



The Louisiana Bonsai Society Newsletter

June 2022

May Monthly Meeting

On May 17th, at the regular meeting, Lowell led the group in a workshop on trimming and bud pinching. Those who brought trees to work on were given some helpful instruction by Lowell regarding development and refinement.

From the President

The June meeting will be a hands-on air layering and rooting cuttings rooting bonsai workshop. Bring your favorite bonsai and learn how to propagate it.

July 10 will be a “bring your own tree” bonsai workshop conducted by Mike Lane. Cost will be \$35 for members and \$45 for non-members. Details will be announced soon.

The September meeting will be hands-on shohin bonsai conducted by Dawn Koetting. If you want to purchase a tree for the workshop, the club has eight Harland boxwoods for \$40 each to choose from. The cost of the workshop is \$25. If you want to bring your own tree, Golden Gate and Narrow-leaf Ficus, broadleaf deciduous, boxwood, procumbens nana juniper, yaupon, or etc. are good species. The smaller-leaf plants with low branches work best.

I would like to say how I appreciate members developing and taking care of starter bonsai for sale. This is a great way to develop bonsai experience. If they develop into something you would like to add to your collection, you can buy it from the club at cost or replace it with another. Marla has some different sized small plastic pots for planting the club trees that will be for the sale table. If you need plants or material such pots, wire, etc. please let Marla or Lowell know.

Bonsai Study Group



At the bonsai study group/workshop May 21st at Forest Community Park, we did one tropical root over rock.

We also worked on some members' bonsai, and some club's bonsai.



I trimmed and bud pinched some of Julia Hawkins' bonsai at Hilltop Arboretum last Thursday morning. They are looking good and special thanks to Tom Harbourt and Mike Watson for their help at previous workdays. Tom has been a big help with all the heavy lifting while repotting all the bonsai. You can go and see her collection during Hilltop open hours.



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

Initial Styling of a Japanese Rough-Bark Black Pine, *Pinus thunbergii* “Nishiki”

By Randy Bennett

In 1984 I purchased a cork-bark pine Japanese Black Pine (*Pinus thunbergii* “Corticososa”) from Roy



Nagatoshi’s Nursery in California. It grew happily in my yard for many years. Then it went the way of all the other trees in my collection – hurricane Katrina.

Since that time, Japanese Cork-Bark Black Pine has somewhat fallen out

of favor in the bonsai community. Its’ popularity waned over the years. As a result, it has become difficult to find the cork-bark variety. It lost its status primarily because it was difficult to cultivate a specimen free of flaws. Cork-Bark black Pine is a weaker cultivar and is propagated by grafting it to Japanese Black Pine understock.

There is a similar variety (*Pinus thunbergii* “Nishiki”) that has very rough bark but is not quite as ‘winged’ as Corticososa. It is also propagated by grafting. That being the case, as the tree grows the rough bark of Corticososa and Nishiki is markedly different from the black Pine understock. So, it is difficult to deal with the base and the nebari as the tree matures. Even if you are lucky enough to find one grafted close to the root base, you are often dealing with reverse taper.



Another problem comes when the “wings” are one-sided. This can also cause a visual perception of reverse taper as in this photo.

However, the bark is so unique and creates such character, even at a young age, that it is difficult to resist the temptation to have one in your collection.

That’s my problem. I cannot resist the beauty and unique character of the bark.



Detail photo of typical bark on “Corticososa”

I recently had the opportunity to attend the ABS Convention in Memphis, Tennessee. One of the presenters was Mauro Stemberger, from Italy. And much to my delight, he was conducting a workshop with Nishiki Black Pine. While I did not participate in the workshop itself (I was still trying to resist the siren’s song), I sat in as a silent observer in the hopes of picking up some new information or techniques used in their cultivation.

However, I succumbed to “rough-bark fever” and the next day, I was able to purchase one for myself. Below is my initial styling of the tree.

The tree was growing in a three-gallon nursery container and was grafted 8 years ago. It stands 23 inches above the soil and has a diameter of 3 inches at the base. The convention was held on Memorial Day Weekend. Therefore, it is a little late to be working on this type of pine. As a result, there were some precautions taken to ensure the health of the pine that would not have been done and the work been carried out in February or March.



Rough-Bark Black Pine before the work began

The first step is to clean up the foliage by removing old needles. Needles that are several years old, even though they are green, are not generating food for the

tree. In fact, it is just the opposite. Needles that are more than two years old are actually consuming energy but not replenishing it. So, they must be removed.

You can identify the age of the needles by looking at the color of the bark and where shoots have emerged. The bark from which last year's needles are growing will be a light tan color. The previous year's shoots will be darker and the year before that, darker still. You will also typically notice one or more shoots emerging where the bark changes color. This indicates the transition to the previous years' growth. If there are no shoots, you will notice a cluster of needles where the bark changes color. This also indicates the previous years' growth. So, in the case of this pine, needles from 2019 had to be removed.

In the fall, when the flow of sap has subsided, it is time to do needle thinning on black pines and you pluck the needles one at a time from the fascicle (the small cup from which the needles emerge). However, that technique is not practiced after the candles have begun to elongate. Elongating candles means that the sap is rising and flowing through the branches. According to Mauro, if you pluck needles at this time, you risk tearing the bark and damaging



the cambium tissue. Therefore, the best technique is to trim the needles off just above the fascicle with a pair of scissors. You must also exercise care when wiring at this time of year.

In this photo, you can clearly see the transition of growth from one year to the next.

After cleaning out the foliage and trimming away the unwanted needles, the next step is to expose the nebari and find a possible front for the design. Using a chopstick, you gently begin raking away the soil from the base of the tree. Once you have located the radial surface roots, remove the excess soil. It may be necessary to trim away the top of the container to facilitate having a good view of the base.

The third step is to decide on the front and plan your design by determining which branches you will be able to use. I had three goals in determining the front: the most important one was to minimize the visibility of the graft union. The second, was to find the widest base. The third was finding the best visibility of the surface roots. Obviously, deciding on the front would be determining which view was the best compromise to maximize all three goals.

When the tree was grafted, a v-notch was cut into the understock and as the tree grew, the rough bark extended down toward the base at an angle. The other side was the understock and there was about an inch of understock showing. In the end, I decide to incline the tree to one side to help bury that part of the graft union that exposed the understock. By creating a slanting or informal upright style, I could solve the problem of an exposed graft union, while at the same time, taking advantage of the widest part of the base. Fortunately, the best surface roots were located on the opposite side of the inclined part of the trunk which would help to visually anchor the tree.

Next was deciding whether the tree would be a slanting or informal upright style. In the case of this tree, the best design would be the Moyogi or informal upright style.

Wooden wedges were placed under the pot to create the best angle. From here I could begin to select the branches. Those branches that were not needed in the design were cut back, leaving about one and a half inches of branch away from the trunk. These pieces were then jinned by crushing the bark with jinning pliers. This was at the advice of Mauro. Because of the rough bark, you cannot remove a branch the way you would on a regular Japanese Black Pine. Each cut branch is therefore jinned to avoid unsightly cut branch ends and minimize the risk of damaging the bark. Crushing the branch stubs with jinning pliers, the bark slipped off easily. Afterward the branches to become jin were torn



using pliers and a concave cutter to create a more natural looking “break” on the ends of each jinned branch.

Once all the unwanted branches were cut back and jinned, the next step was to carefully wire each remaining branch into position based not only on the selected front but also at the correct angle given the inclined position of the container.



After most of the wiring was completed

Each branch was carefully wired to try and avoid damaging needles and damaging the bark on the branches. The tips of the branches were inclined upward slightly to facilitate this year’s growth. Since this is not the ideal time to be wiring this tree, Mauro’s advice was to avoid all detail wiring.

After the branches were wired, the needles on the bottom of each branch were pruned away. These needles, because they do not have good access to light, will be of little value in terms of food production.



View of the tree showing the sacrifice branch

This tree was pruned several times while being grown in the field. One of those prunings created a large shoot which I made sure was on the back side of the main trunk line when picking the front. You can clearly see the shoot in the above photo. It is the one with the longest candles. This will be kept for at least another year of two as a sacrifice branch. It will help thicken the trunk much faster if it is left on the tree at this time. I will simply have to watch to make sure that it does not create any reverse taper. At the appropriate time, the branch will be cut back and jinned. You may look at the sacrifice branch and think that it is already quite large and will quickly cause reverse taper. But remember that much of what you see is bark and the actual woody tissue is much smaller.

It is not possible to repot the tree at this time of year. However, the soil in which it is growing is fine for the field but not in a container. This will be especially true now that the tree has been weakened and stressed by pruning and wiring. In such a situation, the soil will tend to stay too wet, and the tree could die. To prevent this possibility, I will slip pot this tree into a 5-to-7-gallon container surrounded by pumice. This will ensure good drainage, so that the soil can dry between waterings and that the roots have plenty of air. I will also make sure that the tree is potted at the correct angle when placed into the larger container.

Next fall or winter, the tree will be repotted into an appropriate bonsai soil mix making sure to leave a softball sized mass of the current field soil in place under the base of the tree. It will be repotted into a large cedar grow box for a few more years while it is being developed. This will allow me to reduce the height of the current root ball in preparation for an eventual repotting into a bonsai container, while at the same time providing plenty of room for additional growth. One of the biggest mistakes bonsai practitioners make is to plant their tree into a bonsai container before it has been fully developed.

I will continue to fertilize the tree during the month of June using an organic fertilizer. The tree will be given a rest during July and August, and fertilizing will resume during September and October. The tree will be watered every two to three days.

Training modifications that were made due to the time of year and this species:

1. No candle pruning. That will begin next year.
2. Only basic wiring to minimize damage to branches
3. Pruning needles instead of plucking
4. Slip pot into larger nursery post with pumice to mitigate improper container soil



Closeup of bark on the 'Nishiki' after wiring.

Care must be taken when wiring to avoid damaging the bark. After all, it is the bark that is the most important feature of this tree.

Just For Laughs



One of my best workers taking a quick break.

Members' Trees

From Marla--A couple of trees I have in development that are two of my favorites would have to be these. I'm a sucker for blooming trees.



Surinam Pink Powder Puff,

Calliandra surinamensis, is a low branching evergreen tropical rain forest shrub that is named after Suriname, a country in Northern South America. The plant usually has

complexly branched multiple trunks and grows to a height of about 16 feet, although many sources suggest that it only attains a height of 9-10 feet. Left unpruned it grows long thin branches that eventually droop down onto the ground.

Desert Rose, Adenium

obesum, is a poisonous species of flowering plant belonging to the tribe Nerieae of the subfamily Apocynoideae of the dogbane family, Apocynaceae. It is native to the Sahel regions south of the Sahara (from Mauritania and Senegal to Sudan), tropical and subtropical eastern and southern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Adenium obesum is a popular houseplant and bonsai in temperate regions.



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

June 21, 2022, 7-9 pm Air-Layering and Rooting Cuttings Hands-on Free Workshop

LBS Monthly Meeting at the BR Garden Center

July 8-9 GNOBS Workshop by Mike Lane

Check with GNOBS for details and workshop availability.

July 10 LBS BYOT Workshop by Mike Lane at the BR Garden Center. \$35 for members, \$45 for non-members. Bring your own tree.

September 20 Shohin Workshop by Dawn

Koetting, \$25 if you bring your own tree, or \$65 w/Harland boxwood included. (at regular 7 pm monthly meeting time) at the BR Garden Center

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.



The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The next best time is now.

Chinese Proverb



Here comes summer!