

## January's Meeting

Those of us who came out to brave the dark and cold at Planting Fields for our January meeting were rewarded by another informative lecture demo by Vin Russo.

Vin told about his grandfather having collected maple trees and the yard was full of many sizes and shapes, and that led to a fascination with trees, and ultimately to bonsai. Maples are still his favorite material to work with. Each year Vin orders whips, young seedlings, of Japanese mountain maples that he grows on for several years ultimately using them either for stock to have cultivar maple cuttings grafted on to, or as material themselves if they develop potential as bonsai.

Vin expressed the anthropocentric way that Japanese view bonsai. They give human values and experiences to the trees and the feelings they evoke. Forrest groupings are families, the larger trees are the parents, and the smaller trees that surround them are the children. Often twin trees are thought of as parent and child, or husband and wife. John Naka's famous planting called Goshin is a grouping that was representative of his eleven grandchildren. It was also mentioned that generally an odd number of trees are used for forest plantings, but unlike our culture, the number 13 considered good luck by the Japanese and is often the number they choose. However 9 (Ku) is often avoided as it represents pain and suffering or death. Generally if more than 9 trees are used, the "odd number"

philosophy is disregarded. Beyond the Asian thought process, is the fact that odd numbers are used because they promote asymmetry and generally, things in nature occur in an asymmetrical fashion, and appear more natural.

Trees that are not suitable for individual specimens due to lack of branching, good roots, or some other undesirable trait, often are great choices for a forest as it is the overall impression that you are looking at, rather than just one tree, which would show its faults readily. Vin went on to talk about the importance of placement in order to achieve a believable forest; the shapes of the individual trees should complement each other. The completed forest should be triangular in shape. By defoliating in late May, the resulting new leaves will be smaller and in better balance with the overall design. Rape seed which is a slow release fertilizer is the best choice to keep the trees well nourished, but not growing too vigorously.

Vin styled a forest, using dormant Japanese mountain maples of varying sizes and shapes, placing them into a large training pot that had been pre-drilled with 20 or so additional holes that he planned to use to anchor the trees. Fairly heavy gauge wire was bent into a "U" and placed into adjacent holes so the trees could be wired securely into the pot until their roots develop sufficiently enough to stabilize the planting. The trees were wired in through their roots rather than around the trunk. The soil added contained fir bark and coarse

granular material to promote good rootage and drainage.

After a year's good care and development, the tree roots will have formed a dense solid mass that will keep the trees together as if they were a single tree and then they would be transplanted and root pruned as "one".



Joe Catania our lucky raffle winner



## The Presidents' Corner

*Our New Location ...* this is the first meeting I attended in our new location, and I must say it is a vast improvement over the cramped quarters that we used over the past year or so. We may like our seat mate, but not enough to be seated elbow to elbow. Thanks for getting Planting Fields to allow us the use of this great set up.

The Board met on Saturday, January 16<sup>th</sup> to plan the direction our club will be taking as we start a new decade. Our By-Laws are being revised, we have volunteers willing to move our belongs from hither and yon to our new meeting location, our library of books and videos will be once again available for loan under the watchful eye of our librarian, Steve Borakowski; most of the jobs that need to be done throughout the club year have been taken on by willing and not so willing volunteers. Francine, our co-president, was delighted at the response that she has received when asking for help. Having members volunteering for the jobs Francine had in mind does not mean they will not be calling on you to help with the picnic, or an early workshop, Tokanoma display or man a booth at one of our outreach events. Thanks to a kind soul who took pity on us, our web-site is up and running and our web-master Tom Ilijic has been provided with a primer on how to access and input items on our site. The site is a great tool for advertising our Club and inviting people to come and see what we have to offer our members. Once Tom gets the hang of things, we should have a dynamic, interesting site.



This is the real reason I come to our meetings – desert for dinner – what more could I ask for. This is another example of volunteering – without someone being willing to bring in “Coffee and” we would not have these tasty treats at each meeting.



Waldo Hutchins brought in a forest planting that he has cared for over many years. It was not one he designed himself, but his stewardship of the forest speaks for itself. A beautiful example of a forest planting that is expressive now without any foliage, and I am sure equally so as it transitions throughout the seasons.

Thanks Waldo for bring it in to share with us.

This too is another way of helping our club, and volunteering. So when Liz Travers, our Tokanoma chairman, asks you to sign up to bring in a tree, or some other bonsai related item for our Tokanoma display, please say “Yes” - make Liz’s job easier, and share something you are working on with us.

I knew when I left for Florida in January (for 3 months) that I was leaving the club in the very capable hands of our Co-president, Fran Stopfer. I want to thank her for taking such good care of our club, and for keeping me informed about what has been going on.

Last year at our September program, unconventional bonsai were featured in my demo. It was emphasized that our annuals and perennials can also be used as true bonsai.

I have been asked by the Shofu Bonsai society to make a presentation at the Asian Festival held at Selby Gardens in Sarasota this February. I’ve already started gathering and styling the GERANIUMS I am going to use.

I’ve always felt that we up North had it much tougher to over-winter our bonsai, than they do here in Florida. However this winter changed that. The long and severe cold spell in Florida has caused a great deal of damage to their tropical plants. In many cases they have had to scramble to cover their plants each night or take them inside to warmer places.

To make it even worse, I’ve even had to don my winter coat as I searched for fossilized sharks teeth in the Gulf of Mexico on these cold wintry mornings. Regards, Hal



## February's Meeting

Please remember that there will be no early workshop, which is now going to be known as **Bonsai Basics**, for the Month of February **AND** our regularly scheduled meeting will start at **7:30** pm. In the **Classroom** at the **Main Greenhouse**.

*The evening's program will feature Jim Byrne in a program called Interactive Bonsai Design.*

Members are asked to bring in trees that have them stumped, stymied or otherwise scratching their head as to design ideas or potential.

Jim has been styling bonsai for many years, and he has brought in many of his Mugo Pines, his specialty, as well as many other trees, and bar none, I would love to have any one of them in my collection – a feeling that I am sure is shared by many of us. We all have one or more trees that fit into the category of what do I have to do to make this a bonsai – HELP!, so take a peek into those bonsai that are sleeping away the winter in storage, and bring it in for some ideas of where you might take that particular tree.

*Please remember the February meeting will begin at*

**7:30 pm**

# Please

if you have not paid your 2010 dues, please do so at February's meeting. See Lily, our treasurer, and take care of it. If you are unable to make the meeting, please send your check, made payable to the Long Island Bonsai Society to 46 Bond Avenue, Malverne, NY 11565. Thanks, appreciate it.

Our membership chairman, Jim Stopfer will be issuing membership cards this year when dues are paid.

I hate to keep repeating myself, but it is through dues, auctions and raffles that enable us to continue providing the types of programs you enjoy.

It is that time of year we all dread...

### Income Tax time

As a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, any donations made to the Society are tax deductible – BUT NOT OUR DUES. So if you have donated items for the auction, or raffle table, or similar thing, see Lily for a form that can be used to support your claim of a charitable deduction.

Every little bit helps.

I have found these cement tubs to be a very handy item to use for mixing soil, when doing repotting, watering or soaking trees,



They are very inexpensive, around \$10.00, large enough to be useful, but not so big that you can't find a home for



them when not in use; they don't seem to degrade when stored outdoors. They are readily available in Lowes or Home Depot in the section where cement or mason supplies are found. They are extremely durable; the edge is strong enough that you can carry a tub full of soil or plants without the sides buckling - and they make a decent small water feature when dug in to the ground. They are even good to mix cement in. If you have several, they do store within in each other. With holes drilled into the bottom, they could be used as growing beds for young trees as they are a bit deeper than the training pots many of us have purchased from Jules over the years.

You might want to give them a try to see if they work for you.

If anyone has found an item that might transition to bonsai use, let know so we can all



benefit from your thinking outside the box – just as Tom Nerrie did with his oil dry to use as the coarse component in our bonsai mix. Tom does have more to sell if you're interested see him at the meeting.

If you have discovered a good source for plant material or other related items, please don't keep it to you self – share with the club – that is what will help make and keep our club strong.

If anyone has a good source for seedling grade, or fine grade fir bark, in fairly large quantities, with a minimum of chunks and fines, let us know. Fir bark is a good soil component, as it does not breakdown quickly, but does provide some nutritional value to the trees.

Does anyone have a reliable source for sharpening bonsai tools?

### *Moss a friend or foe*

Moss is a very simple plant form that lacks roots that is held down by rhizoids, thread-like anchors. The classification of plant is called Bryopsida and are believed to be the first green land plants that developed in the early evolutionary period. As plants without true leaves, stems and roots, its growth is limited to moist areas – extracting the moisture needed from the ground or air. Mosses are a broad family with over 11,000 species growing around the world. Sphagnum moss is a member of this family, and is one of the few mosses that have a commercial use. Moss possess minimal nutritional value and is generally not eaten by most animal. But moss has value to many gardeners, especially in Japan, who have created moss

gardens for centuries; moss rocks are coveted in landscape gardening and command a relatively high price. Moss is a survivor, it will turn brown and dry out without moisture, but as soon as the necessary moisture is restored, it will resume its bright green color. We tag “moss” onto other plants that are not truly a member of the moss family, such as club moss, reindeer moss, Spanish moss. Moss can have some medicinal benefits, and were used as wound dressing in earlier times.

In the art on bonsai, moss is often used to complete the feeling of a natural setting – mimicking the look of the undergrowth present in a field, hillside of forest. It is small and delicate, so it is truly in scale with bonsai.

While many of us think the use of moss enhances the overall design and does not detract or harm the health of a bonsai, others feel that it should only be applied temporarily prior to display in an exhibit, Tokanoma, or show and then removed. Moss that completely covers the soil's surface can impede water penetration, or its evaporation, so it is best not to cover the entire surface, leaving about 75% of the surface area uncovered. Keep in mind that while moss likes moisture, some of our trees prefer less moisture than that required for the moss. Usually a happy balance can be achieved by watering according to the tree's need, and misting the moss surface lightly daily during drier, less humid times. Of course the bottom line is that the tree is the one to make happy, and moss may not work on every tree in your collection – that's when you would apply

moss on a temporary basis for a show or exhibit.

### *Collecting and growing moss...*

Collecting moss couldn't be easier – at least when you are collecting what is growing right in your own backyard or neighborhood. Generally it just will lift easily from the surface it is adhering to. While local moss is fine, using a variety of mosses produces a more interesting, varied composition. If you use darker colored moss under or close to the base of your tree, it will mimic the feeling of shade, and shadow, and using a lighter color toward the outer edges of the pot will give the effect of the sun shining; some can be lumpy and will add 'rolling hills' to your planting.



Some mosses look like flowers or small trees – each variety can add to the overall story your bonsai is trying to convey.



Whenever I go out on an adventure, I usually take a couple of zip-lock bags, or other plastic bags with me for collecting something interesting – you never know what you might find when you are out and about. I have quite a collection of things from, Suffolk County, Westchester and Pennsylvania

not to mention Sullivan County. If you collect, don't remove all the moss from a particular spot; take a little from here and then walk to another spot and collect more, so that the moss will not be depleted in any one area, and will be able to re-grow and fill in the spots you collected from. If possible, it is best to collect moss that is growing out in a sunnier area, as it will acclimate more readily to growing with a bonsai that is out in the sun for a good part of the day.

### *Now if you really want to do moss...*

It is fairly simple to grow and keep on hand a good supply of moss of different varieties.

Use a shallow container with small drainage holes, cover the bottom with fines (a good use for the leftovers from sifting soil mixes) or sand; mist the surface until the contents are moist. Cut fresh moss into small pieces and sprinkle on the surface and mist again. Place the container into a location that receives dappled light (under a bonsai bench perhaps) – don't allow the surface to completely dry out – misting daily is usually a good idea. In about two weeks, you will have a nice green mossy surface from which to harvest moss when you need it. It will quickly replenish the open spots that you collected from.

Another method is to grow moss is on a brick, cinder block, or patio pavers. Using this method gives you nice, even, clean moss layer. You need a tray without holes, and large enough to accommodate the brick, block or paver, fill it with water. Allow the moss to dry out slightly in the sun, use a blender (that is not going to be used for food purposes – try garage sales, or

thrift shops) put the moss in the blender along with a small amount of either water, buttermilk or beer and whirl it until it forms a thick paste. Spread the paste on the brick or other surface – the water will wick up through the pores of the brick and that should be enough moisture to enable the moss to grow. Keep it in dappled light and mist the surface if necessary.

You can also spread this paste on the landscaping rocks in your shade in your garden – in no time you will have moss rocks.

### *Applying Moss...*

You are trying to convey a story or image in bonsai design and moss can help complete the arrangement by adding texture and color to the design.

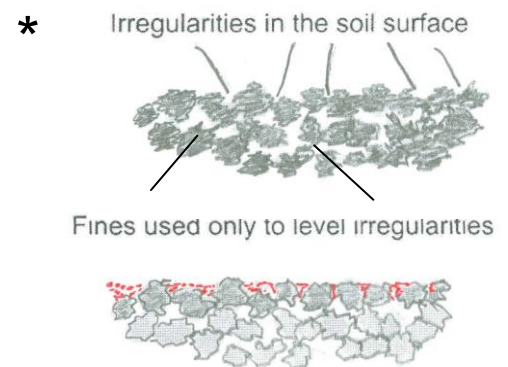
- Remember to leave approximately 25% of the surface area uncovered
- Leave spaces between so that there is ample room for water penetration and evaporation
- Scrape off most of the soil from the bottom of collected moss
- Random application, rather than a carpeted appearance is more realistic
- Use a variety of moss textures and colors – but not necessarily using every type you have just because you have it – it should enhance the design, not be the design.
- Try to have a level surface to apply the moss to – covering the bonsai soil with a very thin coat of fines, which you will dampen, where you want to place the moss helps

the moss settle in. (\*see below)

- You want the moss base to be a bit lower than the soil's surface – not sitting on top of the soil.



- Moss will help retain the soil on a slab planting, and cover muck used on slabs
- Moss can provide a bit of insulation to the roots from the heat of the sun, and winter's cold.



You want to retain the air pockets between the coarse components of bonsai soil as they are essential to keeping healthy roots.

You can form a paper cone, with a very small opening on the bottom, put the fines in the cone and allow a small amount to come out to fill in around the gaps between the moss patches.

(Can you tell I like moss in my garden and on my plantings?)

Long Island Bonsai Society

Monday - FEBRUARY 8, 2010 - 7:30 pm

Jim Byrne - Interactive Bonsai Design

Tokonoma - by Tom Marinace - Suiseki

The Classroom in the Main Greenhouse

Planting Fields Arboretum

Please bring in a tree that needs design help.

Long Island Bonsai Society  
c/o 38 Elm Street  
Lynbrook, NY 11563



*Delicate branches*

*Roots caress a simple pot*

*White blossoms shimmer*

*The essence of all forests*

*Lives here in one small tree.*

*Mastuyama Mokurai*

