



Welcome to the ABS Newsletter for Junly2017. We're coming to the end of cutting season and all that ensues with that. Many of us are now candle pruning our Japanese Red and Japanese Black Pines. (pro tip: Dawn dish detergent gets pine sap off your hands very nicely when used in a concentrated state!) We've taken care of removing flowers from our satsuki and other azaleas and completed the post-blooming treatments. Some of us are watering twice a day. Even though we're all very busy, make sure you take the time to appreciate the beauty of your bonsai, even those early in their state of development. The bonus of looking at and appreciating your trees is that you may find pests that need to be removed.

A major thanks to those who contribute articles. The contributions are greatly appreciated and always in need. As I write every month, if you can contribute or if you have an idea for an article you think would be of interest, please email me at: dave.paris@w3works.com We still need a cache of articles to chose from so we can make the newsletter interesting! We can handle the writing if we know what the membership would find interesting.

The Meaning of Bonsai

By Andrew Smith

I've been thinking about the meaning of bonsai lately, or at least what bonsai means to me. If you've been devoted to the hobby for awhile you probably already know that the word "bonsai" literally means "the art of lifting and carrying heavy things in pots," but that with usage it has come to mean, more specifically, "the art of lifting and carrying heavy trees in pots." In my case it would be "the art of lifting and carrying heavy, wet, trees in pots," because around here we don't call it bonsai unless you have to change your socks afterwards.

Anyway, after deep and serious consideration, I'd say that lifting and carrying heavy trees in pots has been about 90% of my bonsai experience over the years. It's true that I have also spent some time watering, fertilizing, photographing, pruning, collecting and wiring bonsai—all enjoyable tasks- but if you wanted me to sum up bonsai in just a few words it would definitely be "lifting and carrying something heavy." Most often while its unique and priceless jin stabs you repeatedly in the nose.

Trees, through some drastic oversight in evolution, don't have legs. So they can't go anywhere, even when they want to. I've often wished my trees did have legs so they could move themselves around and I wouldn't have to do every last little thing for them, the crybabies.

If trees had legs, things would be easier around here. I could just say, "You, you and you look like you need more sun. March down to that bench at the end of the row and get up on it. Quick now! And you two look like you need to go back in the greenhouse. Not that one; the one beside it! That's the one. And send out those mugo pines, they've been playing inside all day and they need to get out of the house for awhile."

This assumes, of course, that bonsai trees are more trainable than my dog, and will actually follow my instructions and not drop fertilizer cakes all over the new carpet. Or worse yet, run away. Our place isn't fenced and if my trees took a mind to run off into the woods there would be no getting them back. My only hope would be that after a couple weeks without rain they'd get thirsty and come back home. Then I'd have to scold them and give them some water and then they'd probably do it again.

So maybe it's good that they don't have legs after all. But it sure leads to a lot of grunting and swearing and lifting and nose stabbing on my

part. Maybe I should just put cotton balls on the ends of every jin so I could clean my nostrils while I work. It would save time.

What I am, really, is a tree chauffeur. The pines in this greenhouse at the bottom of the hill would like to be moved to the top of the hill and into more sun. Meanwhile the spruce at the top of the hill would like to go somewhere where they could get some afternoon shade. This juniper wants more sun. That one wants more sun, but not quite so much. This one thought it wanted more sun, but has changed its mind, for now. That one is too cold where it is, and this one is too hot. That one wants shade, but not in the morning. This one thinks the wind messes up its hair.

And there's always the weather to consider. Move them outside and you can expect bowling ball-size hail followed by a hard freeze. Leave them in the greenhouse and you'll hit 102 degrees by 10 a.m. Move only half of them outside and you'll get record high temps, a hard freeze, large hail and an ill-tempered agricultural inspector.

So I've got sort of a rotating tree farm, where my trees play musical chairs all year long, and I am the unseen hand that moves the world. It seems wherever I go I am carrying a tree along with me to move it to a better spot. Which means, of course, that the tree that is already in the better spot will have to be moved to another, better spot, and the tree that was there will then have to be moved to a still better spot, and the tree that was there; well, it's sort of like dominoes and there's no end to it and eventually, I presume, everyone ends up back in their original spot, though the trees may have grown too big to move by that time.

Still, there's nothing for me to do but do it. I think I'm stuck with bonsai. I'm in the business of selling trees, and I'm happy when I sell one,

but actually I also feel a little sad to see them go away. Each one is unique and I've collected and potted and watered and worried over every one of them. Heck, I've carried them. It's what I do. It's what bonsai means to me.

2017 US National Shohin Exhibition

by Dave Paris (Rochester, NY)

With the engine of the car still warm and a wonderful home-cooked meal in my tummy, I had to write a review will everything was still fresh in my mind.

First, a huge kudos to Louise Leister and Bill Valavanis and a staff of more than I could count for putting together such an amazing show in such a short time period. If you weren't able to attend this one, definitely mark your calendar for the next one in 2019. It's already on the books, that's how spectacular a show it was. From the workshops, which had absolutely amazing material, to some of the best demonstrations ever given, to the quality of the displays, the venue itself, and the quality and quantity of exceptional pieces of plant, container, and other items from vendors, adequate superlatives escape me.

The shohin compositions were extremely well done, clearly with plenty of planning and design contemplation put into them. The individual trees were exceptionally varied and all were in beautiful condition. There is no question in my mind that shohin and mame bonsai in the US has fully taken root and is thriving. From my understanding, the judging was exceptionally difficult due to the sheer number of exceptional compositions and trees.

From the time setup began early Thursday through breaking down at the end of the show, there was a palpable feeling in the air of this being something truly special. That's more than just my opinion as I heard it repeatedly from

many other people. From old friends to meeting new people, it was as welcoming a group as I've ever seen. Many conversations lasted late into the night, with plenty of laughter and joy in the air.

One of the most remarkable things I noted was the sharing of knowledge from people who are well-known for their shohin and smaller trees, with people who were both new to bonsai or new to shohin and mame. It was truly magical.

On Saturday, we had the special treat of having Sunshine (who owns an exceptional local Asian restaurant), do live fruit carving - something she does professionally in addition to owning the restaurant. What less than a handful of people knew is that she was carving some of the winning trees. A wonderful, unplanned part of the event.

For my part, it was truly both humbling and exciting to be a part of the 1st US National Shohin Exhibition. As I wrote in my first paragraph, if you have any sort of interest in shohin or mame bonsai, plan now to be in Kannapolis in 2019!

Removing Wire

by Brian Keith Heltsley (Ithaca, NY)

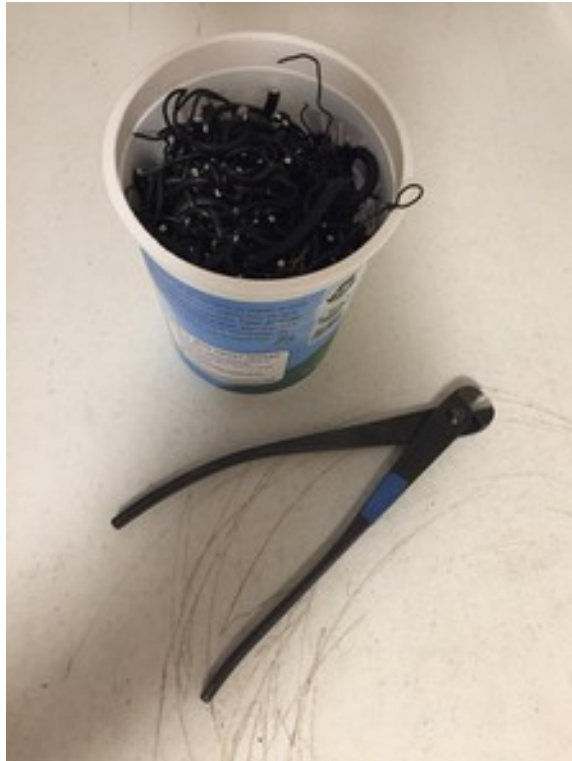
Right around Memorial Day, weddings, graduations, and the garden beckon. The Ithaca Festival comes and goes the weekend after. This college town empties out, by mid-May for the college students, and again in late June after public schools close, allowing families to head off for long-awaited vacations. Summer activities and deferred repairs around the house await. It is tempting for a bonsai beginner like me to think: "If I water and fertilize my trees now, that has to be enough, right?" So much else is going on, after all.

After the bonsai "business" of late winter and spring, with pruning, styling, wiring, and repotting behind us, surely it must be time to relax along with the trees, which are recovering from all the stresses that they were put through seemingly so recently.

Well, maybe, maybe not! In my case, I had wired more than twenty (mostly small) trees in February, March and April. We spend a lot of time learning and teaching wiring technique. Wiring is satisfying, if tedious, because you get to impose your will on the tree. Branches move where they are told, and stay there. Whew! Done! But in reality, when you put on the wire, you have implicitly made a date for yourself to remove it. When that date comes depends upon how tightly you wired, how fast the tree is growing, how much you are fertilizing, and what stage the various branches or trunk are in their development as bonsai. Clearly you want to wait until branches "set", but only if that comes before the wire starts biting into the branch. Removing wire is not fun (for me anyway) or satisfying (unless you enjoy collecting all those little wire pieces off the soil surface, table, and floor). If you don't remove the wire in time, then, just like if you don't water on a hot day, or allow the tree to freeze too solid in winter, a potentially fierce consequence can result. And if you wait too long, it becomes urgent to get the wire off all at once, instead of gradually working through the trees.

To get to the point: as of 4 days ago, all my nearly two dozen trees were "set", and almost all of them had at least a few places where deep indentations were left in the branches. Some of those branches may die off, others may weaken, and some may

eventually heal the wounds to recover. I was shocked that even my workshop juniper, wired in late March for our club meeting, was ready for the removal of wire. It's been growing!



Removing wire can tax the back, the eyes, and the soul if you have to do it for hours on end. I wear a headlamp in order to see clearly, and scoot my glasses down my nose in order to focus close up by just tilting my head. The genius of the wire removal tool becomes apparent, allowing one to cut just up to the branch but no further. One must cut just about every turn of the wire. If the wire is too tight, it may have attached itself to the bark and a careful peeling off must be done. It can take so long that there is a temptation to unwrap the wire, but I almost always regret it if I do (the exception being for the smallest gauge wire in some

circumstances). If one becomes impatient and tries to rush it, serious damage can be done. After all, one is cutting with great force just a fraction of a millimeter from the branch.

I did develop a habit to reward myself. After finishing wire removal for each tree, I took a few minutes to go over it slowly, trimming and ensuring branch division from one to only two at each crotch. (Doing so can help avoid reverse taper from excessive swelling at places with a division into more than two.) This allowed me to re-familiarize myself with each tree, and those few minutes almost made the removal time worthwhile.

I recently saw an event calendar for a bonsai nursery advertising an upcoming Meditation and Bonsai workshop. When I first saw it, I dismissed it as irrelevant to me. However, I now realize that, after 15 hours over 4 days of removing wire, that it would have been a more fulfilling experience to be in a meditative state, not feeling the ache in my lower back or stiffness in my hand as I cut the 500th piece of wire, but rather taking advantage of the time alone with each tree, letting the repetitive nature of the work power itself while my conscious mind drank in the nature of each species, the development of each tree design, and the health of each leaf. I have no idea if this was the purpose of the workshop, but after seeing it, I realized that I had lost an opportunity for “quality time” with my trees and myself. Maybe removing wire is always physically taxing, but perhaps it also can be a positive spiritual experience? I’ll try harder next year to at least practice mindfulness, to live in each moment rather than for the end of the task. Isn’t that why we say “it’s the journey not

the destination?"

Next year I hope to start checking my wire by Memorial Day instead of weeding the garden or sweeping out the garage so I can spread the task over weeks, not days. And when I do remove the wire, I want to look forward to being up-close-and-personal with nature and art.

A SPECIAL INVITATION

If for some reason you weren't able to attend the very special 50th Anniversary ABS/BSF Convention, you can still enjoy a part of history. Purchase a commemorative book, *New World Bonsai 2017*. Along with comments by a number of world class seminar teachers, the book will include professional portraits of 50 displays of beautiful bonsai that have been chosen from over 100 submissions for exhibit at the Convention. Enjoy in hard copy the beauty of equal numbers of both tropical and temperate trees. Click [HERE](#) to pre-order *New World Bonsai 2017*.

Upcoming Events

September 14-16, 2018 – NW Bonsai Rendezvous. Portland, Oregon. Hosted by BSOP and PNBCA Visit <http://portlandbonsai.org> for more information.

April 19-22, 2018 “Gateway to Bonsai”

Guest Artists:

Marc Noelanders, Bjorn Bjorholm and Matt Reel

Bonsai Workshops and Learning Seminars hosted by The American Bonsai Society and The Bonsai Society of Greater St. Louis.

37 workshops and classes offered for your learning experience. 3 Critiques, Juried Bonsai and Ikebana Exhibit, Large Vending Area, Joshua Roth New Talent Contest, Raffles, Auctions and Demonstrations by Marc Noelanders and Bjorn Bjorholm

Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive
Collinsville, IL 62234
(10 minutes east of St. Louis)



Newsletter Submissions:

Please send submissions, upcoming events, article ideas, raves, rants, and so forth to dave.paris@w3works.com

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