

Bonsai Clipper

Newsletter of the Bonsai Society of Southwest Florida, Inc.

Online Newsletter, Issue 5 May 2014



May Program

Place: SPALC Bldg., 6281 Metro Plantation Road

When: Saturday, May 17, 2014, at 9:00 AM

All day workshop, bring your lunch

Display: Suiseki: Anyone having a stone they wish to display, bring it in.

Refreshments: Provided by Marcie Goski & Susan Johnson

Morning Session: 9 AM 'til Noon

Road to Perfection with Ernie Fernandez

Members will bring their potential show trees. Ernie will critique and go over what needs to be worked on during the upcoming growing season in order to be ready for the show. Be prepared to take notes. You will be asked to bring the tree back in October to see how it progressed.

Afternoon Session: 1 PM 'til whenever

Juniper group meets with Dorothy: Bring back the juniper for review and care instructions.

Mentor group: Anyone with a problem tree bring it in for extra help.

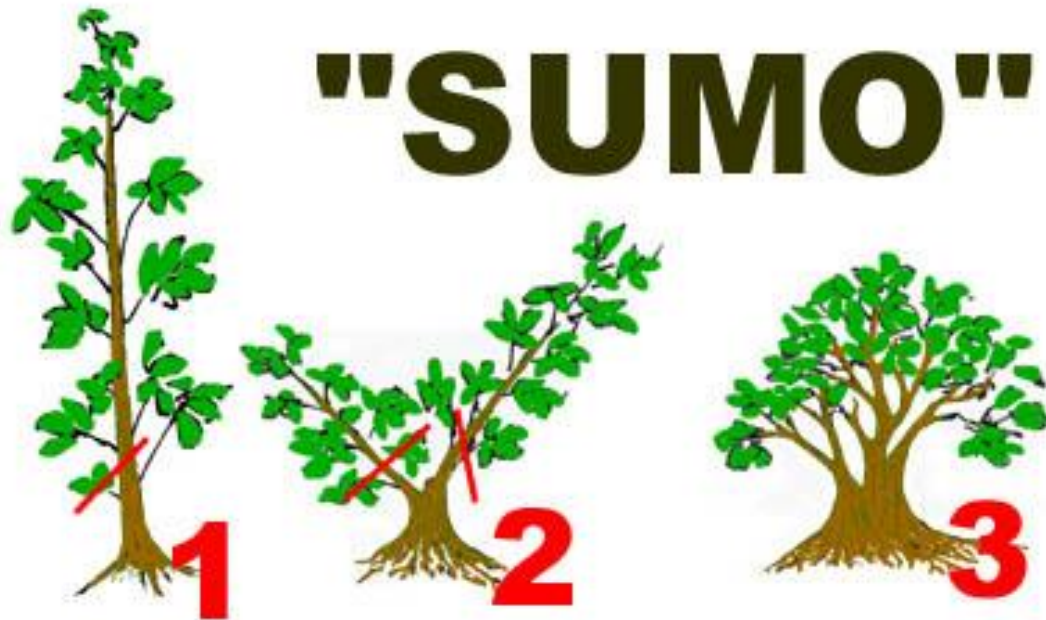
Repotting: Bring your tools, wire, pot, soil and tree for a repotting workshop with Justin.

Participate and Grow in Your Bonsai Skills.

Bonsai Buzz:

(This is a continuation of material published in the September and October 2013 newsletters.)

According to FUKU-BONSAI CULTURAL CENTER & HAWAII STATE BONSAI REPOSITORY of Kurkistown, Hawaii:



STEP 1: STARTING OFF

Allow the seedling to grow, then cut back hard. How hard? It depends on you and your willingness to take risks. It's safer to prune higher up but you'll get superior results if you prune lower and the plant survives. Seal the cut with Vaseline. Some people never get past this stage. They just don't have the confidence to do high risk pruning. Many Fuku-Bonsai customers prefer to avoid this stage and purchase starters that may be somewhere between step 2 and step 3.

Step 1 is the key to success! At this stage of training, install as much variations as possible. Root prune the tree while still very young to remove the tap root and to begin to develop an ideal compact root system. Plant the tree at an angle to get a more interesting base. Plant two or more trees together. Start off with as many variations as possible so each tree will be different!

STEP 2: DEVELOPING THE FORM

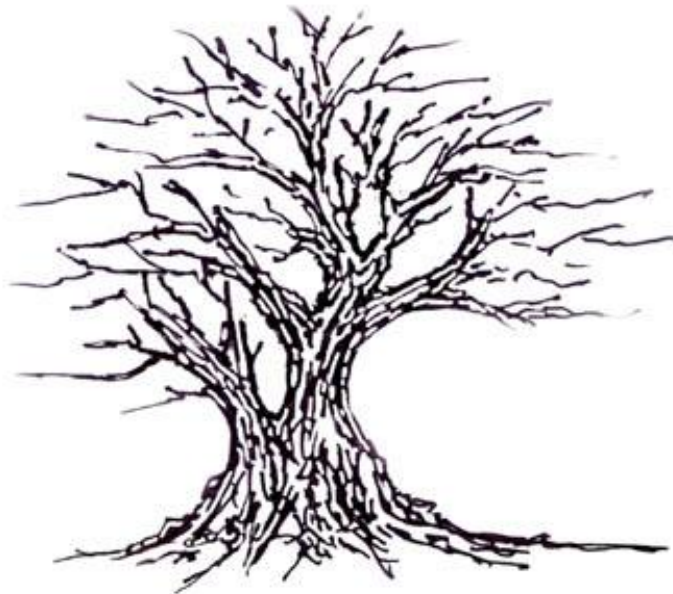
If you cut and only one or two new growth points appear, something is wrong and you should stop and first learn why. Can you obtain more suitable plants or seeds? Can you improve your growing environment? Are you watering and fertilizing properly? At this early stage of training, plants must be heavily fertilized and be growing very strongly. How much fertilizer? Enough to get good growth but not too much to kill it!

So how do you find out? Line up a dozen plants and fertilize one plant with what you think is the right amount. Next week add the same amount to the same plant and to a new second plant. Next week add the same amount to the first plant, to the second plant, and to a new third plant. Keep going until the first tree dies. If the second tree also dies, you'll pretty much know how much is too much. This is something that must be learned from experience. It's valuable knowledge in producing the best possible growth and healthy plant stock!

From the three or more new growth points, select the ones in the positions you like and remove the rest. Allow these to grow at least 7-8 leaves each before it's time to cut back again. If you do "step 2" several times, your tree should be ready for step 3.

STEP 3: REFINEMENT

Fuku-Bonsai's #8 size Living Sculpture, medium and large size Hawaiian Lava Plantings and our Custom Collection items are in this stage of growth. Generally it takes at least 8-10 years to get to this stage and our customers recognize that this is our more costly but best value products. The #8 size Living Sculpture and medium and large lava plantings are ideal for moving up with a #17 Conversion Kit to enlarge the root system to again begin another major growth stage. But in many ways it's an easier challenge as the high-risk pruning and aggressive culling is already past.



If you understand the above sequence of how a tree developed its form over the years, you'll be in a better position to continue to maintain the shape of your tree, to improve it, and to even restyle it. Fuku-Bonsai's primary "sumo" training technique produces stout trees with outstanding rootage, heavy trunks, and an abundance of branches. They are the finest quality plant stock available internationally for growing indoors. That's a large claim and it's true! They are the best simply because no one else is willing and able to grow them to the same high standards.

If you are privileged to start with such exceptional material, you should study it carefully before you do any pruning. First figure out how the tree was trained to get to that stage. Realize that it took many years and many prunings to develop. If it took 8 to 25 years to train, it would be a shame to restyle it after looking at it for just a few minutes! Regrettably, overzealous trainers have pruned off what took years to create.

Japanese bonsai standards begin with an appreciation of the roots, how they hug and rise out of the ground. Trees with poor rootage look like telephone poles sticking out of the ground. A broad base gives a visual stability to a tree and Fuku-Bonsai excels in this most important area!

Next consider the lower trunk and the major lower branches. These too are important. Too often we see beautiful foliage and a nice top that sits on a spindly trunk without any character. If a tree has good rootage, lower trunk, and strong low branches, all things are possible. So in refinement, place emphasis on preserving these qualities. There are many ways to train a tree according to the kind of shape you desire.

THE CONCEPT OF "SHIN" & STRONG LOWEST BRANCHES

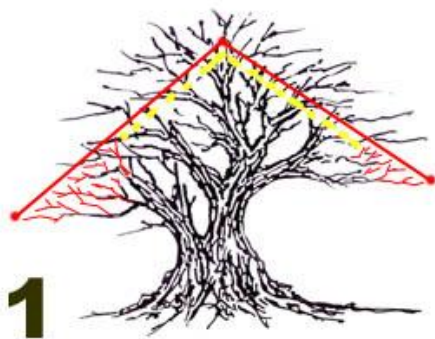
Young trees are thin and tall. Bonsai training attempts to recreate small plants that depict mature older trees which are stout and wide. The "shin" is the top of the tree, the visual balance point. Find the largest trunk and keep following it up the heaviest section each time there is a branching fork. This will take you to the shin point. In initial study, mark it with a string or yarn.

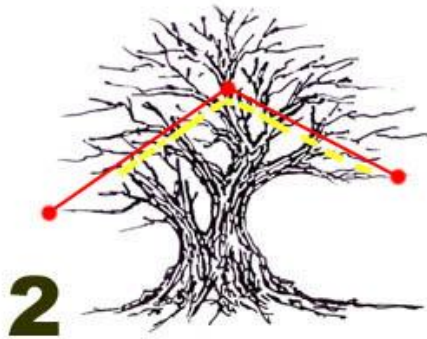
Connect the shin point with the ends of the lowest branches. Use a ruler or stick to mark that line and prune back branches that overgrown that line. If you allow upper branches to grow over the important low branches, those branches will be weak and die. A tree naturally grows more vigorously at the top. The top of the tree should therefore be pruned more aggressively and more often.

1. CREATING A LARGER BROAD CROWN. If you want to keep the height of your tree the same but want to create a wider broader crown, set your top shin point at the end of the woody section and the lower branch points outside of existing low branch points. Prune any and all top growth that grows beyond the lines and allow lower branches to keep growing outwards. A good rule is to prune the portion of the tree that is growing most vigorously. Keep the lines in



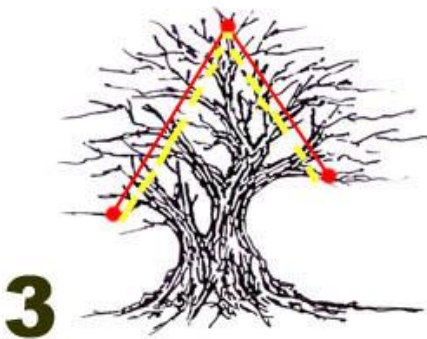
Learning how to visualize and mark the "shin angles" is the key to proper pruning to maintain a healthy bonsai!





mind and prune back to below the line. Until you become proficient, use the ruler to guide you.

2. CREATING A LOWER BROADER CROWN. This is a variation of the above technique in which pruning is based upon the actual length of the lowest branch. This variation is used extensively at Fuku-Bonsai to produce the strongest possible lower branches and stout trunks. It is relatively easy to raise the shin point to create a taller bonsai. When looking down on a tree, try to select three major lower branches facing out about 120° angles as this will create a well rounded tree. Build up 3 additional but shorter branches above and between the first three and keep these heavily pruned back.



3. CREATING A TALLER NARROWER CROWN. If you have well-developed roots and lower trunks, this is fairly simple. Select the woody ends of the lowest branches and the highest shin point. Prune very aggressively to the connecting lines at appropriate points. If you're pruning larger branches, prune back a bit from the line to allow developing some branch taper as you finish off creating a taller tree. Generally the goal is to create a wide tree, but the principle is the same if you want a taller tree.

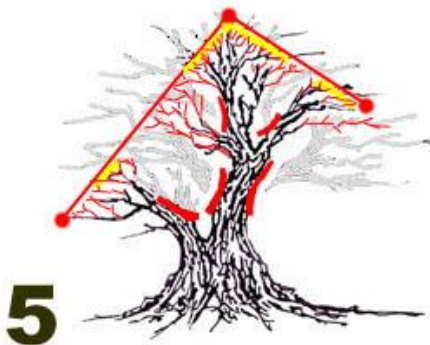


4. CREATING AN ULTRA LOW WIDE CROWN. Severe pruning will often result in an explosion of many new growth points including sometimes from the base of the roots! From time to time, we will greatly reduce the height of an older tree and create such wide crowns with very stout trunks. While this may seem high risk, it isn't if the trees are growing strongly. This technique is often used with extra large containers to obtain

strongest growth and fastest development. Trees are heavily fertilized. Once the new shape is attained, it is potted into a shallow container and growth slows.

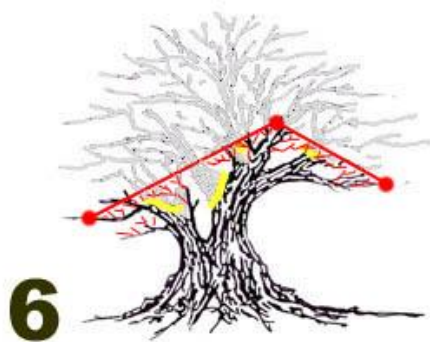
5. CREATING A MORE OPEN CROWN.

Some customers prefer a taller tree with a more open crown rather than the stoutness associated with tropical banyans. Because of the well developed rootage and heavy trunks, it is often possible to remove several large heavy branches to create an elegant more open structure. This type of restyling should be done only after a lot of study as it is very easy to remove too many branches. To help visualize what the tree will look like with a branch removed, cover and wrap up the branch with a dish towel.



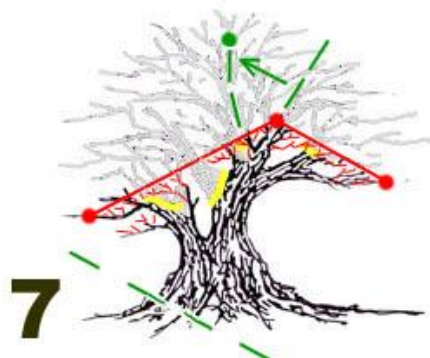
6. "CHANGING SHIN".

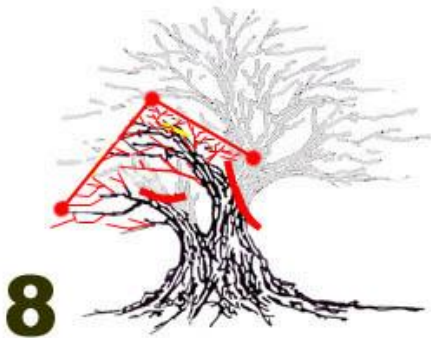
Sometimes a major change in training strategy will greatly improve a tree and the shin point is shifted to a very different part of the tree. When this is done, it is preferable to remove ALL of the former "shin line" to avoid having conflicting themes. Using the principle of marking the ends of the main lowest branches, it is a simple matter to prune off old growth to readjust to the new styling. Trees retrained by changing shin are often outstanding!



7. REPOTTING AFTER A SHIN CHANGE.

While it's sometimes appropriate to have a new slanting shape, at other times, it may be preferable to repot to bring the restyled tree to a more upright position with the new shin pointing up. This will give the tree the strongest growth. This often results in creating a more exciting new root buttressing.





8. ONE & TWO BRANCH STYLING! Before restyling any tree, always consider reducing the tree to just the first or second lowest branch. While this is often the most radical of all alternatives, it produces the largest proportional trunks and roots. In having a larger well developed root system, the plant will grow very vigorously into the desired new styling. Even if you select another styling design, in considering this most radical alternative, often other ideas become apparent. If you've studied the tree carefully over a period of time, you'll be able to proceed with confidence once you know you've fully explored all alternatives!

Bonsai is a thinking man's game! There are really only three major parts: 1) the horticultural challenges that are dictated by the tree, 2) the training technique, and 3) creating the long-term design.

The horticultural challenges are very straightforward. If your tree is growing well, you're doing fine. As you become more of an expert in growing **YOUR TREE IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT**, you'll become more successful in training. But if you cannot grow a healthy tree, you will not be able to train it. Training bonsai places extra stress on a tree! **DON'T TRAIN UNTIL YOUR TREE IS HEALTHY AND GROWING STRONGLY!**

I grew up surrounded by potted plants and orchid greenhouses. Good friends, including the late Dr. Horace Clay, always emphasized the basics. While many thought the cause of their plant problems were exotic diseases that could be cured with sophisticated high-tech solutions, Horace found that problems usually were very simple to correct. Often they simply needed to learn how to apply fertilizer correctly. He always recommended one single fertilizer and taught how and when to use it.

Plants respond to proper care and cannot adjust to reasoning or a person's whims. Too often I am asked to help a person that begins: "I've followed your directions exactly but my plant is dying!" After a few emails, it's very obvious that the person doesn't have the faintest idea of the cultural information that was sent with the plant! Too often they have confidence in their reasoning and are very upset that the plant doesn't respond. Sometimes they are successful with one plant, give the same care to other plants, and can't figure out why the others aren't doing well. Bottom line: "Select plants that will grow well for you in your environment or change your environment to meet the needs of the plants!"

Assuming your plants are healthy and growing vigorously, training techniques are relatively easy to learn. Like learning horticulture, stay with the basics and the best and easiest training technique is pruning. Anyone can learn to prune. If it's a small twig, a small pruning scissors may be okay. If you're reducing a 30' tall tree utilizing the radical one branch styling concept, you might want to use a chainsaw. But in either case, knowing where to cut is more important than how to cut or what tool to use.

So the most difficult factor is styling and refinement and each of us approach this in a different way. The late Haruo "Papa" Kaneshiro was the beloved "Father of Hawaii Tropical Bonsai." He shared

what he knew and used very conservative bonsai techniques that developed small nice trees. But the trunks were a bit thin and it took many years of meticulous skill. When I was developing Reduction-Building techniques, Papa couldn't stand it. It was just too aggressive for him. But he loved the results and only found fault with the way the results were obtained! He was happy to take home plants to add to his collection and he did fine work to refine them.

If you study the finest masterpiece bonsai, you'll find that most began as outstanding collected stock that was dug from the mountains. The trees were already old when collected and the training of the foliage sections were done in a relatively few years. Our Reduction-Building techniques were patterned after the same concept that Nature used to create her masterpieces. They are the result of repeated mass reductions followed by vigorous growth. Each such sequence adds a layer of character and results in exciting plant stock. As the tree moves into the refinement stages, pruning can be done either conservatively or can continue to aggressively add more layers of character.

As professionals, we take pride in creating trees with high potential for our customers to complete styling and refinement. Both require pruning skills! To obtain an understanding from a different perspective go to the two Reduction-Building articles that trace the development of two trees over a 30-year period. [*** Go to Reduction-Building I](#)

[*** Return to Fuku-Bonsai Home page](#)

[*** Return to Training True Indoor Bonsai \(portal page\)](#)

[*** Go to Fuku-Bonsai Workshop items \(including conversion kits\)](#)

© Fuku-Bonsai Inc. 2004

FUKU-BONSAI CULTURAL CENTER & HAWAII STATE BONSAI REPOSITORY
PO Box 6000, Kurtistown, Hawaii 96760 Phone (808) 982-9880
FAX

Hope this material proves helpful for you.

Library: Please remember to return your LIBRARY BOOKS.

Raffle: Remember to bring items for the raffle.

.....