

Brandywine Bonsai Society

Promoting the art and horticulture of bonsai since 1967

Greg Kanaskie on “Super-Mini to Mame Bonsai”

Virtual – Use the same procedure as previous months

Saturday, April 17, 2021, 10:00 am

Pre-meeting coffee is Fix-Your-Own. Tree counseling will be limited to digital before and after the meeting.

This month's Zoom meeting will feature miniature bonsai from super-mini to mame. How small can you go?

The presentation on super-mini will be based on the book “Miniature BONSAI” by Terutoshi Iwai. Small enough to fit in a thimble, super-mini bonsai reflect the artistic principle of less is more taken to the extreme. Mame, still small enough to fit in your hand, are huge by comparison with line and asymmetry featured. An interactive discussion will be encouraged. Participants are encouraged to ‘show and tell’ examples from their own collections. (Think about a display or background to show your tree to best advantage)

Pinning the Artist's Camera During a Zoom Meeting

Do you get frustrated when watching our virtual artist work and then suddenly you are looking at somebody else? This is a default with Zoom. It automatically switches to the person who is speaking. The fix is very easy. Put your screen to “Gallery” view, which you do by clicking on the option in your right-hand corner. Then hover your cursor over the picture of the artist. You will see three dots in the right-hand corner of the picture. Click on them, a drop-down menu will occur and click on “Pin”. This will keep the picture of the artist enlarged on your screen no matter who is speaking.

While this technique is helpful in avoiding unwanted distractions during a presentation, it is antithetical to “show-and-tell” collaborations. Be sure to turn off the feature when Greg asks someone to show their own little trees. Otherwise you will miss seeing some wonderful little trees. (A am certainly looking forward to Tona sharing some of her wonderful little tree – not to apply too much pressure.)

Water Drainage and Particle Size

Here is a little bit of science to go with your bonsai. We normally pick the particle size of our bonsai mix to correlate with the size of the tree;

however, the particle size of the components greatly influences the rate at which water moves through our mix and how quickly the necessary air is pulled into it. The movement of water is dependent on two scientific principles – gravity and adhesion (the interaction of water molecules with molecules of other substances). Depending on your mix, a great number of channels are created between the particles.

Now here is where the science comes in. When you water your trees, gravity pulls the water through these channels and down to bottom of the pot. As the water moves down through the channels, air is pulled down into the channels. This air provides the essential oxygen for plant growth*. The other scientific principle is adhesion. Water will adhere to the particles of your mix by molecular interaction, slowing down the effect of gravity and the movement of water. The larger the particles, the larger the channels, the larger volume of water in them, and the more that gravity is able to overcome the effect of adhesion. In addition, the level of adhesion depends on the components of your mix.

You can see this for yourself. Take two identical terra cotta flowerpot and fill one with your largest size mix and fill the other with your smallest. Pour water half cup by half cup into each one and you will see that the water drains

out of the large particle mix much quicker than it does with the small mix. Another way to see the effect of gravity is to take a common kitchen sponge. Hold it flat and slowly add water to it until it is just saturated but before water starts to drip out. Now rotate it so that the longest side is vertical. The water will quickly rush out. That is why the mix in cascade pots dries out faster than your other bonsai pots.

*This is why we should not leave moss on the surface of our mix. The soil that comes along with the moss will often inhibit air flow into the channels to the detriment of the tree.

Rob King

A Haiku in response to last week's Limerick

An empty bucket
A jack pine from Nantucket
Perfect together

Greg Kanaskie

A Seasonal Haiku

The vision? In sight!
The reality? Eludes!
The goal? Ahh The quest!

Jim DeBastiani

Challenge Limericks

I ordered a tree from Japan,
From a farmer named Kyo Kazan,
It sailed across seas
In a boat with a breeze,
And now sits on my bench in a can.

Kathy Ittel

I ordered a tree from Japan.
It came as a seed in a can.
It all would be fine
If I had much more time
It takes a foolhardy young man

Steve Ittel

I bought a tree from Japan
Still there because of the ban
It surely will die
And the salt will fly
No longer am I a fan

Rob King

(Ask Rob about the Shinto salt reference.)

Trees from Nature



The tree pictured above is next to Tona's house. Again, a pine, so I promise the next example will not be a pine.

This tree shows the important features of a very mature conifer. Perfectly straight trunk, so it would be a formal upright bonsai. Notice that the lower branches leave the trunk at a downward angle from all of those years of fighting gravity, especially when the branch has extended out so far. The upward angle of higher branches increases as you approach the top of the tree. The very top branches are still reaching for the sun.

The tree still has the pointed top expected for a pine, but the silhouette is rounding off and not far from a deciduous silhouette. Because it is next to a corn field, the tree has been completely exposed to the winds. As a result, it is not a "left branch, right branch, back branch" type of cookie-cutter tree. There is evidence of its struggles over time with loss of branches part way up on the right and a vertical branch filling in the space in a manner we have been taught not to accept in our bonsai. But it is what nature does.

Steve Ittel