



# The Midwest Bonsai Connection

A Newsletter Published by The Midwest Bonsai Society

August 2001

## President's Message

By the time you receive this newsletter, I hope that each of you has given serious thought to entering one or more of your trees in this year's exhibit -- particularly those of you who have never exhibited before, or have never won a ribbon in a previous exhibit, and are eligible to show your trees in the novice category. After a brief hiatus in 1997, the novice category returned in 1998, and the number of entrants in that category has grown steadily each year. This year's judge and featured guest artist, Mr. Warren Hill, is deeply committed to bonsai education, and was delighted to learn that the Mid-America Exhibit has a novice category. I would like to show him our own enthusiasm for stimulating beginners, so I invite and encourage all of our novices to enter their best trees in this year's exhibit. Since we will record Mr. Hill's comments on each tree, this is an excellent opportunity to have your trees critiqued by the curator of the national collection. Perhaps his suggestions will help you create the masterpiece of tomorrow.

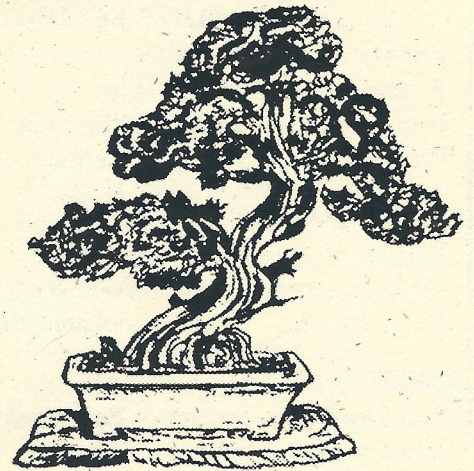
Even seasoned exhibitors will want to attend the next meeting on Monday, August 6, part of which will be devoted to a demonstration of the techniques used in preparing a tree for public display. There is always something new to be learned from the experiences of your fellow members. In my own case, I'll be looking for some advice about how to remove particularly stubborn calcium deposits from glazed containers. Also, in previous year's exhibits, I've noticed that many of the unglazed containers have been "overgreased", which has a tendency to call attention to the container and detract from the overall impression of the tree. It also makes the container very slippery and difficult to move. So those of you who will be exhibiting conifers in unglazed pots should come to the meeting to learn more about what types of oils should and should not be used in preparing your containers.

Finally, returning to the theme of my message in last month's newsletter, I renew my urging that all of you consider volunteering some of your time to do one of the

many tasks which need to be done in running the exhibit. The response to my call for volunteers in the July meeting was a good beginning, but we still have many slots to fill. In the meeting on August 6, Susan Cargill will run through a list of the dates, times and jobs for which we still need volunteers. I hope that all of you will make an effort to sign up for one or more of these openings.

I look forward to a great exhibit in August, and hope to see all of you there.

-STEVE



## Calendar of Events

August 6 - 7:30 p.m.  
**Midwest Bonsai  
Society Meeting**  
Jack Douthitt

August 16  
**Show Prep &  
Entries**

August 17, 18, 19  
**Mid-west Mid-  
America  
Bonsai Show**  
August 19 -  
**Show Breakdown**

September 29 & 30  
**Prairie  
States Show**

## The Mid-America Bonsai Exhibit

It's time, dear members of the Midwest Bonsai Society. It is time to clean up the pots, trim the trees to perfection, lay in the moss, get out the display stands and show your trees.

It is time to sign up to be a helper - time to get our hands dirty. It is time to go to Susan Cargill and/or Rich Helminiak and say, "Here I am. What can I do?"

The 24th Annual Mid-America Bonsai Exhibit will be held at the Chicago Botanic Garden beginning with tree registration at noon Thursday, August 16 and the grand show will continue from Friday morning through Sunday late afternoon, August 19.

There will be vendors of pots and tools and trees and stands. There will be classes designed to improve your abilities and your trees. There will be trees to look at and admire and get inspiration from.

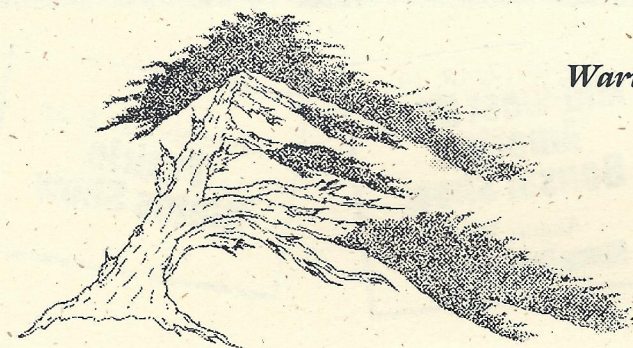
Warren Hill will be here in spite of his heavy schedule at the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum in Washington, D.C.. Joining Mr. Hill will be Jim Doyle - owner of Nature's Way, Brussel Martin former head of BCI, Mike Hanson, Bill Valvanis - publisher of the International Bonsai Magazine, our own Ivan Watters, Frank and Tony Mihalic, Keith Scott - formerly curator of the collection at the Phipps Conservatory in Pittsburgh and Jack Douthitt who gave a most interesting talk at our July Meeting.

There will be a dinner and auction at Forty One North, 445 Skokie Blvd., Northbrook on Saturday evening August 18 at 6PM. There will be a silent auction in conjunction with the dinner.

### WORKSHOP SCHEDULE (See desk for location)

| FRIDAY AFTERNOON   |                      | 1:00PM to 4:00PM  |                |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Brussel Martin     | Chinese Elm          | Intermediate      | \$80 Material  |
| Ivan Watters       | Japanese White Pine  | Inter./Advanced   | \$175 Material |
| Warren Hill        | Styling & Refinement | Inter./Advanced   | Your Material  |
| SATURDAY MORNING   |                      | 9:00AM to 12:00PM |                |
| Bill Valvanis      | Korean Hornbeam      | Intermediate      | \$125 Material |
| Brussel Martin     | Green Mound Juniper  | Beginner          | \$40 Material  |
| Frank Mihalic      | Mame Variegated Elm  | Beginner/Novice   | \$45 Material  |
| SATURDAY AFTERNOON |                      | 1:00PM to 4:00PM  |                |
| Jack Douthitt      | Styling & Refinement | Inter./Advanced   | Your Material  |
| Keith Scott        | Trident Maple        | Inter./Advanced   | \$30 Material  |
| Ivan Watters       | Dwarf Ficus          | Beginner/Novice   | \$45 Material  |

*continued on the inside page*



*Warren Hill*

## Program Chairman Column

On the night of the meeting, August 6, it will be less than two weeks to show time. The trees you plan to exhibit should be ready, except for finishing touches. For those last minute touches, bring your trees to the meeting.

The first part of the meeting will be devoted to show preparations, volunteer sign-up, over-all scheduling, show set-up, and tree preparation.

If you have never won a ribbon, show a tree in the novice category. (It doesn't make any difference how long you have been growing bonsai.) If you have won a ribbon, show a tree or two or three or ten in the open category.

Remember there is a superb line-up of workshops for beginners through advanced at reasonable prices. The show weekend is the time to immerse yourself in bonsai. You will learn something and come away with some good material.

After we talk about the show preparation, we will break up into several demonstration areas. One person will be preparing his tree for the show, another will be wiring, and another will be pinching junipers. Each area will be specific so you can focus on your choice. Everyone is encouraged to bring in trees (not just show trees) for advice and practice. If you have questions or problem trees this is the time to get help.

We are planning to raffle several of the trees styled at the June meeting. For a buck or two you could go home with the product of one of the Midwest's finest artists.

Plan to come August 6. Bring your trees, your questions, and your brightest smile!

Jim Fairchild

## SATURDAY DEMONSTRATION

Auditorium Demonstrations (\$1.00 Admission)

10:30AM Warren Hill Styling Demo of Selected Material  
2:00PM Bill Valavanis Introduction to CLASSIC Bonsai Art

## SUNDAY MORNING

9:00AM to 12:00PM  
Jim Doyle Alpine Fir Inter./Advanced \$100 Material  
Frank Mihalic Cork Bark  
White Pine (Mame) Beg./Nov./Int. \$75 Material  
Bill Valavanis Tiger Bark Ficus Beginner/Novice \$50 Material

## SUNDAY DEMONSTRATION

Auditorium Demonstration (\$1.00 Admission)

10:30AM Brussel Martin Styling and Refinement of Selected Material

Warren Hill and Jack Douthitt will conduct workshops under the title of Styling and Refinement. These workshops are designed to allow the student to take advantage of Warren's and Jack's unique talents while working on the student's own established material or on new material. The sales area will have quality material available as well as all necessary accessories available for the workshop participants.

WORKSHOP REGISTRATION FEES ARE \$50 FOR EACH WORKSHOP MATERIAL CHARGES ARE ADDITIONAL.

## Web Sites for Our Bonsai Area

### Midwest Bonsai Society

<http://Communities.msn.com/MidwestBonsaiSociety/>

### Prairie State Bonsai Society

<http://Communities.msn.com/PrairieStateBonsaiSociety/>

### Near West Bonsai Society

<http://Communities.msn.com/NearWestBonsaiSociety/>

### Problem?

e-mail Roger Thompson  
[aroger@xnet.com](mailto:aroger@xnet.com)



## Willow Extract Application in Rooting Cuttings by L.R. Byrd, Jr., M.D. TX.

Recently I read a note, where I do not recall, indicating that cuttings rooted better if soaked a short time in a water extract of macerated willow limbs before they were placed in the rooting media. This experiment suggests that this is correct.

When I finished pruning my two Bonsai of English Ivy "Teena", a small leaved variety, I had a large number of cuttings of mature wood. These were divided into three groups of 14 comparable cuttings. Six in each group already had rudimentary roots up to 3/16 inch in length that had developed "in the air" through the growing season. As these cuttings were prepared they were dropped in water to soak.

Group I cuttings on removal from the plain water soak were placed in the water extract of willow and allowed to soak for 30 minutes. They were then removed, their bottom end dipped in Rootone, and placed in the rooting box.

Group II cuttings were removed from the plain water soak, treated with Rootone on their bottom ends, and placed in the rooting media.

Group III cuttings were placed directly in the rooting box immediately on removal from the plain water soak.

The three rows of cuttings were adjacent in the rooting box and subjected to the same conditions of temperature, light and moisture.

The water extract of willow was prepared by cutting three 24", 1/2 inch diameter, freshly cut willow limbs (stripped of leaves and small branches) into 1/4" thick rounds with pruning shears. This macerated the willow to considerable degree. It was allowed to soak in water for 48 hours at warm air temperature then removed with a strainer. The remaining solution was immediately used to treat Group I cuttings.

At the end of two weeks all cuttings were removed from the rooting

media. Group I, willow extract and Rootone treated, had 13 cuttings rooted (93%), 9 with roots up to 1-1/4" in length, 4 with roots up to 1/2" in length.

Group II, plain water and Rootone treated, had 12 cuttings rooted (86%), 6 with roots to 1/2 inch in length, and 6 with roots to 1/4 inch.

Group III, treated with plain water only, had 9 cuttings rooted (64%), 4 with roots to 1/2" in length, and 5 with roots to 1/4" in length.

It appears from this small experiment that the application of the willow extract stimulated a greater root development. Perhaps others will give it a trial on material more difficult to root and report the results.

Every activity takes more time than you have!

## Bonsai, My Philosophy and Aims by Susumu Nakamura

There are many ways to grow Bonsai - it depends on the person. Even in Japan, 15 years ago I found an article in a major newspaper on "Watermelon Bonsai..." Bonsai has only recently become more well known throughout the world. Ten years ago, I took several Bonsai containers with me when I visited the United States.

A female customs officer at the airport asked me "What are these?" I answered "They are Bonsai containers." "Huh, what is, Bonsai?" she asked me.

I tried to explain to her about Bonsai using my limited vocabulary, "it is a tree that is dwarfed and shaped artistically. These containers are used to plant the Bonsai trees in."

Unfortunately, she had trouble, understanding about it because she had never heard about or seen a Bonsai tree before.

Nowadays however, Bonsai has become more popular. I talked to an Italian gentleman on the airplane from Rome to Torino not long ago. He told me, "My wife gave me a small Bonsai for my birthday and after a couple of months it died! I can't understand why?"

I asked him to explain what he had done with it and found out the reason - he had left it in a dark room for a long time. He didn't understand that it is a real tree that needs to be grown outside like other trees. We can bring it in to appreciate it for a day or two but it needs to be outside to grow and be healthy. Regardless of whether people understand bonsai correctly or not, its popularity as a potted tree has spread around the world remarkably in the last ten years.

Let me try and explain what I believe Bonsai to be. Bonsai is a plant that has been grown in a container for appreciation and purposefully kept small or dwarfed using various kinds of techniques over a long period of time. There is a definite aim and plan to determine its final shape. In China, there are many schools of Bonsai which

they call "Pen-jing". Each school has a different way to express their plants. After coming to Japan, Bonsai went through various transitions and ultimately came to express the essence of nature. By viewing Bonsai, one can enjoy and feel the serenity of nature.

In Japan, it has been traditional to describe Bonsai using the words "Wabi" and "Sabi". Wabi has the feeling of being quiet, calm, humble and even lonely. Sabi has the feeling of being simple, poor, declining, and very old. This concept of Wabi and Sabi came from the Tea Ceremony or "Wabi-Cha" which was developed by Sen-no Rikyu over 400 years ago.

As for myself, I do not think that Wabi and Sabi are enough to cover all of Bonsai. I believe that they are important but I also think that "Ga" is needed. What is "Ga"? The concept actually comes from China. In China, they have the word "Rikugi" which means "to make a poem". Rikugi has six requirements as follows: Fu, Ga, Sho, Fu, Hi, and Kyo. Each is a different aspect needed to make a Rikugi poem. The second concept is the one I am referring to in Bonsai, "Ga". It has the sense of elegance, grace, serenity and, modesty. Never loud or showy, or course. When we call someone a "Ga-jin", we mean that person is refined and has a noble spirit. He is never vulgar or low in word or deed. Therefore, in my opinion, even if a Bonsai is powerful, dazzling or intricate, if it doesn't have "Ga" then I can't say it is a good Bonsai.

Bonsai is a living thing that is always growing and changing. It is a different art from paintings which also express through shape and color but are static and never change. Thus, we can not keep and enhance Bonsai for a long time unless we have a good plan based on a sense of beauty and use good techniques. If we don't do these things, the Bonsai will be destroyed by haphazard pruning, shaping, and cultivation. Then, we can no longer call

the plant a Bonsai but a "Sakuochi" which means a plant that's health and beauty have declined. Therefore, it is extremely important to have an aim based on a sense of beauty, technique and experience.

When we Japanese study something, we have been taught to follow three principles. The first thing is "Shu" which means to be consistent by practicing the instructions of the teacher or the fundamentals faithfully.

The second thing is "Ha" which means to break down or tear something apart in this case change or reject the teaching of the instructor. Of course, we must have "Shu" before we can proceed to "Ha" in Bonsai.

The third and final principle is "Ri" which means to leave, go away, or be independent.

Consequently, at the last stage of learning from our teacher we should advance on the basis of knowledge we have accumulated, with our own ideas, talent, and creativity.

Often, however, at this time we feel that we must assert our own views completely while ignoring the knowledge and techniques we have learned. We call this in Japanese "Namaiki" or "Namabyoho". It is difficult to attain greatness with such an attitude.

Aside from these three principals, I feel that it is very important to develop the best characteristics of one's material or future Bonsai by observing it with a free and open mind. Observe each new plant with a fresh view toward using the plants natural characteristics.

To summarize, I feel that the concept of "Ga" (elegance, grace) is the spiritual backbone of Bonsai with Wabi (calm, quiet) and Sabi (simple, old) as the building blocks for growing Bonsai. We must forever renew our knowledge and keep a beginner's interest and mind.

I hope to have a happy life with Bonsai as my lifelong friend.

## From The Editor

The August Newsletter lays a little bit of stress on the "Mid-America Show" which, of course, it should. This is the most important event in the annual life of the Midwest Bonsai Society. However so much ink has run and will run on this, I decided not to devote the whole issue to the show.

However, the Show should be important to every member and every bonsai enthusiast in the Midwest area. Keep in mind that the Prairie State show and the Milwaukee show are important to us as well. Anything that promotes bonsai is important to all of us.

I must not forget, the Prairie State Show will be held on September 29 and 30 at Cantigny in Winfield. That is not far away. There will be workshops held on Saturday and Sunday and many trees on display. Call Dick Anderson at 630-963-5620 or e-mail at [mkarka1958@aol.com](mailto:mkarka1958@aol.com) for info or workshops.

To be selfish about it, bonsai promotion makes tools and material and knowledge more accessible to each one of us. Lest we forget.

I will now descend from my soap-box.

I went out to the CBG production department while Nakamura-san and our volunteers were there working on his trees. He was kind enough to give me an article he had written about his feelings about his art.

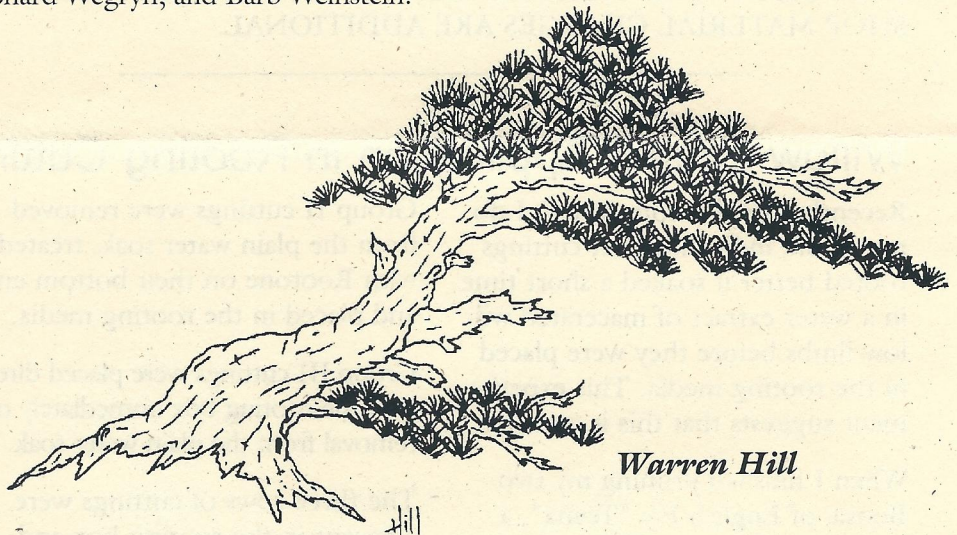
I was very pleased with Jack Douthitt's talk at our July meeting. I think we tend to forget that bonsai is a very fluid art form. It is an art form that is dependent on a living thing and our reaction to how it looks when we first see it and then to how it changes as it grows and reacts to our styling. Jack referred to it as a living "three dimensional sculpture".

It is difficult to keep the above in mind when we are faced with the

different types of trees and the possible styles. Added to this is the selection of the right pot, the care and feeding and protection of the tree from insects and the elements. There is so much to know and so much to learn.

It is my intent to run a mix of articles including as many as I can find on the emotional and artistic approach to bonsai like the Nakamura article in this issue. Consequently I am also running an article that Jack Wilson had in the BCI publication 20 years ago (in the next issue).

The Midwest Bonsai Society sponsored a Beginners I Workshop at the Garden on July 15. Nine beginners attended and seemed to enjoy creating their own bonsai. My special thanks to volunteers Howard Kerman, Leonard Wegryn, and Barb Weinstein.



*Warren Hill*

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Info for the newsletter  
or the web page  
or archival material

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