Long Island Bonsai Society - Monday – November 14, 2011

Bonsai and gardening tips Part 2, and a little extra

by Hal Mahoney

Lecture Demo – Kathy Shaner –8 p.m. Pines

Main Classroom - Planting Fields Arboretum

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

October's meeting…

Our early workshop – or perhaps I should say sneak quiz - we were tested on our knowledge about fertilizer, and how plant material utilized the nutrients it received – whether from nature, or from a bottle given by Jim Stopfer. I hope we were marked on a curve.

Jim was kind enough to provide the following article covering the salient points.

Bonsai trees use the same biological and chemical process as trees growing in the forest. Forest trees don't need fertilizer to grow because they recycle and use living or decaying materials in the soil which contain nutrients and minerals. Bonsai trees however, need regular addition of fertilizer since the light or very granular soils do not retain nutrients soon after application. Fertilizer supplies the nutrients necessary for cell division and enzyme processes needed for trees to allow photosynthesis and growth to proceed. Nutrients are mainly absorbed through roots but small amount are absorbed through the foliage. Osmosis and transpiration are the processes by which plant roots absorb soil solution containing Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium (N,P,K and other necessary elements. It makes no difference to bonsai trees growing in porous, inorganic soil whether you spread solid fertilizer to the soil or you use liquid fertilizer. Liquid fertilizers are safe used properly because Nitrogen absorbs quickly and then leaches out rapidly in water. Fertilizer powders slowly release nitrogen as they first must be decomposed by microbes to allow absorption. Pelleted and cake fertilizers containing ingredients needed to bind them take even longer to decompose. A grower can therefore use both types of fertilizer by timing them. Probably the best fertilizer for bonsai is any balanced fertilizer which contain N, P,K, and all thirteen minor elements.

An organic fertilizer like cotton meal produced from a specific plant will usually only indicate N,P,K on it's label The function of Nitrogen is growth by cell division. Phosphorus is most associated with good root growth and flowering. Potassium is most associated with the cell health and activity and the prevention of deficiencies. Fertilizer is not really "plant food" although commonly labeled. Actual food is produced by photosynthesis in the leaves producing starch and sugars. Fertilizer is more analogous to vitamins which contain many of the same ingredients.

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What is the differe abeled as organic or non-organic fertilizer? Science has defined organic material as a class of chemical compounds that formerly comprised only those existing in or derived from plants or animals but now include all other compounds of carbon such as synthetic urea. Inorganic materials do not contain hydrocarbons or their derivatives. This makes it confusing as some fertilizers labeled "organic fertilizer" contain inorganic materials.

Nutrients containing organic , inorganic,or both process the same way. How much fertilizer should you apply to bonsais? It is safe to apply following the manufacturer's recommendations. If you apply fertilizer more often than the manufacturer recommends, reduce the amount of application to the same ratio inversely i.e. If the manufacturer directs application every other week, and you apply every week you have to cut the dosage to half. Over fertilizing can cause leaf burn, large leaves, soft tissues in leaves, weak stems, and long internodes as well as deficiencies but may not grow larger trees.

Genes most often determine growth. Fertilizer should first be applied in the spring when trees start producing leaves. Some people apply only Phosphorus and Potassium to prepare the tree for winter by increasing its cold hardiness. There is no scientific reason to justify this. Others believe that using Nitrogen in the fall and winter will force new

growth that will be killed by frost. Again there is no scientific reason for this whereas pruning at this time of year may cause unwanted new growth. Many do not realize roots grow so long as the temperature in the soil is above 40o F.

Therefore the absorption of nutrients continue to be stored. When a tree has a problem many stop fertilizing believing the problem will worsen unless over fertilizing caused it.This is analogous to not taking medicine, vitamins and nutrition when you are sick. I urge readers to examine scientific studies pertaining to all trees and specific bonsai trees rather than depending on outdated techniques continually repeated in bonsai literature.

Thanks Jim for sharing this valuable information with us.

Articles, photos, or information about bonsai and related "hobbies" are always welcome – not be mention giving your editor a break from having to come up with enough material each month to do this newsletter.

Our main program was with Jack Sustick – and what a pleasant demonstrator Jack is. He just gently told us about what he saw in the tree as he studied it, and sketched his design vision while comfortably seated out in the sun prior to our meeting. (*we are often told by our many demonstrators that sketching out the tree you mind's eye sees is an important first step – before you start to cut and shape. We are also told that the artistic quality of your sketch doesn't matter, it is getting a plan down on paper that is important, and so you have a 'road map' showing you where you expect the tree to go – sometime in the future*

Jack points out what he sees as good with the plant material, and what he sees as potential flaws, or weakness.

Tom Nerrie provided the tree, an Hinoki Cypress, planted it in a growing box, or training pit pot and had replaced all the clay soil the tree and replaced it with a nice coarse soil that most bonsai seem to love.

The tree had three trunks but Jack felt two were all that was needed to achieve the design he had in mind so he set about cutting off most of the foliage. Jack commented on the good trunk base the tree possessed - reminding us that the trunk is a very important consideration when choosing stock.

Before cutting branches, you should decide on the tree's "front" – that makes it easier to decide what can go – if at all possible you want to avoid cutting off branches that will leave a visible scare on the front.

Jack likes to leave a long stump when he cuts off branches giving the option of making jin on the stubs.

The larger trunk is treated as the main tree, the second trunk will be made smaller to create balance – avoid placing the branches directly across from each other, - one is forward of the other. Jack said to "hide the negative and accentuate the positive.".

Hinoki Cypress are reluctant to bud back, but if you keep the branching and foliage "open" that will encourage back-budding. Hinoki's are sensitive to drying out which will lead to loss of foliage, Spring is the ideal time to do extensive pruning, but fall is the next best time.

Jack reminded us that if you plan to jin branches it should be done when the branches are removed. The bark will slip right off when pinched in the jaws of a jin pliers. If you allow the branch to dry out, it becomes difficult to remove the bark.

Jack mentioned a cut paste that he likes using called Black Balsam (I believe he said it was made in Germany) It has the consistency of tooth paste and provides a good seal.

Inside branching should be removed as they will die out as they compete with each other for light. Jack showed how to pull the foliage rather than pinching it – pinching or cutting juniper family foliage results in brown tips – but if you grasp the foliage just below the length you want the branch to be and tug the other end it just separated and does not cause browning.

When wiring you want the wire to come up under the branch rather than over the top. This offers greater support to the branch. Jack also said using an 80% granite 20% pine bark was a good pine mix. The granite used is poultry grit which comes in three grades – starter (for baby chicks), grower, and developer. At the Arboretum they use the grower mix.

HInoki's like full sun in the spring and fall, but partial shade during the hot summer and he again reminded us that they do not like to dry out. He recommended that the tree be allowed to grow on in the present growing box until the Spring of 2013 and then plant it in a classic rectangle or oval container. However if the winner plants the tree directly into the ground, you will get quicker results.

Jack said that artistically there can be several "right" ways to style a tree, you have leeway in styling, but horticulturally you need to get it "right" as to watering, feeding, location.

The tree had a rather large bulge on the trunk after the extra branch was removed, and Jack suggested it be reduced – he prefers using hand tools over die grinders or a Dremel as the finish is smoother. Power tools generally results in the wood fibers being broken and sticking out from the tree.. Grabbing a piece of the branch and pulling it downward replicated what would happen in nature when a branch gets ripped off by the wind or lightning, the rip follows the wood's grain line.

After the initial pruning the tree is very open as most of the foliage is growing on the 'end' of the branches. Jack does not like to wire in multiple bends on a branch to bring it closer to the trunk – he feels it produces an artificial look. The top was jinned to shorten the tree.

The tree has some foliage growing to do, but it certainly looks like the sketch Jack did earlier in the day. It is hard to believe that is the material he started the demo with.

As much as I hate to admit it, unless you can be ruthless with those cutters, you can't achieve a bonsai – you will always have a tree in a container.

One of our newer members, Rich Steiner, is the winner of Jack's tree – and sketch.

That 's a great tree to add to your collection Rich. (I also like Jack's green mustache.)

Francine asked club members to bring in Pines to our November meeting.

. It will be wonderful to see samples from beginning, intermediate and experienced members.

There is one slot still open for the soft touch holly workshop that is being held in the South Lounge at Planting Fields on Sunday, November 19th 10 am – 2 pm. The fee is $30.00 – if possible bring your own tools.. Already signed up – please send your check to Tom Nerrie 26 Cambridge Drive, Babylon 11702 Phone 631-661-4268, or pay at the Nov. 14th meeting.

I wish to extend to Hal and Maron Mahoney the club's condolences on the recent death of Hal's brother Bob.

Bob had been a member of our Society for several years, and then actively participating in Eastern Suffolk's bonsai society.

This month's meeting features Kathy Shaner – a very popular presenter to our club. Kathy's years of bonsai experience comes through with every step she takes in transforming raw material into the foundation of a good bonsai to be.

Kathy has been with us many times, and she always has some new knowledge to share with us, and she keeps us abreast of what is going on globally with bonsai, as it is being transformed in Europe, and around the world.

I look forward to see what type of pine she will be working on, and what she produces in the couple of hours that our demon-

Reminder that the November meeting is also the election of officers. Don't forget that we are open to nominations from the floor.

To all those who helped make last month's meeting successful and to run smoothly.

Mentor Program…

will be starting offering members the opportunity to work with a more experience member who will offer guidance and assistance with styling your tree on its way to bonsai stardom. (additional information will be forthcoming)