor of this newsletter, was the club president, and I learned so much from him. He told his story in the June edition. I'd like to point out that although he learned much from his mentor telling him the honest truth about one's tree, Dave was far less 'honest', and always gentle. I do remember the first time I took a tree to him for assistance in styling, he held it up, and after looking at it, said while holding the conclave cutters to it, "well I'd cut off this branch, but it's up to you." Although I was shocked at the amount he was cutting off, and I held my breath while he did it, he was right. Over the years, I have learned to cut away the small bottom branches, the unnecessary branches, and focus on the eventual look of the tree. It's a hard lesson, but one I learned from Dave.

In my current location, the nearest study group is over three hours away. I really miss attending one. However, I think I know all the reputable bonsai dealers from Eastport, Maine to Lynchburg, Virginia. Now for a bonsai road trip!

**Coming soon !!!! We are in the process of building and creating a new ABS web site. We will announce its launch soon.**

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