



Fog City Bonsai

Newsletter of the Bonsai Society of San Francisco
Hall of Flowers, 9th Avenue and Lincoln Way

Bonsai Events at-a-Glance...

Thurs., February 12. BSSF February Meeting. Choosing a Pot for Your Bonsai and Pot Swap.

Thurs., February 19. BSSF 3rd Thursday Workshop.

Sat., Feb. 21. Bonsai Basics I - Beginners Workshop.

Sat. & Sun., Feb 28 - Mar. 1. Mammoth Fundraiser at the GSBF Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt.

Thurs., March 12. BSSF March Meeting. Bonsai Display.

Thurs., March 19. BSSF 3rd Thursday Workshop.

Wed.-Sun., March 25-29. BSSF Bonsai Show at the San Francisco Flower and Garden Show.



Japanese Black Pines

January Meeting Notes

To kick off the Bonsai New Year, our own Eric Schrader gave a talk and demonstration on the "granddaddy of bonsai", Japanese black pine. Black pine is native to Korea, Japan and China and is widely considered the finest pine for bonsai as well as the "King of bonsai" (whatever that means...) Black pine care can seem complicated to the beginner and does take some time to understand, however once the basic concepts are in place the results that you will see from your black pines are fantastic. *(continued on page 2)*...

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Choosing a Pot for Your Bonsai and Pot Swap

BSSF General Meeting, February 12

Choosing and finding a pot for your bonsai is a difficult task. For our February meeting, we will be discussing how to choose a pot for your tree. In addition, members will bring pots to the meeting for trade or sale with other members. Members should bring trees to discuss potting options and maybe find that perfect pot. The best way to match a bonsai tree with new pot is to bring the tree along to where you plan to purchase pots. Here is a perfect opportunity for you to "try on" different styles of pot for your tree. Please review the guidelines for our first annual pot swap on page 4.

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Health

The first thing to consider when looking at a pine that you own, or are considering purchasing, is the health of the tree. Pines in general are slower to react to many environmental conditions than deciduous trees. They will take 2-3 years to become healthy if they are very sick but given poor conditions will continue to grow for 1-2 years before reacting adversely. A popular test of the health of a Japanese Black Pine is to bounce the palm of your hand off the needles to see how sharp they are. This technique in reality will tell you more about the variety than it will about the health of the tree. Trees that are currently in distress from insect attacks may have very sharp needles since the needles are grown out the previous year. Landscape variety trees tend to have longer needles, larger buds and sharper needles. In contrast *Mikawa* and *Arakawa* varieties of black pine, both popular for bonsai, have finer growth patterns and softer needles.

To judge the health of the tree look at the following:

- Length of the needles - sick trees will grow very slowly and may have short needles even without having been candle-cut the previous year. If there is no sign that the tree was candle cut in the previous year but the needles are short the tree is not healthy.
- Color and shine of the needles - A healthy tree will have shiny dark green needles with no twisting, the needles will generally be stiff and strong. If the needles are uniformly yellow this may indicate a temporary lack of nutrients or insect attack. If the needles are yellow or brown on the tips or banded yellow this may indicate improper watering in the previous year and thus show that the tree has been stressed.
- Interior buds - healthy trees will have small buds emerging on the branches closer to the trunk than the tips. If there is no interior growth and the tree has long branches it is likely unhealthy and long-neglected.
- Strong top growth - if the tree is exhibiting strong top growth (6-inch to foot-long straight sections or similar) it is likely healthy, but before purchasing consider whether or not the lower branches have enough buds to form good branching.

Generally, the more dense the foliage of a pine bonsai the longer it has been trained and cared for properly. Given improper care the interior and lower branching will die first and then the tree will start to thin out.

Soil and Repotting

The first step in making a pine bonsai is to get the tree as healthy as possible. Repot into a loose, well-draining bonsai mix made of 1 part pumice, 1 part akadama and 1 part lava. All the components should be sifted to remove dust (they must be bone dry), and to make the sizes uniform. If the sizes are not uniform that larger particles will tend toward the top of the pot effectively separating the components and making the soil conditions not uniform. Use 1-16" to 1/4" size for JBP. You should never completely bare-root a JBP, or any conifer really. Instead, remove the tree from the pot, rake out and cut off the mass of roots on the bottom and flatten the bottom of the rootball. Then set it on a table and comb out the mat of roots on the sides. Leave the interior of the rootball intact unless this is the first time you have worked on the trees rootball. If it is the first time bare root 1/4 to 1/2 of the rootball, less for very weak



For first meeting of the year, Eric Schrader lectures the BSSF membership about the care of Japanese black pines in bonsai. (top) Eric discussed how to determine the health of your Japanese black pines and those you find at other sales and auctions. (bottom), One of Eric's seedling black pines growing in a container. Eric has grown many black pines from seeds. While only few years old, this pine is well on its way to becoming a bonsai. Early in its life, the trunk of this tree was wired to give it movement. We'll check back with Eric in 15 years to learn about its progress...

trees, more for healthier ones. Go all the way to the trunk and replace the soil on the part of the rootball you intend to replace. Do the other part on subsequent repottings, 1-2 years later.

Fertilization and Watering

Pines like heavy fertilization routines once repotted properly. Fertilize more conservatively if you purchased the tree during the growing season and are unsure about the soil conditions. For a 6" pot add 2 cakes (tablespoon sized) or 2 tablespoons of organic fertilizer starting in March when the candles begin to elongate. Add another 2 cakes or 2 tbsp or powder every two weeks until June 1st when the tree is decandled (if healthy and in San Francisco, more on that later). If you run out of room on the surface of the pot remove the oldest cakes first. Also, periodically use liquid chemical fertilizer such as miracle grow, diluted according to the package directions. I use it once every week or two depending on when I have time. For a 14" pot you would double the number of cakes each time, so add 4 every two weeks. If a crust of organic material forms on the surface of the soil scrape it off and add fresh soil to restore air circulation to the roots.

Watering should be done so that the soil is damp but not wet when the tree is watered again. If the tree stays too wet it will get root rot. In my yard, I water trees in medium to large pots once a day typically, smaller pots twice a day on sunny days when warm. Do not use a watering system, while they are convenient, they will not pay attention to when your tree is already too wet, they also promote moss growth and lichens which can damage the bark of a pine.

Sun and Wind

Black pines require full sun. How many hours is that?...well, it is as many as you can give the tree. Put your pines in the sunniest spot you have. The sun is the source of food for the tree (fertilizer is really more like vitamins to a human.) Black pines will never be healthy and will not respond well to training if they are in too much shade. Avoid wind whenever possible, while it will not damage a pine as much as it damages tender-leaved plants, wind does nothing to help the tree. Hot dry wind in warmer climates than San Francisco can kill a JBP. They are a low land pine, like Monterey pines, and Japan is a humid place in the summer, unlike California.

Seasonal Care Cycle

Starting in November, on a healthy and vigorous tree, remove all needles that are from previous years. Remove enough of the new needles to make the tree roughly even throughout (e.g. remove some new needles from the top of the tree, but leave all the new needles on the bottom and interior. Reduce budding from prior years decandling to 2, leaving either a smaller one on top and a larger one on the bottom or two equally sized buds side by side. Select stronger interior buds along the branches to keep while removing the weaker ones to even out strength of all buds. Repot JBP in late January through the end of February. Repotting in March or later will remove much of the new root growth and weaken the tree. At this time remove more needles, reducing the tree (based on health, weaker trees should be left with more needles) to 7-8 pair on the top, 8-9 pair in middle areas, and 9-11 pair in weaker areas (bottom and interior.) Fertilize heavily from the time candles start to move until June 1st. (see fertilization section above.)

On June 1st decandle trees. This applies to the climate in San Francisco, CA. If you live anywhere else, the date must be determined by trial and error....and even if you live in the city, there is variation. For Bernal Heights I find that June 1st gives me good needle length for smaller to medium size trees. On larger trees, or for slightly longer needles, decandle a week earlier. As long as the tree is healthy it does not matter what the candle growth looks like when you cut it off, the important part of the operation is how long between the time the candles are cut and the end of the growing season. The longer time there is the longer the needles will be. The hotter and/or more humid it is the longer the needles will be. Be sure to cut evenly across the base of the candle, do not cut at an angle and do not cut back further than about 1/16" from the base of the candle. If you do you will remove the dormant buds at the base that you want to sprout out. When you decandle, remove all the fertilizer cakes from the surface of the pot and stop fertilizing with liquid for 4-6 weeks. This will keep the needles shorter, more fertilizer or fertilizer sooner equals longer needles.

Do not decandle interior buds that are weak or just appeared the prior season - not decandling them will make them very strong, and the needles will be longer than the rest of the tree (scissor them to even out length, and more importantly - strength, in November.) Bud thinning - I do not thin buds during the growing season, it only causes the remaining growth to become more vigorous, remove the excess buds in November when you clean up and wire the tree. Starting around the first of August begin fertilizing more lightly than in the spring. Use half as many cakes as you did and apply liquid half as often until around the middle of October. In November start the cycle again. Basically all this information is based on the teaching of [Boon Manakitviphart](#). *Eric Schrader*

Guidelines for Our First Annual Pot Swap.

This year, our February Meeting will be program devoted to choosing the best pot for you bonsai tree. We will also host our first ever "Pot Swap". The meeting will be divided into three parts:

Part I A discussion about bonsai pots and guidelines to choosing a pot for your tree. Lawrence LeClaire will be leading this part of the meeting and will be providing information that will be very useful for our beginner membership.

Part II A mini-critique/discussion of different trees (supplied by the membership) and possible pot selections. The best way to choose a pot for you tree is to bring the tree with you to where the pots are sold (vendor areas, stores, etc). Therefore, members are encouraged to bring along trees to the meeting that need a matching pot. We will present the trees to the club and discuss pot options as a group.

Part III The main event - The Pot Swap. Most of us have shelves full of pots but no trees to match and vice versa. Here is your chance to browse pots of our members and maybe find a match. Just want to swap or exchange a few bucks? No problem. We will set up tables for our members to display their pots and trees. Just have a couple pots? No problem - bring them along, everyone is welcome to participate.

Please observe the following rules for the pot swap.

1. Prepare your pots just as would for a public sale. Clean them up! Give them a good wash under a strong spray of water to remove dirt and spider webs. Use a dish-pad to remove chunks of dirt but avoid using soap or abrasives. The aged look of pot that's been exposed to weather is sometimes preferred over a shiny new pot.
2. Mark your pot clearly with the price you are asking. The preferred method for pricing pots is to use a chalk mark on the inside of the pot. Adding your initials will help. We will provide chalk at the meeting.
3. Bring old newspapers, paper, or cardboard boxes for transporting your pots. You don't want to crack or ruin the glaze on the pots you buy or sell.
4. The 20% commission the club takes on meeting sales will be suspended for this meeting.
5. Tables will be arranged in the meeting hall for you to set up shop. Plan to arrive early so we can get started and not wait to start the program.

Preparing Bonsai Soil

It is repotting season and for the past few years, you may have acquired your bonsai soil from vendors, the kindness of others, or from the club stash. But now you may have more trees than ever and handouts of those bags of premixed soil are getting more expensive and you're feeling guilty about hitting up your bud for 10 gallons of soil. Is now the time to attempt your own mix? Sure! It's actually quite easy, but some planning is necessary.

First of all, you need to determine what your soil components will be. There is a wide variety of components and each provides different characteristics to suit your local environmental conditions. For the Bay Area, we require a free draining mix for our wet (usually) winters but enough water retention to handle those dry windy days of late spring and autumn. A good basic mix is equal parts pumice, lava rock, and *akadama* (a hardened clay medium exported from Japan and available from many vendors).

Next, you will need to round up your soil components. There are a couple suppliers in the area. For small amounts, I use American Soil Products in Berkeley. They sell large bags (2 cu ft) of cleaned pumice and lava rock for around 5 dollars per bag. The bags easily fit in the trunk of your car! *Akadama* can be purchased at any of the local shows or fundraisers where bonsai vendors are present (see the Mammoth Fundraiser for the Bonsai Collection at Lake Merritt). It is available in three sizes (small, medium, and large). A bag of the medium size is ideal because it contains a great mix of small to medium pieces due to breakdown. *Akadama* is the most expensive component at >\$25/ bag. Cheaper alternatives are available such as pine/redwood bark and turface. The *akadama* is the water retention component in your mix, so its use is your own personal choice (see numerous discussions on web blogs/chat rooms/internet forums for pro/con arguments).

Next, you will need a few supplies and tools for preparing your soil components.

1. A roll of plastic sheeting (plastic drop cloth etc)
2. Screens/sifters of various sizes
3. Soil scoops
4. Buckets for storing your prepared components and soil.

The pumice, lava rock, and *akadama* you purchase will be full of dust and fines. These must be removed. But first, the lava rock and pumice will most likely be wet. So, you need to dry them before sifting out the dust. I use sheets of plastic spread out on my patio. Both the pumice and lava rock take days to dry completely. So, spread each bag over a sheet of plastic in

a dry sunny area. Every other day you may want to redistribute the rocks so they are completely dry. Sometimes I will wash the gravel a few times in a bucket to remove most of the dust, then spread it out on the plastic.

After your material has dried, you must separate according to size. For small amounts of soil, you can use a simple hoop sifter available from most bonsai suppliers (\$15). These sifters usually include three different interchangeable screens (2/16", 3/16", 5/16" sizes). Most people start with the smallest screen to remove the dust and fines. I begin with the largest screen to remove the largest pieces first and then move on to the smaller sizes. Each time, I move the sifted material into a bucket for storage. You will require many containers for storing soil components. At the end of the process you will have three sizes of lava rock, pumice, and *akadama*. Plus, you will need individual buckets for mixing and holding your different soil mixes. You may wish to buy Rubbermaid containers, but a better alternative exists. If you have a cat or know a cat owner, make sure to buy your kitty litter in plastic tubs. They have re-sealable lids and are stackable. They are the perfect size for keeping your mixes.

So, now that you have all your components, it's time to mix. 1 part of each component is ideal. I make two mixes, a 1/4" mix for *shohin* trees and top dressing, and a 1/2" mix for my larger trees. The largest pieces of pumice and lava rock can be used as the drainage layers during repotting or for filling space in large growing containers. I even make a 3/4" mix for my largest trees that require a lot of a drainage.

Even though you have sifted your soil throughout the process, you should always sift your soil mix prior to repotting. Dust always accumulates and can impede drainage in your bonsai pots.

So, Yes, I'll admit that preparing your own soil is a lot of work, but it is very satisfying once it is all mixed and your trees are all soaking their feet in it. Don't be scared and give it a try.

Lawrence LeClaire

Mixing your own bonsai can be easy. (top, right) Three bags of soil components ready for drying, sifting, and sorting. These 2 cu. ft. bags are ideal for growers with limited space and only a few trees. No need for a pickup truck or finding a place to a dump a truckload of rock. (middle, right) A few of the tools you'll need for the job. A hoop sifter with interchangeable screens and a soil scoop. This is a great scoop that contains a built-in sieve for removing dust. (bottom right) Three common size screens for sorting your soil into sizes of 1/8", 1/4", and 1/2" sizes.



Bonsai Notes for February

In February, try to finish up your repotting chores. Sometimes it seems like every tree needs to be repotted all at once, just take it one at a time starting with deciduous trees and ending with pines. Make sure you sift your soil to remove dust as this will clog the space between soil particles and cause the tree to stay too wet. You should be finalizing all winter chores this month in preparation for the growing season.

Make every effort when repotting to tie your tree securely in the pot. This can be quite simple for small trees with established rootballs, or quite difficult with large material that is slanting or has small roots that will not anchor it in place. Use aluminum wire and chopsticks if you need them. (cut into pieces to wedge the tree or to protect the tops of tender roots.)

Think about which trees you will be showing in March! Make sure you get them whipped into shape in time and that they have top dressing. Remove large wire and raffia from show trees, especially if it is on the trunk of the tree. Start looking for or making accent plantings that coordinate well with your tree and season. Look for stands at the upcoming fundraiser or borrow a stand that matches your tree. At our March meeting we will be discussing the principles of creating a bonsai display.

Upcoming Events

February 28- March 1 - Mammoth Fundraiser GSBF Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt: 18th Annual Mammoth Fundraiser at the Lakeside Garden Center, 666 Bellevue Avenue. Saturday (Feb 28) Auction 1PM-4PM with preview 12PM-1PM. Sunday (Mar 1) Mammoth Fundraiser 10AM-5PM. Demonstration and critiques by Kathy Shaner, Curator. Vendors, benefit drawings, raffles and large consignment sale of bonsai and bonsai-related items.

March 29 - Santa Cruz Bonsai Kai 20th Annual Show. at the Scotts Valley Community Center, 360 King's Village Road, Hours are 10:30AM-4:30PM. Demonstration at 1:30PM by Katsumi Kinoshita. Plant sales, door prizes, raffle of the demonstration tree and much more.

April 4-5 - Bonsai Sekiyu Kai 32nd Annual Bonsai Show 32nd Annual Bonsai Show at the Sacramento Betsuin Buddhist Church, 2401 Riverside Boulevard, Saturday, 12:00PM to 5:00PM, and Sunday, 10:00AM to 3:30PM. Demonstrations both days at 2:00PM by Bonsai Master John Uchida. Refreshments, door prizes, raffles, plants and bonsai tool sales. Ron Krause (916) 481-4792.

BSSF Meetings and Workshops

February 12, 2009 - BSSF General Meeting - Choosing a Pot for Your Bonsai and Bonsai Pot-Swap.

Choosing and finding a pot for your bonsai is a difficult task. For our February meeting, we will be discussing how to choose a pot for your tree. In addition, members will bring pots to the meeting for trade or sale with other members. Members should bring in trees to discuss potting options and maybe find that perfect pot. NOTE: Repotting will not be performed at the General Meeting but at the following Third Thursday workshop on February 19.

February 19, 2009 - Third Thursday Members Free Workshop.

Make plans to stop by the Free Third Thursday Workshop on February 19. The workshop begins at 7PM. The emphasis of this workshop will be on repotting. The club will provide soil for a tree or you can purchase a few gallons of soil for later. We will also provide the expertise. Also, now is the time to start prepping for our March Show. So, bring a couple trees by the Hall of Flowers and get advice from advanced members of the club.

February 21, 2009 - Bonsai Basics Class I - Introduction to Bonsai.

Part I of our Bonsai Basics Class will be offered on Saturday, February 21 at the Hall of Flowers from 1:30-4:30PM. This class is a basic introductory course to the bonsai hobby and serves as the basis for all club workshops and activities. We cover bonsai styles, fundamentals, tools, and tree design. The cost is \$60 and includes instruction, literature, and two trees. We will supply basic tools and wire. Membership in BSSF is required. Please contact Lawrence LeClaire at (415) 200-8967 to enroll or ask questions.

March 12 - BSSF General Meeting - Bonsai Display - John Edwards.

Our March meeting about how to prepare and arrange a formal bonsai display. There are many points to consider when planning for a bonsai display. John will cover the basics of bonsai display as we prepare for our own formal display at the San Francisco Flower and Garden Show.

As a demonstration, members will be preparing formal displays at the meeting followed by a club critique of each display. The raffle table will be filled with items you will need for display such as accent pots and display stands.

March 18-22, - 2009 BSSF Annual Show at the San Francisco Flower and Garden Show.

We are now in the planning in stages for our annual show at the San Francisco Flower & Garden Show at the San Mateo Event Center. We will have more space than last year's show and expect all members

2009 Board Members and Officers

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Librarian:
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 Tim Kong - (415) 387-7398

About our Club

The Bonsai Society of San Francisco exists to perpetuate the enjoyment of the art of bonsai. BSSF General meetings are on the **2nd Thursday** of the month at **7:30PM**. The **members' workshop** is the following Thursday (**3rd Thursday of the month**) at **7:00PM**. BSSF Board meetings are held on the **4th Monday** at **7:00PM**. All of the meetings occur in the **Hall of Flowers (Strybing Arboretum)** at the corner of **Ninth Ave and Lincoln Way**. Enter through the parking lot at Tenth Ave and Lincoln and walk along sidewalk behind the building to the doorway to the garden club meeting



to show at least one tree. As with years past, we will have no sales area. Instead, we will have a separate sale at the Hall of Flowers at a date to be determined. Eric Schrader is our show coordinator and will need plenty of help scheduling volunteers/security, soliciting demonstrations, and setting up the displays. We need your help! So please speak to Eric at our next meeting to volunteer. Also, begin selecting and preparing your trees for the display! Identify 1-5 trees you wish to display and submit the information to Eric ASAP. All members, new and old, are encouraged to display at least one tree.

Announcements

DUES!!! Your 2009 BSSF dues need to be submitted to Daryl Quijano. You will be receiving a reminder in the mail. In addition, you will have the opportunity to update your contact information and newsletter delivery preferences. Please take the time to complete the form and return your payment promptly.

Hapi Coats?

BSSF members, new and old, wishing to order a new stylin' BSSF Hapi coat should contact Robert Smith at the next meeting/workshop. Coats feature the logo tree and "Bonsai Society San Francisco" embroidered on the back. The price for a new Hapi Coat is approximately \$62.00.

Name Tags

Please wear your name tag to our meetings or workshops. We have lots of new members and wearing your name tag will facilitate learning everyone's name (and for the memory-challenged, a way to avoid an embarrassing moment). If you need a new or replacement name tag, see Robert Smith at the next meeting.

BSSF Bonsai Library

The BSSF has on hand a large assortment of books, magazines, and other literature about our favorite hobby. To access the library, arrive early at either the monthly meeting or the monthly workshop and speak to Bernard Marque. Checking out materials requires a \$5 deposit per item.

FOG CITY BONSAI is the monthly newsletter of the Bonsai Society of San Francisco. Images and articles are the property of BSSF and permission must be granted before reproduction of any kind. If you have advertisements or announcements for the BSSF or local bonsai community and would like them published in Fog City Bonsai, please contact Lawrence LeClaire at lleclaire@gmail.com or (415) 668-8456.



