

SOUTHERN BONSAIST

A publication of the Azalea City Bonsai Society Mobile, Alabama

BONSAI HORTICULTURAL MANAGEMENT BY JOE DAY *THE OCTOBER ACBS PROGRAM*

Common sense and bonsai horticultural practices don't have much in common. Growing flowers and bushes in the landscape, growing a gift pot of flowers on the window sill are a world away from growing bonsai for many, many years to maturity. Is it difficult to understand? No! It's just a different mindset and it's the logical side of bonsai. What we do in Mobile, Alabama to grow healthy bonsai is unique in some ways because our climate cycle is unique. Bonsai books are a help, websites are a help but the cumulative knowledge of the artist who grow bonsai in our area is the best knowledge because it works. This meeting certainly can not cover the subject in depth but we will lay the groundwork on as much of the how and why of growing bonsai in our area as time will allow.

Joe Day

ACBS
Regular Meeting
October 2nd
Mobile Botanical Gardens
Host: John O Lee

Tokanoma: Carla Moon

ACBS
Regular Meeting
November 6th
Bonsai Containers for
Growth and Development
Russell Coker
Host: unknown
Tokanaom: John O Lee

ACBS
Regular Meeting
December 4th
The ACBS
Christmas Dinner
Meeting

THE ACBS FALL AUCTION AND PARTY OCTOBER 6TH AT ST LUKES

ACBS members will be at St Lukes at 3 P.M. to set up, 5 P.M. starts the viewing, 6 P.M. the gavel drops and we begin the night of bidding, talking, relaxing, eating, joking and going home with a car load of bidding bounty. To allow a lot of people to go home with a

lot of bidding bounty we must have a lot of items available. Thanks in advance to all who donate. I know already we have so exciting items going up for bid. We will have refreshments for all. If you would like to bring some favorite

cookies or whatever to add to the snack table, it would be appreciated by all who attend. Remember 3P.M. doors open, 5 P.M. viewing and at 6 the bidding starts. St Lukes School and Church, Azalea Road. Joe Day

OCTOBER THE SWING MONTH

Yes Summer ends as a noted season but it can stay hot, Fall can begin and it can turn cool or turn cold. It can be a dry month or not. October is a month when tropical systems can stick in the gulf and bring long periods of rain. Cold fronts can bring periods of very low humidity. The days will be short and the nights long. We will a September period of new growth on most species. Most species will loose their old foliage and hang on to the foliage on the new growth. Do you cut the new growth off or not? If the plant was weak it needs to hang on to any ability to continue to feed the plant. If the

plant is strong it should not make any difference if it is cut off or stays.

It's important to know if how it gets cold in our area. It happens, most years, very quickly. Our first freeze usually catches most plants with green leaves and some new growth. We can go from a high in the 80's to a low in the 20's that night. That swing catches most non-tropical species in a semi-dormant state of being. They will need protection. Inside any structure that is insulated should be enough protection. On the ground, away from the wind will be adequate for species that grow naturally in our area

or north of our area. The dry air that come with our northern cold fronts is more of a problem for us than the cold weather. Most of our winter problems come from our bonsai becoming too dry, not too cold.

If you have tropical bonsai and a nice heated hot house with automatic controls you will have few winter problems. If not you spend most of the winter moving your tropical bonsai in and out and watching the performance of your heating system. That might seem like too much work but we usually have few nights below freezing, most days of sunlight that keep the hot-house warm. Joe Day

PLANTS RECOGNIZE SIBLINGS

Plants can recognize when they are potting with their siblings or with strangers. The ability of animals to recognize and favor kin has been known for a long time but only recently has the ability of some plants to do the same been recognized. This information was taken from an article on the net site Live Science. If

you have tried to grow a bonsai forest from plant picked up from different locations you have probably noticed that it's difficult to keep them all alive. I've noticed that my Trident forest all from the same seed source does not have as much of a problem. It has long been the practice in Japan to take cuttings from a

single plant to grow the material for a forest. This makes all the plants identical making them grow at the same rate, have the same leaves, bark and Fall color. Now they find out it also keeps the plants from trying to kill off the non-family member.

With humans it's usually the family that can't get along.

Joe Day

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

E. Felton Jones passed away in his sleep at the age of 86. At our regular ACBS meetings I'm probably the only person that would know who Felton Jones is or why we would note his passing. Felton was one of the cast of characters creating bonsai in the deep south in the 1960's. When I started in 1980 Felton's name would be on the list of teachers headlining regional bonsai events. He was a

southern working man bonsai artist who had to earn a living as he worked at bonsai. I'm certain this limited his ability to move about and teach in as many locations as he would have liked to or was ask to. I talked with Felton at two regional bonsai events over the years. He talked slow and low in deliberate words. Both times I talked with Felton I invited him to Mobile but he never made it. Felton's

bonsai reflected his life in the South. They were very natural looking, relaxed not imposing with strange twist or loaded with jin or shari. Felton was from North Carolina, studied bonsai in California, moved around the south then settled back in North Carolina helping in a big way to create the North Carolina Arboretum that contains a permanent display of bonsai. Whatever bonsai is in the South, Felton was a part of why it is. Joe Day

THE MOBILE SOIL MIX

About 1981 or 1982 we, Joe Day and one of the founders of ACBS Gator Vickers had a talk about the best soil for our bonsai. The talk came about because we were trying to use the mix talked about in the John Naka books. We had the Naka mix wrong as we were using our local sand. The sand in all the books about bonsai was actually small gravel but that point was never made clear and the small fuzzy pictures in the books certainly didn't clear up the point. Our collected Azalea would not grow in the "bonsai soil" of the 60's, 70' books. They didn't die they just didn't grow. We got a horticulturist to look at the situation. He said the roots

were not getting enough air circulation. Gator has experience working in the local nurseries. We talked about how they grow everything is Pine bark. Gator was also a cactus grower and had bought some cactus growing in the red lava rock. When he lived in Tampa, Florida he noticed the succulent growers used lava rock. It grew excellent roots as it held moisture inside and drained quickly with good air circulation. We decided to take a bit from both sides. Pine bark like the nursery folk and mix in red lava rock that was keeping sensitive root cactus and succulent happy and growing

sensitive roots in good condition. The mix worked with the Azalea and every other species we were growing. John Naka liked our mix when he visited but said the people in California believed red lava rock would poison the roots of plants. Visiting masters would look at our healthy bonsai and ask about the soil mix. Over the years this mix of lava rock and Pine bark has become a universal mix used almost everywhere. Did we invent it. Possible. None of the visiting teachers of the 80's had ever seen this mix used but the combination Lava Rock and Pine bark were staples of different growing situations so anyone could have combined the two as we did. Joe Day

THE MOBILE MIX PART-2

Lava rock is sold as "FlowerRock" brand name. From the bag it is filled with a very small red dust. It must be washed before it is used. A nasty job but a must. Pine bark is also dusty. It must be sifted to remove the dust. Rock is sifted and or washed over a 1/16 screen. Pine bark is sifted over a 1/8 screen. We use a mix of 50% lava

rock and Pine bark for almost everything. 60 to 70% lava rock and 30 to 40% Pine bark for Juniper and Pines.

We now also use a high fired clay, Turface by brand name in our mix. The percent used is the same. Lava rock has always been difficult to obtain. Turface needs only to be sifted to remove the dust. I

find the mix of Pine bark and Turface holds moisture better during our dry periods but does not drain as well as lava rock. Good watering techniques would overcome this situation. A mixture of 25% Turface, 25% lava rock and 50 % pine bark is a great mix if you have the fixings.

Joe Day

THE MOBILE MIX PART 3

Flower Rock has never been easy to find and buy. Only bonsai, cactus and succulent growers seen to need it. It is not a stock item at any garden center. Turface, high fired clay is a construction and landscape maintenance item carried by companies that supply commercial business. It is also not carried by garden centers. Pine bark was in the past easy to find and at times it could be found in large bags

that had the correct size needed at a reasonable price.

That is not the case now. Most of the Pine bark is either too small for too large, has lots of pieces of Pine wood in the mix and \$4 bags are now close to \$8.

Bonsai soil is neither easy to make or cheap to buy. I have a large collection so how do I handle it. I buy a large quantity of items and keep them

on hand. The price will go up but I don't have to pick it up every Spring. I buy bulk Park bark, sift it using the large pieces in the landscape and the dust goes into the garden. I work to make my bonsai soil in the Fall so it will be on hand when I need it in the busy Spring season. The joy of bonsai has it's cost. The dirty work is more than worth the rest of the time I get to spend with my bonsai. Joe Day

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Dedicated to the art of bonsai

The Up Side of Down

Every growing year, our late February to November, is different. Similar yes, but never the same. With a complex bonsai collection made up of many species each year bring both success with some species and bad years with some species. My Crepe Myrtle bonsai sulked all year. I always believe it's something I'm doing until I find out, as I did this month from two different people, that the problem exist in other collections and other areas. The Crepe Myrtle are now growing well. Summer heat and summer rain seem to be what they both like and need. It's important to remember and look closely at your failures. Yes, your failures, not successes. Success needs to be noted so it can be repeated. Not much change needs to be undertaken. Failure calls for change. What changes? How much of a change? Change that turns failure into success has never been easy to bring about. When you are walking in your bonsai area take care to look for any sign of failure and write it down. Those long winter nights are a good time to research, plan and make a decision on the how, when and why of change.

Joe Day
