



# BONSAI SOCIETY OF

# LAKELAND

Jan/Feb

2010



## The President's Bench...

Well, we had the kick-off of a new year at our first meeting of 2010 on Thursday, Jan. 21. I think that the highlight of the meeting was Pete's surprise appearance. It was certainly good to see him and his wife, and to know that he is on the road to recovery. Pete, we hope that you can make it to all of our meetings. Second to that was Charlie's soil presentation.... Seems like nothing in life is simple anymore, but Charlie certainly cleared up a lot of the muck about what makes good bonsai soil. Thanks to him for his obvious preparation and an excellent presentation.

Another thanks is to John and, of course, Cindy. Both of them have been key to the success of our club and their efforts and contributions have been significant. John may not be the president anymore, but I am confident and appreciative that his commitment will continue. And Cindy too!

We are very close to finalizing the presentation schedule for this year. So, let me summarize the plan: Guest presenters planned are: Jim VanLandingham (February), Clif Pottberg (April), Dorothy Schmitz (July), Suthin Sukosolvisit (August), and Ed Trout (October). We are lucky to have this first class line-up of presenters. Clif has in the past presented high quality programs for us. Jim, Dorothy and Ed have been selected to lead workshops at the BSF State Convention in May. And, Suthin is world class!

Also, we will have three "Bring your own tree" nights: March, June and September. Plan on getting comments, tips and recommendations from other club members to improve your trees and your skills. Other details to work out for the year are the Gosh Exhibit, a potential display at the Polk Museum of Art (to tie in with their planned activities), maybe a Hollis Garden display, the multi-club auction, and a Christmas party to end the year.

And, that's not all...we have the BSF Convention in Orlando to think about! We are also going to try and have some road trips this year. There's a lot of bonsai to see and do in Florida, and I think we can have a lot of fun exploring. We are getting the Newsletter up and running, thanks to Esther and Gail for taking this project on. The plan is to publish this introductory newsletter and then do 3 or 4 during the year. Make sure that we have your correct email address!

Saturday workshops are on the horizon, it's just a matter of getting organized. We need advance commitments to attend, so that we can have one or more of our more experienced members to mentor. The "test" will be in February--Brent volunteered to lead, so let us know if you will be there. I will be there... As a trainee! Thanks to Carolyn for always making her nursery available!

So, you see, I think we are off to a great start and I look forward to a fun and informative year with our Club.... *Paul*

### Officers and Board Members

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### Meetings

*Meetings* are held the third Thursday of each month at the First United Methodist Church, located at 72 Lake Morton Drive, Lakeland. Meetings begin at 7pm and conclude around 9pm.

*Raffles*, with material provided by the members, will be held every other meeting starting Feb 2010. Trees demo'd by the presenters will (for the most part) be raffled.

*Bonsai workshops* are the second Saturday after the meeting, if scheduled, from 10am until ? They are located at Cee Jay Nursery, 4225 Lake Hancock Road, Lakeland.

# Upcoming Events

**February 18..** Club meeting with Jim Vanlandingham as our guest speaker. This month we will also have a raffle.

**February 27..** Club workshop at Cee Jay Nursery. Bring your own soil if you wish to repot.

**February 27 & 28..** Wigert's Bonsai Nursery's Open House. (North Fort Myers) Demo's, workshops, raffles, etc. Check it out at [www.wigertsbonsai.com](http://www.wigertsbonsai.com) or call 239-543-2234. Features Pedro Morales & Adam Levigne

**February 27 & 28..** The Asian Cultural Festival at Selby Gardens in Sarasota. [www.selby.org](http://www.selby.org)

**March 18..** Club meeting: Bring your own tree

**April 15..** Club meeting with Clif Pottberg as our guest speaker. This is raffle month!

**May...** There will be no scheduled club meeting this month due to the convention, and we are firming up a date for our annual GOSH! Exhibit

**May 28-31..** (Memorial Day weekend) Bonsai Society of Florida's annual convention. Will be held at the same hotel as last year (Ramada Celebration). Workshops, demos, raffles, vendors, exhibit...Looks great!!! Check it out in the recent edition of Florida Bonsai, or at [www.bonsai-bsf.com](http://www.bonsai-bsf.com)

## IN THE WORKS:

We are still trying to firm up a date for our annual GOSH! Exhibit.

Plans are being made to have Suthin Sukosolvisit be our guest presenter at the August meeting. We may have to change our usual meeting date to accommodate his schedule.

We are looking forward to scheduling some road trips this year. Let John or Paul know if you have any suggestions or requests.

Tentative plans are in the making for a beginners class that will be open to the public.. Let us know if you have any ideas to increase membership. This is going to be a great year!

Seen on a tee shirt:

**Bonsai: Obedience Training for Trees**



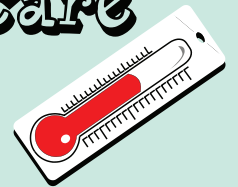
## The Newsletter

This is YOUR newsletter! We hope to publish it bi-monthly. Please help us out by contributing: favorite articles (we will obtain author's permission), websites, tips and tricks, local vendors, jokes, member news, events, just about anything that can be published!! Also, we still don't have a name for the newsletter. Please be a part of this by giving your contributions, compliments, criticisms, Whatever!

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## SEASONAL CARE



We have been having some unusually cold spells, the tropicals are not liking this. They must be protected below 40 degrees. You can bring them inside (watch for hitch-hiking critters!), or cover them up. If you decide to cover them, do not allow plastic to touch the trees. If you use plastic, build a frame over them. Lightweight cloths can be used. Light bulbs and heaters also help as trees do not give off heat. You can also purchase an indoor/outdoor thermometer in which a sensor is placed among your trees to keep a check on the cold from inside.

Your deciduous trees have probably lost their leaves by now, a good time to improve their structure. They (like all bonsais) still need protection because their roots are not protected by the earth: they are in a pot which can get very cold and damage the roots.

Repot your cypress trees while they are dormant. This is also a great time to clean and preserve the deadwood on your trees. Get ready for your spring potting sessions by cleaning up your old pots and making sure you have all the soil and equipment you will need. Clean up & sharpen tools!

Use a low nitrogen fertilizer to prevent pushing new tender growth. Keep watering, and hope no more 30's! But, be ready, remember last Feb we had a couple freezes.....



# INTERNET SURFING

Lots to explore on-line, this month we will look at "forums", a great way to learn, ask questions, and see what others around the world are doing in the world of bonsai.

A forum is a site on the internet where people of similar interests have "discussions". You can join and contribute, or browse. The bonsai sites that are available are very popular, folks discuss everything including styling, care, problems, opinions, contests, events, etc. There are many famous bonsai people that are on these sites, and you can get answers to just about everything. Some sites will not allow you to view pictures unless you join, but joining is very easy and free. You just need a user name and a password. You can also do a "search" on the forums to find past info on a particular subject.

Some of the more popular bonsai forums are:

[www.bonsainut.com](http://www.bonsainut.com)

[www.bonsaisite.com](http://www.bonsaisite.com)

[www.ibonsaiclub.com](http://www.ibonsaiclub.com)

[www.bonsaistudygroup.com](http://www.bonsaistudygroup.com)

[www.bonsaichat.net](http://www.bonsaichat.net)



## This month's article.....

This month's article is "Ten Steps to Better Bonsai" by Mary C. Miller. She is a very well known and respected bonsai master, especially in South Florida, who began her "addiction" in the 1970's. With a special attraction to tropicals, Ms Miller owned 2 bonsai nurseries (shut down by Hurricane Andrew), wrote newsletters, magazine articles, lectures, teaches, demo's and wrote a book: **Bonsai with Tropicals - *Some things I learned along the way.*** Her latest endeavor is a website: [www.bonsaimary.com](http://www.bonsaimary.com)

## Last Month's Meeting....

At January's meeting we were privileged to have our own Charlie Swedberg present an enlightening session on "Bonsai soil, what's inside the pot?"



Charlie explained, and had samples (to see, feel and smell) of the primary components used in bonsai soil mixes in Japan. He explained that most of these are volcanic in origin, and are combined in different "recipes", or ratios, depending upon the tree, your growing region, watering and feeding schedule, etc. A good goal is to have your bonsai soil be "humid": not dry and not wet.

Charlie emphasized that these components have virtually no nutrients. You have complete control of the feeding process of your tree. He also said that drainage is very important to allow aeration of the roots, and to prevent over watering. By using smaller particles for water-loving trees and larger particles for trees that like it on the dry side, you can water everything at once and the trees will receive the conditions that they need.

As long as you adjust watering/drying and feeding of your trees, Charlie says that you can grow your bonsai in just about anything. He listed many of the bonsai "masters, and what types of components that they use for their masterpieces.



For more information, or to purchase Japanese-style bonsai soil, contact:

Graydon Swedberg

[G\\_swedberg@mac.com](mailto:G_swedberg@mac.com)

# Ten Steps to Better Bonsai

By Mary C. Miller

These "Ten Steps" are about creating a good bonsai collection. The steps are divided into two parts. The first five are best applied *before* acquiring a tree. (However, they will still be valid when refining or purging a collection.)

Steps six through ten are ongoing. In closing, a few miscellaneous but important tips are included. These tips may be new thoughts for novices, but hopefully serve as reminders to more experienced bonsai practitioners.

## PART I

### Selecting a Tree

**1. Tree Choices** - Use proven species as bonsai subjects. Let someone else try weird and strange trees from other zones. If you want to experiment, try plants from your area that others may have passed by. First, ask around. There may be a good reason that the plant is not being used.

Small leaves, small flowers and/or proportionate fruit are standard guidelines. *Use them.* There are some exceptions. Seagrape, for example, has proven to be an *easy-to-reduce* large leaf subject.

**2. Branching and Taper** - When creating your own tree, lots of branches means lots of choices, that's good. If you are purchasing a "finished" bonsai, major branches should already be *where they belong*.

Taper in trunk *and* branches is a huge asset. Taper is part of what gives a small "tree-look" to your bonsai. Most of the time, you can tell how the taper will appear when mature, even in juvenile trees.

**3. Nebari** - is a Japanese word. It refers to the *lower trunk and surface roots*. *Nebari* is a major asset in designing a quality bonsai. No matter how well you have placed the branches, no matter how old the plant is, without good "nebari" your tree will never be considered a great bonsai

**4. Size of Bonsai** - Select a tree that you can handle. Very small trees (shohin) don't take up much space. However, they are more difficult to create as good bonsai and they do require more attention.... Including frequent watering.

If you have "ready helpers", large trees may not be a problem. **Be warned:** friends, kids and other family members will quickly tire of hauling, lifting and helping repot your huge masterpiece. These bonsai are often categorized as *two-man* and *three-man* trees.

A medium size - *one you can lift* - works best for most people.

Place your bonsai at a comfortable height for working. (Smaller trees need to be higher). As in other art forms, the closer to eye level the easier to enjoy.....and work. Bonsai kept at or near ground level are *regularly neglected*.

**5. Make better investments** - Whether shopping for starters or old trees, *buy better material*.

Good bonsai subjects are often costly..... Because someone else has put in the time and money! Judge the tree by the guidelines above and remember, *expensive does not necessarily mean better!* Examine trees closely. First appearances can be deceiving. Beautiful flowers on a stick, albeit a fat stick, do not make a good bonsai.

Good health seems like obvious criteria, but sometimes sickly bargains cry out to be taken home. When you start with a tree that already has problems, you are taking a risk. Your money *and* time is often wasted.

## PART II

### Develop and Maintain

**6. Understand Certainties** - Expect your bonsai to change. *No bonsai ever stays the same!* If you have done Steps 1-5 properly, the changes should be for the better. Watch for opportunities to have a new branch in a better location or perhaps remove an old one. Be aware of *exposed roots* headed in the wrong direction - treat them as branches. Eliminate criss-crossing roots early on!

Another certainty is weeds. Weeds will appear frequently and must be removed roots and all. *Don't even think about weed killers* (e.g. Roundup) in containers.

**7. Trim, Trim, Trim** - No excuses. It is important to keep your trees trimmed. Learn how to directional prune! If you're not sure where to cut.... *At least "hedge prune"*. (Next time you walk by a hedge, observe how dense the branches are.) This will give you many options when you are ready to prune appropriately.

**8. Wire** - *Learn to wire properly.*

If *you are likely to forget* to remove wire, consider "tie-downs". Not quite as perfect for placement, but certainly better than nothing. *If done right*, "tie-downs" can be an easy way to get a branch started in the right direction. Eventually, to have fine bonsai, *you will have to wire!*

Remove wire *before* damage ruins an otherwise good tree. Don't be the one that everyone looks at your bonsai and says "beautiful but...." Yes, *we will see the scars.*

**9. Roots** - Get to know your tree's root system. Some trees prefer to have somewhat "tight feet" (junipers for one), while others, like Fukien Tea, will decline if kept in a rootbound condition. Ask *experienced* people for advice. What time of year to prune? How often? Should you comb out the roots? What about sawing the root mass? *Not all plants are the same.*

**10. Refine your Collection** - *At least once a year*, give your collection a *serious* critique. If you can't be honest, *hire* someone to do it for you. Sort out any trees you no longer love and ones that have no future. (Best done around club auction time.) Don't worry about "getting your money back". If they gave you pleasure and hopefully many lessons, *you got your money's worth.*

### Additional Tips

If you don't own John Naka's '**Bonsai Techniques I**' and '**Bonsai Techniques II**', go online and *order both books today!*

Most bonsai books are written for *other than tropical climates*. In South Florida, skip chapters about trees to use, times of year and most soil mixes. Unless you're just curious!

*Water as needed!* **Be wary of instructions** to "water every day" or "every other day" or "every third day", etc.! Every little micro-climate is different. Instructions should be "keep evenly moist", "keep wet", or sometimes "allow to dry out a little between waterings".

*Feed your trees frequently.* Follow instructions for "outdoor potted plants" on any fertilizer packages. No need to get creative by diluting and/or changing the timing.

The '*perfect soil*' is the one that works for you.

Use your own '**Magic Cloth**\*'. You may be surprised at how helpful it is.

Are you a "collector" by nature? Instead of too many trees, *collect bonsai pots and stands*. Zero maintenance!

\**Magic cloth: a cloth used to cover a branch that you are thinking about removing, helps to visualize the result.*

*Reprinted courtesy of Mary C. Miller*

*www.BonsaiMary.com*