



# The Bent Twig

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Dedicated to learning, enjoying and promoting of bonsai.

January 2012

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**HAPPY NEW YEAR**

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

*By Paul Holtzen*

Another year has begun, and it's going to be a busy one for bonsai fun.

Our club will be offering a series of four bonsai workshops this spring. It's beginning with a bonsai basics class on Saturday Feb 4 that will be taught by experienced club members. Sign – ups at the January meeting. Material will be provided and you will create a tree to take home.

Our January meeting will feature member Bob Bugay on preparing our bonsai for show. Our show is in April and now is the time to begin getting the trees we will show in show condition. I feel this is an area we can all improve on and Bob is the guy to help us. **Please** bring trees you plan on showing. Along with any moss you can find and screened top dressing. I attended the Bay Island Bonsai show last weekend and the trees were perfectly prepared for show. Let's learn from their example.

I want to thank Kathleen for volunteering to chair our nomination and election committee this year. Many positions are up for election. So, please don't be shy and let Kathy know if you will step up and help lead the club into the future.

Thanks also to Don and Andy for volunteering to chair our home tour this year.

We still need a volunteer to plan our annual bus trip. Let me know if you will do this.

Lastly, I just want to say that this is *your* club. Please let me know if you like or dislike our programs and especially if you have ideas for improvement.

Paul

## Christmas Party 2011!

The combined ABAS and Satsuki Aiokai Christmas Party was once again a great success and a lot of fun. We had lots of great food, live entertainment, Secret Santa gift exchange, and a bonsai Christmas tree contest.



Partiers enjoying the live entertainment





The winning tree!



And the happy winner.



Too much good food!

**Meeting this Tuesday:  
January 24<sup>th</sup> at 7pm**

## BONSAI POTTING 101

By Paul Holtzen

### Why Re-pot Bonsai?

Re-potting our bonsai correctly is one of the basics we all need to learn to get the most out of our trees both horticulturally and artistically.

There are several reasons for repotting. Established bonsai eventually fill the pot with roots affecting both the health and styling of the tree. The tree is fed by the young hair-like roots. As roots become old and woody they lose this function. By periodically cutting the roots back we stimulate new feeder roots to grow keeping the tree vigorous. The nebari, or structure of the roots at the base of the tree is a *very important* feature in good bonsai and re-potting time is when we can work to improve this. We want to remove as much root as possible directly under the trunk of the tree and encourage lateral roots to radiate out at the base of the trunk. This process can take many years and is often overlooked resulting in trees that will always be inferior. Planting the tree in the esthetically correct pot is also very important and often we re-pot simply to move the tree to the correct pot for the tree to look its best.

### Tools and Supplies For Re-potting Bonsai

We should always have tools designated only for repotting work. These can be cheaper and of lower quality than our tools for working on the top of the tree. The abrasive nature of the soil on the roots will quickly dull tools and destroy fine quality shears.

The basic repotting kit consists of:

1. Shears for trimming roots.
2. Root hook for combing out the roots and removing soil.



Root Hook

3. A root cutter for cutting heavy roots.



Bonsai root cutter

4. A folding saw for heavy root work.
5. Assorted bamboo chopsticks for combing roots as well as working soil back in when planting,
6. Pliers for tightening tie wires.
7. Screen to cover drainage holes in the pot.



Pot screen

8. Wire to tie the tree into the pot (steel or aluminum)
9. Water spray bottle
10. Bonsai soil in several particle sizes.

### **When to Re-pot?**

Re-potting our trees at the wrong time of year can have deadly consequences. The safest time varies somewhat by species, but the best rule of thumb is to repot at the beginning of a growth surge. For most trees this is springtime when the new buds are starting to swell. This is the time when the tree is loaded up with growth hormones that help it cope with the trauma of re-potting. Some deciduous trees can also be re-potted in early summer, after a full defoliation as this fools the tree into a second spring bud push.

### **Choosing the Pot**

The best way to learn which pot best complements a particular tree is to study as many fine bonsai as you can to develop an eye for what works and what doesn't. There are, though, some general rules to guide you:

1. Oval or round pots for more graceful, feminine trees.
2. Rectangular or square pots for rugged, masculine trees.
3. Glaze pots for fruiting, flowering, and deciduous trees.
4. Unglazed pots for conifers and evergreens.
5. The size of the pot is dictated by the height and thickness of the tree. Length should be about 2/3 the height of the tree. Pot depth should be about the diameter of the trunk at the base.
6. Deeper, round or square pots for cascade styles
7. Round or irregular (namban) pots for bunjin style.
8. Color of glazed pots should complement and not clash with color of flowers, fruit, or fall foliage.

## Preparing the Pot

Before starting any work on the tree you should have the new pot prepared. If you're not sure which pot will work best prepare all of the candidates before starting.

Step 1. Clean the pot. Clean any old soil and water or mineral stains from the pot.

Step 2. Screen the drain holes and place tie down wires.



Pot with screens and tie wires properly placed

## Bonsai Soil

It should go without saying that you should have your bonsai soil prepared before beginning to re-pot. Either purchase soil from a bonsai nursery or make your own. Do Not use commercial potting soil! My soil recipe for almost everything is:

- 1/3 to 1/2 akadama or Turface
- 1/4 to 1/3 pumice or Hyuga
- 1/4 to 1/3 red or black lava, or coarse sand.

Before mixing all ingredients are sifted over window screen to remove any fines and then through a series of larger screens to obtain particle sizes need for the particular tree

Some people add bark to their soil mix. I don't as it can cause root rot.

## Preparing the Tree

1. Cut and remove any wires tying the tree in the pot,
2. Loosen the tree by sliding a knife around the inside edge of the pot.
3. Remove the tree by gently tipping and prying it out. Be very careful not to handle the tree by the trunk or branches as this can irreversible damage valuable bark and fine ramification
4. Use a root hook and chopstick to gently untangle the roots and remove old soil.



Before root work

After the root work

5. Remove unnecessary and dead roots as well as roots growing directly down beneath the trunk.
6. If possible, remove roots out of scale with the tree.
7. Comb the roots out into a mat radiating away from the trunk. Try not to have crossed roots.
8. Use a water spray bottle to keep the roots moist while you are working.

### **Potting the Tree**

Place a layer of coarse pumice or bonsai soil covering the bottom of the pot. Cover this with a small mound of your bonsai mix.

Set the tree in the pot adding or removing soil under it to get it at the right height and orientation. It is helpful to keep turning the tree on a turntable while doing this to get it right from all sides. Ideally, the base of the tree should be slightly lower than the pot rim and centered in the pot.

When the tree is positioned perfectly, tie it in the pot. There are many techniques for this but the one I think is best is to use bamboo sticks laid on or through the root mat and then run the tie wires over the sticks to hold the tree in place. A properly tied in tree will not move in the pot.

After tying the tree in, begin adding soil, carefully working it between and under the roots using a chopstick. Be persistent in this so there are no air pockets in the pot and all the roots are in contact with the soil. Be sure that the surface roots are covered with soil. This will help the tree develop better nebari.

When the pot is filled with soil to just below the rim smooth out the soil, and water the tree.

Water the tree continuously until the water runs clear and freely out of the drain holes. It's important to wash all of the fine soil and dust out at this first watering before it adheres to the roots.

### **Care After Re-potting**

Your tree has just been through a lot of trauma, so you need to protect it from wind and bright sun for a while in an area with high humidity. A cool greenhouse is, of course, ideal, but any protected area close to the ground and out of full sun and wind is good. Gradually move the tree out of protection until it is growing and can be put in its place of honor on your bonsai tables.

**ABAS Membership Dues  
are due in January.  
Please pay at this month's  
meeting, or print a form at  
[abasbonsai.org](http://abasbonsai.org)**



## **2012 ABAS PROGRAMS**

**January 23 – 10 AM** USPS Bonsai Stamp unveiling at the Garden Center.

**January 24** – Club member **Bob Bugay** presents a program on preparing trees for show. Since there will be no demonstration, Bill Burns will purchase a nice tree for the raffle.

**February 4<sup>th</sup> - 10 – 6 PM** Bonsai Basics workshop taught by Paul Holtzen and Greg McDonald at the Garden Center. Cost \$25. Bonsai basic instruction and beginning styling work on a Japanese maple that you keep. Sign up at Jan meeting or contact Paul @ [pbholtzen@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pbholtzen@sbcglobal.net).

**February 18 – 10 to 6** *Free* workshop on soil mixing and fertilizing. Taught By John Cota at the Garden Center. Sign up at Jan meeting or contact Paul @ [pbholtzen@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pbholtzen@sbcglobal.net).

**February 25 - 26 – Mammoth Fundraiser Bazaar** at Bonsai Collection North, Lake Merritt Garden Center, Oakland CA

**February 28** – **Scott Chad** of Lotus Bonsai will demonstrate creating a Japanese Maple forest.

**March 3** – **Ann Hultgren** and **Dolores Rauh** will teach a workshop on Satsuki azaleas. At the Garden Center 10 to 6. Cost \$25 includes tree to style and take home, Sign up at Jan or Feb. meeting or contact Paul @ [pbholtzen@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pbholtzen@sbcglobal.net).

**March 17** – *Free Re-Potting Workshop* led by club members at the Garden Center 10 to 6. Bring trees to repot and soil, pots etc. Sign up at Jan or Feb. meeting or contact Paul @ [pbholtzen@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pbholtzen@sbcglobal.net).

**March 24 – 25 – Spring Sale at the Garden Center.**

**March 27** – **Sam Adina** styling an olive.

**April 14 -15 – Annual Spring Show.** Demos both days by **John Thompson**.

**April 21st** – Styling a collected Boxwood – **Roger Steele**. Registration \$35.00

There are 5 very old trees collected by Roger. Bill Burns will bring one of the trees to the February meeting and provide a registration form for those interested in attending the workshop. If there are more than 5 registrants, a lottery will decide who attends

**April 24** – **Larry White** styling a collected Boxwood. He will bring several of his trees to share.

**May 22** – **Bob Shimon** of Mendocino Coast Bonsai, demonstration material to be determined.

**June 26** – **Paul Holtzen** and **Greg McDonald** conduct a deciduous defoliation and wiring workshop for member trees.

**July 24** – **Annual Luau**

**August 22** – Club member, **Timm Johnson**, presents a program on olive defoliation.

**September 25** – **Ted Matson** demonstration (demonstration material to be determined).

**October** – **GSBF Convention**, no program

**November** – open



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Wishing You a Prosperous New Year