

SPOT LIGHT ON PHOTOGRAPHY

BONSAI CLIPPER

VOLUME 33 ISSUE 7

JULY PROGRAM

We will be meeting, in person, at the Garden Council on Saturday,
July 17th at 9:00 AM

Visiting Artist ADAM LAVIGNE

Adam will be giving a presentation on refinement techniques—
improving the tree after its initial styling.

Adam is a talented artist, extremely knowledgeable and a good
speaker.



ABOUT US:

We meet every third Saturday of each month at the Berne Davis Botanical Garden building located just north of the Edison Estates at 2166 Virginia Avenue. Parking is located on Larchmont street located one block south of Virginia off McGregor Boulevard.

Our website is:

www.bonsaiswfl.org

We welcome everybody interested in this ancient art form to take advantage of our many experienced artists and teachers.

See you soon...

COMING ATTRACTIONS

August- Hypertufa (Jaye Saarinen) & Succulents (Jim Gehring)
September- Going to Pot- all about Pot making and appreciation (Joe Mayhew)
October- Presentation Planning- Stands, Spacing & etc (Phil K and Martha G ?)
November - 6 & 7 SHOW
November meeting- Show postmortem and election of officers
December - Holiday party



Tips for good Bonsai photography

Written for beginners using a smartphone camera
by Sherri Rutten



Key things that make for a good photograph:
Lighting, angle, focus, background and of course, the subject ☺

Lighting

- Outdoors in natural light is usually best.
- Time of day is important. If using sunlight, early morning or evening when the sun is lower and less intense can help illuminate the trunk and lower parts of a tree as well as not overexposing parts while leaving others in deep shadow.
- Overcast days also make for good photography. Does not create high contrast of bright areas and really dark shadows. Alternatively, photograph in light shade such as on a porch.
- If photographing indoors, turn off your flash or use good studio lighting.
- Pay attention to the shadows. A tree's own shadow or yours can distract from the tree.
- Avoid backlighting (unless that's the intended look)

Angle

- There is usually a front to the tree and the trunk is very important, shoot the tree at the ideal angle for viewing.
- Keep adjusting the angle and take a new shot, a little higher, lower, more left more right, closer and farther away. As a general rule, shoot from an angle that is near the ground of the tree, but where you can still see the top of the pot and soil (see reference below). Make small adjustments to the angle; moving the camera even a little can reveal or cover a key branch
- Do not digitally zoom in as the resolution will degrade. If your phone has the option, use 2x camera enlargement as a farther distance will minimize distortion.
- If you are photographing for yourself rather than submitting a formal view, have fun! Don't get stuck just shooting the whole tree from the front, get some detail and fun shots too. Jam the camera down by the trunk and get a view looking up into the canopy. For a landscape or forest, try to get the camera down into the scene. Use the sun's natural lens flare to backlight and create drama. Try all sorts of things, get creative, learn from the results and have fun.

Focus

- Be sure your subject is in focus by holding the camera steady. Sit down, use a tripod, steady your arm/hand, do what you need to do to be comfortable and able to hold the camera steady without straining.
- If you wanted to experiment more with lenses like macro, wide-angle and fish-eye, there are some good lens kits you can get off of amazon.
- Don't be too quick to move the camera away after hitting the shutter button, some cameras take a second to capture an image (especially in lower light).

Background/backdrop

- Avoid distracting backgrounds
- Contrast is key to highlight the tree's characteristics. Using a considerably lighter or darker background is ideal.
- If the camera has a wide depth of field (the area that is in focus, as is with most smartphones) the background will be in focus and competing with your subject. Try moving the tree farther away from the background, change the background or use the portrait mode if available on your smartphone.
- Use neutral colors such as black, white or gray. Contrasting colors can also be fun, consider a red or orange background to make green foliage stand out.
- Homemade backdrops can work well. Try a blanket or unwrinkled sheet, large piece of paper, plastic or foam core, a piece of felt or cloth, a cushion, or wood (painted or not, just be careful there is enough contrast to see the tree). Could even use the side of your clean stucco house.

Shoot a lot!

The more the merrier!

- Again, keep changing the angle, wait a few minutes for the sunlight to change, reposition yourself etc. Take more pictures than you think you need as subtle differences can make a big difference.
- If possible, preview and select images on a device with a larger screen such as a computer, laptop, ipad/tablet or even your TV.
- Utilize your smartphones ability to favorite a photo or start an album to make it easier to find, select and edit images.
- If your first photoshoot session did not produce the results you want, try again. Take note about what you don't like about the photos and try to correct them.

Post-processing

Most photos aren't 100% awesome right from the camera.

- Do not over-process or add filters and effects. Don't shoot with filters and effects.
- Get familiar with the editing tools in the default photo app
- The Snapseed app is very helpful and easy to use (my personal favorite)
- Common adjustments include:

- lighten shadows
- add a vignette or selective focus

A note about resolution

- Do not decrease the resolution of an image. The higher the resolution the better.
- Typically the newer the smartphone is, the better the camera it will have. • • Using a flip phone will not produce a good result.
- Facebook photos: Facebook reduces the resolution of images upon upload. • Anything saved from Facebook will not be high res.
- If you are emailing a photo, select “original” size

Examples

Photos taken on a patio chair with a cushion as a backdrop. Shot in the evening when the sun was low.



Poor Image

Poor Image:

- Distracting and busy metal mesh surface
- Branches and trunk not fully illuminated
- Stand does not add value to photo
- Hard line shadow on right side
- Phone shadow in lower left corner
- Bottom of the cushion visible and not level
- Not framed nicely

Good Image:

- Nice clean background and wood surface
- Foliage and trunk nicely illuminated
- Bright color and good contrast
- Natural vignette and soft variation of shadows on backdrop
- Framed nicely
- Could do without the tree shadow on the backdrop but it's off to the side and not interfering with the tree



Good Image

A good resource for more advanced techniques <https://www.bonsaiempire.com/blog/photographing-bonsai>

Jonas Dupich article in Bonsai tonight on finding the right height to shoot <https://bonsaitonight.com/2018/10/23/photographing-bonsai-getting-the-level-right/>

<https://minnesotabonsaisociety.org/2020/07/01/how-to-make-a-great-photo-with-just-your-smartphone/>

Bonsai Photography (for the more advanced photographer)

By Sam Ogrinaja with Joe Naga

Whether you're a bonsai professional with a full nursery or a hobbyist with only a few trees, photographing bonsai is a practice all bonsai growers should do regularly. A record of each stage of growth is extremely important for many reasons; to track progression is probably the most obvious. A good photo will reveal weak spots in the tree and whether it's lacking ramification or a needed branch. We get used to seeing our trees daily, but evaluating our trees through a photograph forces us to focus on the positive aspects of the tree as well as the negative issues that must be addressed for improvement.

Just as bonsai has "rules", taking a good bonsai photo also has some basic "rules" as well. And just like most advanced bonsai growers who sometimes deviate from the basic rules, you can experiment with your picture taking to suit your own style but it's important to start with the basics principles of photography before you can develop your own style.

The camera for photographing bonsai requires manual adjustments that allows for focusing, setting the ISO, adjusting the aperture, and adjusting the exposure time.

Hand holding the camera to photograph your bonsai is not suggested because it is too difficult to compose your image and it is only more reason why you may not like your results. A tripod is preferred and it needs to be sturdy to safely hold your camera in position without shaking or toppling over. To prevent the camera from shaking during the exposure, squeeze or lightly depress the shutter button. An alternative to this If you have a self timer on the camera is to set your camera on a 2 second time delay which will ensure that your finger will not shake the camera as you pressed the shutter.

To avoid a confusing or distractive background when photographing your bonsai, you will need to find a uniform background material to have your bonsai be the main object of your photo. The background can be of any color, white, blue, gray, or black. A darker background, regardless of color, will make your bonsai stand out in the photograph.

Light is important to your photograph but it doesn't have to be an elaborate lighting system if you decide to photograph your trees in a controlled environment indoors. Photoflood lights and reflectors are inexpensive and can be purchased at any of the big box stores. It's important to avoid mixed lighting falling on your subject at the same time such as fluorescent lights, tungsten lights, or sunlight from windows in the room. If you decide to photograph your bonsai outdoors, the light required will need to be as soft as possible to get the best result. Direct sunlight may not be the best. Think of the sun; when it's out shining in all its glory, you have a strong shadows behind your tree. This is called direct or hard light. Now think of an overcast, cloudy day. In this setting you won't have a cast shadow. This is called diffused or soft light. Whether it's a natural light, a cloudy day, or recreated with studio lights diffused by modifiers, shooting with a soft light will create the best looking bonsai photo you can create. The next requirement is composition. Once you've set up your background and identified the front of your tree, you will need to set the tree onto something that will not draw attention from the tree. This can be a display stand or some object that is appropriate for displaying the bonsai. The table top for holding your display should complement the tree such as a bamboo mat, colored burlap, or any color fabric, etc. In determining your composition by viewing the cameras display screen, adjust the camera to frame the bonsai and be sure to raise the camera so you can see the soil above the pot, but not so much that you can clearly see the back lip of the pot.

Now that you have an understanding of soft vs hard light and composition it's time to discuss focusing, Depth Of Field, and Aperture. Focus is adjusting the lens to produce a sharp image. Take your time to critically focus on the tree to insure sharpness. It is important to understand that you need to manually focus on the bonsai because the "auto" function of the camera may not focus on the appropriate area of the tree or not even focus on the tree. Depth of field is how much of the scene will appear sharp. It determines how much before and after your subject will be in sharp focus. Our subject is bonsai so you should have depth of field for sharpness from the point closest to the camera to the point furthest from the camera. You control the depth of field by adjusting the aperture. The word aperture means hole or opening. The easiest way to understand aperture is to think of the pupil in our eye. When the pupil is fully dilated, this allows more light into our eye so we can see under dim light at night. Under full sun however our pupil is constricted so as to not let so much light into our eyes that everything is overly bright and we can't see. So the wider the aperture, the larger opening (say $f/1.4$) the more light that will reach the film or digital camera sensor, the smaller the aperture the smaller opening (say $f/22$) the less light will reach the film or sensor. The wider ($f/1.4$) the aperture the shallower the DOF becomes, the smaller the opening ($f/22$) the DOF extends greatly. We'll need to use a smaller aperture to allow for greater DOF. It is suggested that when photographing bonsai you should use an aperture range between $f/11$ - $f/16$ so as to have as much of the

tree in sharp focus.

The camera you select for photographing your bonsai needs to allow you to set custom settings to include shutter speed and ISO. Shutter speed is the length of time you allow the light coming through the aperture reaching the sensor or film. Think of it as blinking your eye. A fast shutter speed of 1/4000 sec. will allow a shorter time for the light to reach the sensor than 1/40 sec. ISO (International Standards Organization) is how sensitive the film or sensor is to light. The ISO is important in photography in that it can be adjusted to achieve the desired aperture and shutter speed. While a high ISO of 3200 is more sensitive to light and will allow you to take a photo of a fast moving object, this also degrades image quality by what is called noise or grit in the image. Noise in digital photography is equivalent to graininess when using film. To avoid this problem a lower ISO should be used. Depending on the digital camera that you have chosen, anything higher than an ISO of 200 will bring noise to the image. It's best to shoot at an ISO 100 if possible with your setup for the highest image quality.

Now that you have the tree arranged, the lighting adjusted, the camera on a tripod, the tree in sharp focus, go to Manual programming on the camera and set your aperture at f/16, ISO at 100 and Shutter speed at 1/200 sec. Whether you're shooting inside or outside, this will give you a base exposure. If the image is too dark, lower the shutter speed to 1/100 sec. If the image is still too dark set it to 1/50 sec. It's really a testing game until you find the right exposure. You can also open up the aperture by using f/11 but you need to make sure doing so isn't reducing the DOF for your bonsai. Zoom into the picture to check critical focus and sharpness. You may need also to change the ISO to give you the best aperture and shutter speed. This is all trial and error until you find your happy point. Once that has been identified, bring in any tree you need photographed and simply move the camera for best composition. If a tree is larger or smaller than the one prior, move the camera back and forth or zoom in or out if using a zoom lens.

The image provided to you will be a color corrected JPEG file. You can print an image from this file anywhere, be it on your printer, by CVS's 1 hour service, or a real photo lab for best results. There are plenty of photo editing options out there, some quite complex that allow tremendous control but can be tough to learn. Some that are quite easy to learn but don't allow as much control. GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Software) has been around for a while. It's great but tough to learn. Picasa is a great simple program that is a free offering from Google. While it doesn't allow incredible control, it's fun and easy to learn.

(Sam Ogrinaja has visited one of our club's exhibitions and photographed the exhibition at BSF. Joe Naga is photographer for the National Bonsai Exhibition)

BONSAI GLOSSARY

NODE - growth point on a branch or trunk from which leaves, leaf-buds and shoots can appear.

OVER-WATERING - watering too frequently and poor draining soil; decreases amount of air available to roots; can eventually lead to root-rot and death of a tree.

PEAT - organic soil component derived from rotted and broken down Sphagnum Moss; unpopular with Bonsai enthusiasts.

PETIOLE - the stalk of a leaf that attaches to the stem.

PHOENIX GRAFT - technique where a sapling is attached to deadwood.

PRE-Bonsai - a young tree that has not yet been trained.

PRUNING - most important method in training a Bonsai by trimming leaves and/or branches.

RAMIFICATION - repeated division of branches into secondary branches by means of pruning.

ROCK PLANTING - trees grown in or on rocks to create a dramatic visual appearance.

ROOT FLARE - also know as the Nebari, the mound of exposed surface roots at the base of the trunk; provides visual balance.

ROOT OVER ROCK - a technique where the tree is planted over a rock with the roots extending downwards to reach the soil.

<https://www.bonsaiempire.com/blog/bonsai-terms>

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