

Azalea City Bonsai Society



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Winter Silhouettes

Even though it doesn't seem like it, this is a great time to work on your

For many of our trees the leaves have dropped and we are able to see the underlying structure. This unobstructed view is a great time to assess our tree(s). The pictures shown here are classic examples of Winter silhouettes and we can bet that the owners of these trees used this time of year to their best advantage.

I spent the past couple of weekends wiring out a couple of my Boxwoods. Now I know you are saying, "Wait a minute Joe! Those are evergreen trees!" This is true but it is a wonderful time to assess all of our trees. This weekend a couple of my Trident Maples and possibly a Snake-bark Maple (is that the right name for it Russell?) might fall into my crosshairs. I like to just set-up and have a cup of coffee handy and just study the tree at first. I try to keep in mind what I want the finished product to look like. If I am unsure of that I try to remember to keep the idea of an Isosceles triangle in mind when wiring and trimming. That is my new word for the month! ;) In other words a triangle with a long side and a short side. Another design idea I use is something Russell Coker told me one time. The tree needs to tell a story. In other words, if it is leaning to one side it is because the weight of the tree is pulling it that way. The design should make sense. I can't have a tree leaning left if all the visual weight of the tree is on the right side and vice-versa.

Now that I have those ideas in mind I start making my design decisions and start wiring or trimming as necessary. A few things to remember is that the tree is stiffer and care must be taken when wiring and bending branches and when the tree starts to grow out in the Spring we must pay attention to the wire as some species swell quickly and we can have a wire-burned branch.

Take care and enjoy this time of year with our friends, families and our Bonsai trees.



Over Wintering Bonsai

By Brent Walston

Introduction

Bonsai need protection from killing cold temperatures in winter. The degree of protection depends upon the severity of the winter in your area the species that you grow. This protection can be simple as bringing them inside the house a few times during the coldest nights of the winter to a complex scheme to store your entire bonsai collection for the whole winter.

I Need Winter Protection?

If you grow only temperate climate plants (those that freeze in the winter in their native habitats) and you live in USDA Zones 8 and above you will rarely need freeze protection. I have a rule of thumb that has worked very well for me in determining the degree of protection: No winter protection is needed for temperate climate woody plants until the temperature falls below 15F (-10C). Below this point some kind of freeze protection is needed. I live in USDA Zone 8 and each year I prepare my entire container plant areas for freeze protection by programming the irrigation system to come on if I expect the low temperature to approach 15F. When water freezes it actually releases a good deal of heat. Of course the ice doesn't heat up, but what does happen is that the temperature of the ice does not fall until all this heat is released and radiated into the surroundings. In addition to this, the ice forming on the plant can also insulate it somewhat, protecting it from falling air temperatures. This form of frost protection is widespread in the orchards and vineyards of our area. Tropical bonsai, in general, need protection from freezing. This means bringing them in the house in the winter or keeping them in a greenhouse (See the article Growing Bonsai Indoors).

Subtropical species, which are tender but can tolerate some freezing, must be protected from temperatures, which will kill their small branches or roots. This varies by species and you must do some research to find out just how low a temperature they can tolerate. In general, these species have shallow or no dormancy requirements and can be brought into the house if a suitable environment can be established. Other simple, temporary freeze protection measures include placing a tarp or plastic film over the plants for the night and removing it during the day, or moving the plants to an unheated, but protected area. These are methods for minimal freeze protection. If you live in Zones colder than 8 and experience low winter temperatures below 15F, then you need more protection.

Zone Numbers for Species to Determine Freeze Protection Levels

The numbers given in the USDA Zone system are for mature top growth. This is fine for landscape purposes, but it doesn't really work for container plants including bonsai. Roots do not undergo the cold hardiness acquisition the top of the plant experiences. In general they are much more tender and susceptible to freezing temperatures. This is not much of a problem when the roots have the great insulating capacity of the earth, but in container plants the roots experience the same freezing temperatures as the top of the plant. This is the reason I use the 15F degree rule of thumb for all temperate plants in containers. Some species can indeed survive root temperatures lower than this, but it makes a good guideline for the majority of temperate species.

Why Can't I Just Bring Them in the House?

Temperate climate woody plants must go through a period of cold dormancy to survive. This is not just a good idea; it is a matter of necessity. If you do not give them this cold dormant period they will die. For a more in depth discussion of this problem, and for giving temperate plants a dormant period in the refrigerator, see Dormancy and Indoor Bonsai.

Serious Freeze Protection in Cold Areas

In areas colder than Zone 8, you must prepare your plants for winter protection. This begins in the fall by allowing your plants to experience the full brunt of the early freezes to trigger their cold hardiness mechanisms (see the article Freeze Damage in Woody Plants). Let them stay outside and unprotected until the low temperatures start to fall below about 20F. At this point, begin your cold protection plan. In areas of heavy snowfall, nature will do most of the work for you. Make sure that your plants are well watered before the freezes and snows hit. Before the earth freezes, heel your plants into the ground and cover the tops of the pots and lower stems with mulch such as pine, cedar or fir bark. After the first snowfall, cover your plants with snow and make sure that they stay covered with snow all winter. It's as easy as that. If you don't get a lot of snowfall, or you can't depend on a regular snowfall, then other measures must be taken. One method is to build a cold frame to house your plants in the winter. There are many plans for cold frames and all of them will work as long as they keep the temperature from falling below 15F. I strongly recommend that you place a minimum-maximum thermometer in the cold frame to monitor the temperature. Cold frames do have one serious disadvantage, they can heat up if the sun can shine through a transparent housing. For this reason it is best to place it out of direct sunlight or construct the covering with translucent, not transparent materials. You do not want the temperature to rise above 40F for any appreciable period of time. This you can monitor with your min-max thermometer. In very cold areas, heating cables can be installed in the floor of the cold frame. Another method of freeze protection is to house your plants in an unheated garage, basement or other structure for the winter. Again, it should be monitored to make sure that the temperature does not fall below 15F. Small space heaters can be installed with a good low reading thermostat to heat the enclosure when the temperature starts to fall below 20F. High temperatures should not rise above 40F for more than a few days at a time. A more bizarre, but perfectly acceptable method of over wintering is to keep your plants in the refrigerator during their dormant period. This works well if you only have a few plants and you need to give them the required dormant period and plan to return them to an indoor environment in late winter. The constant 35 to 40F temperature of most refrigerators is ideal for winter storage.

What About the Need for Light?

Dormant deciduous trees have no leaves and do not need light until they begin growing again. Dormant evergreens do not need light as long as the temperature does not rise above 40F for very long. Evergreens stored in the dark at temperatures around or below freezing (32F) will survive the winter nicely.

Do I Need to Water?

Many areas will have warm spells during the winter that will warm the earth and your bonsai above freezing. This is a good opportunity to uncover them and check for dryness. If they need water, give them a good soaking and replace the mulch and coverings. Always check to make sure that the

When Should I Bring Them Out?

After dormancy requirements have been satisfied and the temperature is allowed to rise above 40F for more than a few days, temperate climate plants will begin to grow. This will occur in the total dark. Therefore, you should plan to have your plants introduced to sunlight when temperatures reach this level. In some areas, spring weather can fluctuate wildly and you must be prepared to protect plants from sudden freezes. And finally, Bonsai is a wonderful and diverse art. They can be grown indoors and outdoors, stored for the winter, or manipulated to give them dormant periods. There is no reason to let your natural environment limit your possibilities. But you must pay attention to the needs of the individual species and the limitations of your space.

Some nice trees to look at and maybe to steal a few ideas from!



ACBS Annual Pot-Luck Christmas Dinner

I want to thank everyone who came and celebrated with us. The food was great and no one went home hungry!

ACBS “Day of Bonsai”

Our Day of Bonsai will be Mar 24th at St Luke’s Hall at St Luke’s Episcopal School. Russell Coker has gathered up a gorgeous collection of Bald Cypress trees for the workshop. His idea is to style these into their natural look which is a flat-top design. He brought one to the Christmas dinner and it is fantastic. If you are interested to sign-up for the workshop just email me at magsterone@msn.com. The example below is not Russell’s but it is what we are expecting after the initial design and some time to grow. It doesn’t get much better than this!



Ben Oki Workshop Jan 25th

Come and join us as we watch Ben do his magic once again. If you want a tree styled by Ben it is \$20 and to sit in it is all of \$3. Where else can you see a Bonsai Master at work for that price? If you do not know about Ben OKI just Google his name and see all the links that show up. Let me know by email if you are interested in the workshop.

Last but Not Least

We will have our Jan meeting on the 3rd and it will consist of a workshop or if you need some design ideas, it is the right time to bring your tree(s). Also I will be canvassing our fellow members to get some ideas for the upcoming year. The Tokonoma will be provided by Joe Kuhn and the snacks will be provided by the club. See ya there.

P.S. Here is an interesting link I came across. <http://bonsaisc.blogspot.com/>