



# The Louisiana Bonsai Society Newsletter

May 2022

## April Monthly Meeting

On April 19<sup>th</sup>, Vice-President Robert Reed led the group discussion on trees that were brought for Show and Tell, then gave a very informative lecture demo on trimming tropicals, with his Brazilian Rain Tree.

We had a larger than usual member attendance, with several visitors and new members.



Shirley's Cork bark Jade



Robert's Brazilian Rain Tree

At the May 17<sup>th</sup> bonsai meeting we will do a hands-on bonsai workshop on bud pinching, trimming, and pruning. Bring a tree you want to practice on.

We will start scheduling the hands-on shohin (small) and phoenix graft bonsai workshops in a few weeks, send Lowell your name and phone number if you are interested.

## 2022 Spring Bonsai Show

Our bonsai spring show on April 2-3 was a great success with a wide variety of outstanding quality trees displayed. Thank you to everyone who participated. Also, the addition of the burgundy cloth table coverings elevated the show to a more professional level.

Thanks to all the members who came early to set-up, talked to visitors and prospective members, loaded and unloaded trees, brought trees for the donation table, took trees home to foster and generally made the day enjoyable and fun. We really have a great group!

We appreciate Ron for doing the azalea lecture demo (and Robert for his wiring assistance). Ron created 2 lovely azaleas, one windswept bonsai for the raffle and one for the donation table.



Lowell gave a lecture demo on creating juniper rock plantings. He showed how to tie the juniper onto the stone and bury in the soil to create the roots for a root-over-rock and created a raft style juniper on a lace rock.



Both lectures were very informative and well attended. We appreciate their expertise and their willingness to share it with us.

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*The Louisiana Bonsai Society (LBS) is a non-profit organization of people interested in the art of bonsai.*

We are always ready to learn new techniques, so if you have a topic you could share for future sessions, please discuss it with a board member.



Thanks to all members who have been growing and tending club trees and those who gave trees for the donation table, we had a wide variety of nice trees. We encourage members to grow and style trees for the table for the November Fall Show.

And thanks to Shirley and Ray for storing and displaying the club pots which is no easy task. These beautiful pots are available for sale to any club member and are priced very reasonably.



Winner of the Parson's Juniper Raffle was LBS member Irene Araneda.

Winner of the windswept styled azalea was Paul Cacioppo, (brother of LBS member Julie Cacioppo). He was not available for a photograph.



To view all the displayed trees, please take a look at the photos posted to our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/LouisianaBonsai> or on our website: <https://www.LouisianaBonsaiSociety.com>

## Pruning and Trimming Bonsai Tips

By Lowell Tilley

This spring weather with its cool nights and warm days, is perfect for non-tropical bonsai to grow and is a busy time of bud pinching, branch trimming, and pruning. The objectives are to enhance or maintain the shape and silhouette of the bonsai, develop and improve the taper of the trunk and branches, as well as reduce the leaf size. In general, you want to encourage the lower and inside growth of the bonsai to maintain the desired size.

It is very important to understand the leaf food production and root growth cycle. Many think you feed the tree with fertilizers through the roots, but all plants produce their food through photosynthesis using chlorophyll in the leaves and stems. The food is then transported down the outside of the cambium to grow new cells with any excesses going to the roots to grow new fine feeder hair roots. Therefore, if too many leaves are removed, it won't produce enough food to grow more roots.

The plant uses stored food reserves to start the leaves growing in the spring and the leaves produce food to grow new roots and replenish the food reserves. If the leaves don't restore the food, the cycle will be broken, and the bonsai will die. Some species have enough chlorophyll in their bark to produce enough food to grow new roots if growing conditions are good enough, but it is a slow process which will slow the styling and development and can open the door for disease and pests that can kill the bonsai. The better the cycle works, the more vigorous the bonsai so that faster styling and development can be done. It is important to monitor the new growth after pruning. If it weak or slow budding, wait before the next pruning cycle. Learn how to read the plant.

At the 2010 Brussel's Rendezvous, two bonsai experts, each did a different lecture/demo on a different Trident Maple. Their instructions on pruning the Trident were almost opposite of each other. At first, it looks as if one of them is giving wrong instructions, until you realize one is working on a young tree just being developed into a bonsai, while the other is working on refining a mature bonsai. I hate to turn a simple pruning task into a very complicated process, but as many things in

bonsai that look simple, there are many fine points, as with any art, that must be observed and learned. The amount of pruning should be adjusted for the bonsai species and how well developed it is.

One of the most important things in bonsai is to balance and control the growth of the tree. Most trees are top dominant, and the growing buds or tips produce a hormone that will slow growth on the lower branches and trunk and inhibit new bud growth. The bonsai needs to have smaller leaves and shorter internodes at the top to make the bonsai look taller, so the top buds must be kept pinched or pruned to get more back budding on lower branches and shorter internodes at the top. This is opposite to the way most trees grow naturally. They are designed to get more leaves up top for more sunshine to increase food production and prevent getting shaded out. The bonsai doesn't know you are going to give it its day in the sun.

Pruning is done when the branch has grown enough to extend beyond the desired silhouette and the side branch is long enough to reach the silhouette when wired to point outward. When a branch is cut back to the side branch and the side branch is wired outward to become the new end of the branch, it creates a pleasing crook in the branch as well as a diameter change that improves the branch taper. It will probably require wire to hold it in place. The wire will cut into the branch in about four weeks, so it must be removed and re-wired if the branch doesn't stay in place.

Generally, evergreens store less food, but they produce food year-round. Therefore, fewer leaves should be removed at one time, and they may be pruned nearly any time in South Louisiana. In other words, go slow on pruning and observe how fast new growth occurs. If too many leaves are removed, it will be very slow to initiate new grow and back budding. Only cut off what you don't want on deciduous bonsai, then grow what you want, On evergreen trees grow what you want, then cutoff what you don't want.

It is always very important to notice which branches or leaves are shading lower and inside branches. These lower and inside branches are very important to develop taper in the main branches and trunk.

Sometimes it may be better to wire them down or to one side to prevent shading than to cut it off, letting it be a sacrificial branch to produce food for the bonsai until the small branches can grow enough leaves to produce the needed food for the bonsai.

Since deciduous bonsai have more stored food in reserve than evergreens, they can be trimmed more during the spring growing season. Even so, careful observation should be used to make sure you don't damage the health of the tree. Some species are much more tolerant to pruning than others. Elms are a good example of a species that can be trimmed closely and often, but the vigor of the bonsai must be observed. If they are slow putting out new growth, reduce the amount and/or frequency of pruning. A red Japanese maple is one that must be pruned sparingly. They don't have a lot of chlorophyll in the leaves to produce food and are less forgiving if you prune the wrong branch. You should be careful to prune the leaves and branches near the top of the tree and ones that are shading interior and lower branches. It is very important to pinch buds before the internodes grow too long. It is also important to cut any damaged leaves that are not producing food to encourage new leaf grow. Leave the leaf stem to die and drop off.

Defoliating the bonsai will encourage back budding increasing the number of branches which will reduce the leaf size. This technique should be used only with very vigorous bonsai. For weaker bonsai, the desired results can usually be achieved by just cutting off the older leaves with less chlorophyll that have become less efficient at making food. You can usually observe a less green color in the leaf. After the older or damaged leaves are removed (and if the tree is vigorous enough), begin to remove the larger leaves that are shading out the interior buds.

Don't remove anything but old or damaged leaves on a weak bonsai. Always watch the new growth and stop pruning if it is slow putting out new growth or if the new growth is weak. Just remember as you prune, you are reducing root growth, and back budding is creating new smaller roots. That is how you redirect the growth to keep it balanced.

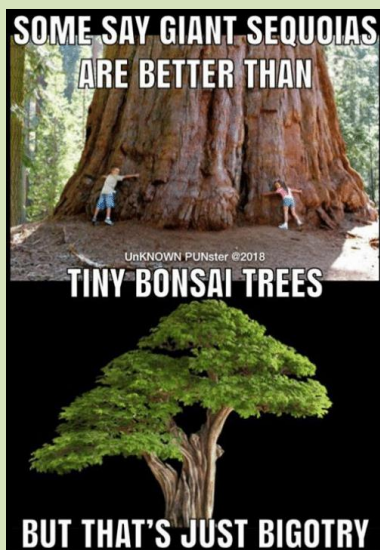
The techniques must be adjusted for different species and the maturity of the bonsai. Some species will

adapt better to be a small bonsai than others. Some species leaves will reduce more than others, some are more affected by sun, and some are more top dominant. Pruning the bonsai will usually cause branching and the more branches, the smaller the leaves. This is especially true for Elms, Maples, Hornbeams, etc. There are some species such as Boxwood, Holly, Camellia, etc. that will reduce a small amount and will take much longer to reduce. Therefore, you should prune and style the size to fit the species.

In summary:

- Just pinching the new buds will reduce food production very little and will stop the internodes growth and bud-inhibiting hormone production. But you don't pinch it until the internodes are the correct length. Pinching the growing buds will stop the internodes growing longer.
- Cut the big older or damaged leaves first, starting at top of the bonsai. Next cut the largest leaves shading leaves and buds below, and in the interior of the canopy. In the summer, generally remove only smaller branches to encourage back budding, do the pruning of larger branches in the fall during the second growing season.
- Prune in phases to give the bonsai time to produce its food to stay healthy, but prune soon enough to control growth, to develop internodes between leaves to the correct length, and promote back budding. It is generally better to wait too long before pruning, than doing it too soon, as the health of the bonsai is the most important thing.

### Just for Laughs



I came across this article written by Howard Merrill a few years back about his air layering technique that he used with great success. Since a lot of you never knew Howard, he was one of the earliest members of the club, a bonsai guru who had some really spectacular trees, and for many years, grew and styled all the trees for the donation table. We remember him fondly, miss him terribly and will never forget him.

### AIR LAYERING

By Howard Merrill

What do you do when your favorite tree has grown too tall, or too strong at the top? You could always trim back to a lower branch and develop a new lower top, but what if the top already looks great?

What if you need a new tree to replace a dead tree in your five-tree forest that dies, leaving you with four (which is to be avoided as the Japanese Konji for the number four also means Death).

What if your tree needs new radiating roots to fix an ugly nebari or one-sided root system?

The answer to all these problems is an air layer, an almost sure thing in warm, humid LA. You may have read in the literature about wrapping a wire tightly around the trunk so that as the tree sends nutrients back to the roots, it is restricted by the wire. The trunk swells above the wire and puts out root sprouts into the surrounding growing media. But we have found a much better way.

At the point where you want the new roots to grow, using a razor knife, cut a groove all the way around



the trunk. Then cut a series of vertical cuts about 3/4" long above the circular cut, each about 1/4" wide. With the tip of the razor knife carefully lift each one of the bark flaps out away from the trunk.

The green cambium layer will be on the underside of each bark

flap. These flaps will become roots radiating around

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the trunk. With the knife blade, scrape the bare trunk under the flaps to remove any residual cambium from the trunk which might cause bridging.

Spray each flap with water and apply rooting hormone to each flap, then wrap wet sphagnum moss under and above each flap. You should now have the flaps encased in a ball of sphagnum moss. Tie a string around that ball to keep it from falling apart.



Next, cut a small plastic pot down the side and across the bottom. From the center of the bottom cut a series of flaps toward the outside.

Trim the tips of these flaps to match the diameter of the trunk.

Fit the pot around the trunk and sphagnum ball, wire the pot closed, and wire to the top of the tree to hold it at that level. Fill with fine bonsai soil. Keep the tree and the air layer watered. The only air layer I have ever lost was on the bench where it did not get over head watering and the air layer dried out, killing the roots.



After 2-3 months cut the air layer free from the mother plant and pot in a larger container disturbing the tender new roots as little as possible. You now have two trees.

A couple of years ago I made two air layers at the same time to compare the cinched wire and the bark flap techniques. When I removed the air layers, the bark flap air layer had filled the plastic pot with roots, while the trunk of the cinched wire tree had swelled but had not yet put out the first root.

This time of year is good for trying an air layer, just be careful to keep it well watered and perhaps give it a little afternoon shade protection.



Dawn and Lowell at LBSF



Congratulations to Randy Bennett for placing Best Texas Native with his Bald Cypress.



Congratulations to Dawn Koetting for placing Best in Show with her Neea buxifolia.

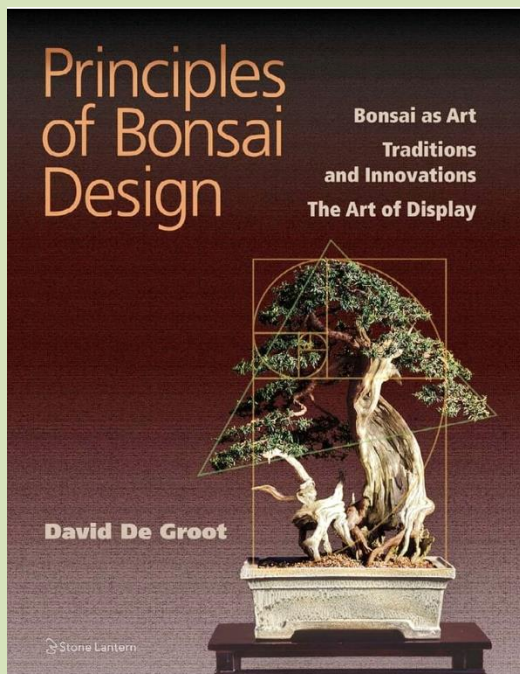
## Member Tree Pics

After a trim, this trident maple gave us some beautiful new red leaves.-David Thompson



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition by David DeGroot

"PRINCIPLES OF BONSAI DESIGN" IS ON ITS WAY! Still in transit from the printer, the second edition of "Principles" is beautifully re-designed. It has text edits throughout, clarifying material in chapters 2 and 4, added photos, and a new Chapter 15. Soft cover, 250 pages. For more information and discounted pre-orders, contact [StoneLantern.com](http://StoneLantern.com).



## Don't Forget to Pay Dues for 2022

Membership fees are due January 1 of each year, delinquent on April 1. Some of you have already paid for 2022, so if you can't remember if you are current, please call Marla 225-503-7397.

Your dues must be current to receive the member discount for workshops, club pot purchases or club tree purchases. You may pay at the next meeting or send payment to:

LBS, P.O. Box 41661, Baton Rouge, LA 70835

\$20/individual membership, \$25/family membership

## Coming Events

### May 17, 2022, 7-9 pm on Bud Pinching

LBS Monthly Meeting at the BR Garden Center  
Don't forget to bring a tree you can practice on.

### June 21, 2022, 7-9 pm

LBS Monthly Meeting at the BR Garden Center

### July 8-9 GNOBS Workshop by Mike Lane

Check with GNOBS for details and workshop availability. (Also working on getting him here on July 10 for a workshop.)

October 5, 2022- Lone Star Bonsai Federation touring artist Pedro Morales Workshop for LBS. Details TBA.

November 12 & 13, 2022 11am-4 pm both days  
LBS Bonsai Fall Show at the BR Garden Center.

December 20, 2022, 7 pm Potluck and Gift Swap  
Christmas Party BR Garden Center

### January 13, 14, & 15, 2023

Mid-Winter Workshop featuring Jennifer Price.  
More details to come.