

# MIDWEST BONSAI CONNECTION

[www.midwestbonsai.org](http://www.midwestbonsai.org)

## November Thoughts!

In the midst of the Covid 19 restrictions the Midwest Bonsai Board has been hard at work. OK, it has been on-line video conversations, not in person meetings but we are doing our best to provide some helpful tips and events to our members. An example of this is the article in this month's newsletter by Matt Mazza about creating the perfect Nebari (surface roots) for your tree. Please provide feedback as to whether you found this interesting and helpful. For any suggestions, comments or feedback please use our email [midwest.bonsai@yahoo.com](mailto:midwest.bonsai@yahoo.com).

**Garden Walk** – This recent event was a success as Dick has detailed in the last newsletter. We want to do it again in the spring when our trees come outside. At this point we have no indications from the Chicago Botanic Garden that they would host our May Exhibit in 2021. Until we hear from them with a clear answer we will work on alternative events.

**Andy Smith** – Andy did a demo at Hidden Gardens recently and we had it filmed. Andy is from Golden Arrow Bonsai, in Deadwood, South Dakota, and is one of the finest col-

lectors of trees for bonsai in the United States. Of course, he is also one of the favorite vendors at our August show. Jose Fonseca will be looking at how we can edit the video segments and post them on line for your enjoyment.

**Winter storage** – You are invited to send your thoughts and photos of your winter storage set up to the society's email [midwest.bonsai@yahoo.com](mailto:midwest.bonsai@yahoo.com). This may be content for a future newsletter or an exhibit at our May show (COVID permitting).

**On-Line tree photo competition** – We are thinking of asking members to send in photos of their best trees for an on line photo contest. Let us know if you think this a good idea.

**MBS Help Line** – Remember if you have questions about taking care of your trees, or how to sharpen tools, or anything else related to Bonsai please e-mail them to [midwest.bonsai@yahoo.com](mailto:midwest.bonsai@yahoo.com). One of our more experienced members will get back to you with our best advice.

Stay warm and safe. Keep your mask handy.  
—Larry Stephan

## November 2020 – Creating Nebari by Matt Mazza

“Roots rule!” That’s what I was taught right from the start. It makes sense. Of course, there are ‘distractions’ like the beautiful flowers or colors of fall foliage on deciduous trees. Maybe the well-manicured foliage pads of pines and conifers might catch your eye. But those things won’t make much sense if the important parts of the tree aren’t in place. Particularly with bonsai, because we are dealing with idealized miniature models of much larger specimens, precision is important; and so the structure of our trees becomes the defining variable resulting in: “Ooooo” or “nyeh.”

In keeping with definition and precision, I guess we should pull out the old Google and get some definitions for Nebari:

“The surface roots that flare out from the base of a bonsai tree.” -Wiktionary



Above is a tree with nebari that meets our definition. With the right techniques, care and time, desired and astonishing results are possible. Photo taken by Tim Priest; The Bonsai Collection of the Chicago Botanic Garden for “*Bonsai A Patient Art*”

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# Events Calendar

**Please note:** What we have shown below is a list of events scheduled as of October 20, 2020. Where we have information on cancellations due to COVID 19 we have included same. While all of the local clubs are still not meeting BC Bonsai and Hidden Gardens are open and offering workshops. Chris Baker from the Chicago Botanic Garden is offering Zoom workshops. In addition, Ivan Waters is offering one on one workshops. Please check all events to insure they have not been canceled.

## **Monday November 2, 2020 MIDWEST BONSAI SOCIETY NOVEMBER MEETING - CANCELED DUE TO COVID 19**

Next meeting is scheduled for February 2021. For more information or updates go to <http://www.midwestbonsai.org/meetings>

## **Wednesday November 4, 2020 PRAIRIE STATE BONSAI SOCIETY GENERAL MEETING - CANCELED DUE TO COVID 19**

Room TEC/1038b College of DuPage. For more information or updates go to <https://prairiestatebonsai.com/news-and-events/>

**Saturday November 7, 14, 21, & 28, 2020  
SATURDAY WEST SUBURBAN MASTERCLASS BONSAI WORKSHOPS with Ivan Watters - CANCELED DUE TO COVID 19** but one on one, bring your own tree workshops are available by reservation any day of the week not booked. For further information go to [yasukunai@hotmail.com](mailto:yasukunai@hotmail.com) or call 847-917-0817.

**Saturday November 7, 14, 21, & 28, 2020  
SATURDAY MORNING BONSAI with Mark Karczewski**  
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM, Hidden Gardens in Willowbrook, IL. Bring your own tree workshop. For further information go to [http://www.hidden.garden.net/bonsai\\_saturday\\_morning.html](http://www.hidden.garden.net/bonsai_saturday_morning.html) or call 630-655-8283.

**Sunday November 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29, 2020  
SUNDAY NORTH SUBURBAN MASTERCLASS BONSAI WORKSHOPS with Ivan Watters CANCELED DUE TO COVID 19** but one on one, bring your own tree workshops are available by reservation any day of the week not booked. For further information go to [yasukunai@hotmail.com](mailto:yasukunai@hotmail.com) or call 847-917-0817.

**Saturday November 7, 2020  
DECIDUOUS TREE - LAST STYLING BEFORE WINTER WORKSHOP at BC Bonsai**  
1:00 PM - 3:30 PM, bring your own tree workshop at 2250 Durham Drive, Wheaton, IL. For further information or to register go to <http://www.bcbonsai.com> or call 630-386-1515.

**Saturday November 14, 2020  
FIR/SPRUCE - LAST STYLING BEFORE WINTER WORKSHOP at BC Bonsai**  
1:00 PM - 3:30 PM, bring your own tree workshop at

2250 Durham Drive, Wheaton, IL. For further information or to register go to <http://www.bcbonsai.com> or call 630-386-1515.

## **Saturday or Sunday November 28 or 29, 2020 BRING YOUR OWN TREE WORKSHOP with Todd Schlafer**

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM, Hidden Gardens Willowbrook, IL. Todd is a collector and bonsai artist from Colorado. Todd started teaching in 2018 and has been in demand ever since. For further information go to <http://www.hidden-garden.net/bonsai.html> or call 630-655-8283.

## **Wednesday, November 30, 2020 DECIDUOUS BONSAI TREE WORKSHOP: ONLINE with Chris Baker**

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM, Chicago Botanic Garden, Fall is a great time to work on deciduous bonsai trees. You will learn specific deciduous bonsai care and how it changes seasonally, including feeding, pruning, wiring, and repotting. For more information or to register for workshop go to [https://www.chicagobotanic.org/adult\\_education/horticulture/deciduous\\_bonsai\\_tree\\_workshop\\_online](https://www.chicagobotanic.org/adult_education/horticulture/deciduous_bonsai_tree_workshop_online)

**Saturday December 5, 12, 19 & 26, 2020  
SATURDAY WEST SUBURBAN MASTERCLASS BONSAI WORKSHOPS with Ivan Watters - CANCELED DUE TO COVID 19** - but one on one, bring your own tree workshops are available by reservation any day of the week not booked. For further information go to [yasukunai@hotmail.com](mailto:yasukunai@hotmail.com) or call 847-917-0817.

**Saturday December 5, 12, 19 & 26, 2020  
SATURDAY MORNING BONSAI with Mark Karczewski**  
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM, Hidden Gardens Willowbrook, IL. Bring your own tree workshop. For further information go to <http://www.hiddengarden.net/bonsai.html> or call 630-655-8283.

**Sunday December 6, 13, 20 & 27, 2020  
SUNDAY NORTH SUBURBAN MASTERCLASS BONSAI WORKSHOPS with Ivan Watters - CANCELED DUE TO COVID 19** - but one on one, bring your own tree workshops are available by reservation any day of the week not booked. For further information go to [yasukunai@hotmail.com](mailto:yasukunai@hotmail.com) or call 847-917-0817.

**By Reservation Only in November and December  
ONE ON ONE WORKSHOPS at BC Bonsai**  
Time TBD, 2250 Durham Drive, Wheaton, IL. Pick a time and plan to spend 1 to 2 hours in one on one workshop with your tree or ours. For further information or to register go to <http://www.bcbonsai.com> or call 630-386-1515.

**Saturday January 16 thru Feb 27, 2021  
BONSAI BASICS at BC Bonsai**  
9:30 AM - 12:00 PM, 2250 Durham Drive, Wheaton, IL. Covers history, styles, tree selection and development, wiring, trunk and branch manipulation, soils and fertilizers, pest control, pot selection, and propagation. For further information or to register go to <http://www.bcbonsai.com> or call 630-386-1515.

# Monthly Care Report – November 2020

**Outdoor Trees:** Be ready to put your trees into winter protection as soon as the weather dictates the need for it. Generally, in November you can leave them outside with no protection. Trees from Hardy Trees Hardiness Zones 4 and below do not tolerate the 28-35°F temperatures, so protect them or bring them in sooner. By around December 1, group the remaining Very Hardy Trees together on the ground in a protected space. To cope with the occasional night or two in the 25°F or below range, cover with tarps or snow blankets. Make sure to weigh down the blankets so wind doesn't blow them off. A consistent night temperature of 25°F is a good reference point as to when the Very Hardy Trees need to be put in their final winter protection location. When bringing trees in, remove remaining foliage on deciduous trees and any weeds or debris on the soil before placing them into winter protection. Reduced wind and light are extremely helpful for dormancy. A spraying with a general fungicide can help prevent problems over the winter and in the Spring. If leaving the

trees out with pots/roots buried, provide mulch or wood chips for protection. Burying with snow when it comes will also help protect from freezing and provide moisture. Water if there is no snow so the roots don't dry out.

Regarding Semi-Hardy Trees like Chinese/Japanese Elms, Pomegranate, Holly, Chinese Sweet Plum, Olive, Japanese Silverberry and Crepe Myrtle, leave them outside as long as possible, but bring them in when the temperature is consistently hitting the lower 30's. They are safe in your regular storage so long as the temperature does not drop below 30°F; leave them there until they are dormant. Once they're dormant, bring them inside and put them under light and heat. They should start leafing again in a week or two after which you can take care of them as you would your indoor trees per below.

Keep your trees properly watered. The trees will use less water in the cooler temperatures. Fertilization may be stopped at this point. Do not repot except in the case of an

emergency. Wiring may be done and is easier to do on deciduous trees after the leaves have fallen. Wire as many trees as you can in December but do not prune them. Once leaves have dropped from your deciduous trees is a good time to begin needle thinning your two needle pines. If you thin last year's needles by pulling, be careful to pull in the direction they grow. Otherwise, you will most likely lose the bud you are trying to stimulate. Safer approach is to cut off needles, rather than pulling. On strong, well-developed pines, you can also thin this year's needles by thinning to 5 or 6 pairs of needles in the top half of the trees and 7 or 8 pairs in the lower half of the trees.

**Indoor Trees:** Continue fertilization assuming the trees will be receiving 12-18 hours of light daily and will continue to grow. If you are not using supplemental light, do not fertilize until mid-March. Some people opt not to fertilize at all (and adjust their lighting accordingly) during the winter so as to avoid long leggy growth. Such growth

will occur if you are not providing enough light but will be exacerbated if you are fertilizing and not providing enough light. All species are a little different, so adjust your watering, fertilizing and light accordingly as needed for your particular indoor conditions. Provide some means for humidity via humidity trays or a room humidifier. Circulate air with a small fan. Light pruning may be performed if long internodes occur. Wiring may be done, but repotting should be avoided unless there is an emergency. If you must repot, use a heating pad set at ~80 degrees below the pot until the tree recovers.

Regarding lighting, unless you have a system that provides good results and has a reasonable cost factor, the current system of choice is LED (Light Emitting Diode) lamps. On a broad basis, LED is far superior to everything else in use. Cost, results, electricity use and ease of operation are all attractive. The author used metal halide lighting in the past and was very pleased with the results (some trees seem to prefer it to LED), but the electricity consumption is considerably higher than LED.

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## Nebari

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Saw that definition in about 18 other places, too. How about these:

"In Japanese: Nebari – A very important aspect of a Bonsai is its Nebari (or: root-flare), the surface roots that provide visual balance to a tree." – Bonsai Empire

"The surface roots and the lower trunk area. Sets the feeling and direction of the tree." – Bonsai, Peter Warren

Nyeh. How about mine...

In a bonsai tree, the lower trunk area and surface roots emanating from the base which develop a sense of stability by symmetry or asymmetry, depending on the static or dynamic design of the tree, by virtue of spreading outward (flare) on all or primary sides with no unintentional large gaps, crossing or dominating roots. It is also the foundation and set up for the tree structure above.

Ooooo! Not bad. We're going to pick this definition apart with do's and don'ts based upon my reading and learning from Naka, Warren, Watters and Yoshimura.

Let's first point out that trees grown in pots do not

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# Nebari

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naturally develop balanced root systems let alone good surface roots. Commonly, roots grow more (or less) on one side, they cross over other roots, they circle around the trunk or even start growing upward. The more attention paid to your roots in the beginning, the less time it takes to correct the problems. While those are things that generally need to be avoided, there is a caveat in the definition: the word "unintentional." If you have a dynamic design working for your tree, or perhaps a style where the visual weight of the tree is asymmetrical, you may want or need stronger root growth on one side. "Unintentional" also addresses our ability to have a little artistic leeway, perhaps in the way of gaps or somewhat dominating roots if it looks correct. It won't do if all trees look the same.

It goes without saying that soil plays an integral role in building healthy roots, but this essay is not going to get into soil mixes. Suffice it to say that the soil needs to allow for a good balance between water and oxygen, and proper pH with some plants. Your fertilizing will take care of the rest.

The root system should be comparable to the branching system with respect to ramification. For an idealized tree in a pot, efficiency is key. For example, if your tree is going to have a couple of very strong branches, you will likely have a couple of very strong roots that you need to keep. If your tree canopy is going to be well-ramified, then you will need a well-ramified fibrous root system with mostly smaller roots. We're going to assume that this is the design/direction most trees will take. It needs to be understood that roots which belong below the soil surface should not be confused with the roots originating from the base of the trunk; nebari. Nebari should be left exposed to increase the beauty of the tree.

It's important to remove the tap root at an early age to promote growth of lateral roots. Cutting the tap root (and other unnecessary roots) under the trunk in a multi-step process hopefully causes them to callus up. From that point, the roots need to be controlled and structured so that they flare outward and evenly (if that's your requirement; and it is for most trees) around the tree. It is best that no single root or grouping of roots becomes dominant. If you prune too much of the root system, the tree will become weak or perhaps die. Prune too little, and the roots will become unruly and the tree will not develop. Percentage that you can safely prune depends on the tree and the time of year, so it's not prudent to set a percentage to prune in this document. However, 50% is usually a conservative maximum and safe number to suggest. Study your species before you prune more than that. If you're root pruning deciduous trees in the fall, you don't want to prune more than 30-35%. Keep in mind that this is not a safe operation due to the unpredictable fall weather in Chicago. Act accordingly.

Success with your roots also depends on proper pruning techniques. Once root overgrowth is cut away, I tend to look at refinement root pruning as judiciously as I do branch pruning. Cutting back strong roots and leaving them short will encourage more fibrous roots to develop. I'll look at junctions where small roots extend from the larger root branches and prune for the direction that I want the root to extend. Particularly with roots near the soil surface, your cut should be made so that the cut face faces downward since that's the direction you want new roots to grow. If the root is already directed downward, then you want the cut face facing outward so that new roots grow outward.

As the tree grows new roots, the new roots make it increasingly difficult for air and water to penetrate into the soil. Feeder roots absorb the majority of the nutrients and main roots closer to the trunk receive less, which causes main roots to harden and eventually decay. Therefore, while we want these surface roots to grow for good nebari, we must also recognize that it is periodically necessary to thin them out, and sometimes even cut back the main root. Main roots don't have the ability to absorb many nutrients because of few or lack of feeder roots.

As noted, while we recognize that the vast majority of tree appearances benefit from an even/balanced root and nebari system ("on all or primary sides"), you may need your root system to be asymmetric based upon your tree design or style. For example, you may prefer or need asymmetrical roots for informal upright, slanting, cascade or semi-cascade, windswept or even literati styles.

Whatever style works best for the tree, it will benefit when we understand that growth of new roots occurs better in the shade. We're continually admonished as to the importance of rotating our trees so that all sides of the canopy get equal and appropriate sun. This applies to new root growth in reverse. At the same time, exposed surface roots will grow larger in the sun. So if you have an asymmetric or dynamic design, you may need to use a little more strategy in your tree rotation to either grow or maintain stronger roots where you need them. The point to be driven home here is that you don't just rotate your trees for the canopy sake. You must do it for your roots/nebari as well. Shade to promote new roots; sun to increase the size of exposed roots.

In creating nebari for your tree, you want roots to be growing just below the soil surface so that in time, you can raise the tree up in the pot to expose and show off the nebari. Exposing the roots (when ready) will start the process of giving the roots the same texture as the trunk. If you need surface roots, I can tell you from my experience with maples that placing a thin layer of sphagnum moss on the soil surface helps the roots grow up near the surface and sometimes into the moss. This works for all trees, but especially for deciduous, broad leaf evergreens and tropical trees. You don't want the moss

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# Nebari

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to be thick so that it constantly retains water. The roots may grow too much up into the moss and not down in the soil. Also, it will keep too much moisture in the soil and the tree may become unhealthy. The thin layer of sphagnum moss (maybe up to 3/16" thick) keeps the area below cooler, moist (not saturated) and shaded.

With some very young trees, the author has had success increasing the size of the trunk base and creating more flare and outward roots by placing a saucer or plywood underneath the trunk base for a couple of years. Extra care must be taken to fill all voids below the trunk with soil. Another technique can be learned through a video for purchase from Bonsai Empire where Bjorn Bjorholm fastens carefully straightened and well-spread roots of a shishigashira japanese maple to a piece of plywood before placing it in a pot, and then allows time for the roots to develop in a very organized and defined manner.

Now that we have some means for getting nebari properly growing, we should look at some items that need to be corrected or prevented. From John Naka (Bonsai Techniques 1):

## **Faulty Rootage:**

- 1) Coiled rootage: unattractive and unnatural. This is usually a consequence of growth in a restricted volume of soil in a round pot.
- 2) Deeply buried roots will not give the effect of an aged tree rather one of stunted growth.
- 3) Vertical rootage appears unsecured and unstable (and sloppy).
- 4) One-sided rootage implies instability. If corrective

measures are not possible (i.e., very difficult for pines), it can be compensated for by planting the lacking root side at the edge of the pot. Avoid facing strong roots in these cases toward the front of the pot.

- 5) Root size should be in proportion to the tree. Small roots on a large trunk or large roots on a small trunk appears unbalanced.

There are many methods for correcting faulty rootage which would expand this essay by quite a bit so it won't be covered in this issue. Some methods that the reader can study are inarch grafting, drilling holes into the trunk in areas needing roots and covering with sphagnum moss, making deep scars with a chisel and covering with soil and moss, tightening copper wire around the trunk into the cambium attempting to force rootage to grow above the wire, or planting in a deeper pot for several years. Deception can also be utilized by placing strategically oriented rocks or planting fern or grass which may actually promote root growth.

A simple method to grow roots where needed is to cut scars into the unrooted side, paint on a rooting hormone and bury the side in sand or sphagnum moss until healthy roots emerge. Unruly roots or roots growing upward can be pinned down with air tube and anchoring wire, filling any air voids with soil. Roots that are too large can be carved. You can carefully and precisely apply sumi ink to the carved surface, or apply a sealer to the whole area to promote healing or protect from drying out and rotting.

## **Sources:**

John Naka, Bonsai Techniques I and II, 2002 & 1987  
Peter Warren, Bonsai, 2014  
Ivan Watters, Beginner's Bonsai Class Notes, 2016  
Yuji Yoshimura & Giovanna Halford, The Art of Bonsai, 1957

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## **MBS Help Line Reminder**

Given we cannot hold General Meetings or more Events this year we understand that many of you may be looking for help or advice on what to do with a tree or grove or accent plant. If you have questions please e-mail them to [midwest.bonsai@yahoo.com](mailto:midwest.bonsai@yahoo.com). One of our more experienced members will get back to you with our best advice.

## Chicago Bonsai Club

There are normally no meetings of the Chicago Bonsai Club, a chapter of the Midwest Bonsai Society, from November through February. Our next regularly scheduled meeting is in March and of course that may not be possible. We will provide update in our next newsletter (February 2021) as to status of the Garfield Park Conservatory in Chicago and their closure due to COVID 19.

If you would like further information about or to join the club, please contact: Susan at sukazoo17@gmail.com or call 773-235-9479.

## November MBS General Meeting Has Been Cancelled Due to COVID 19

The November meeting was originally scheduled for 7:00 p.m. on Monday, November 2th, at the Chicago Botanic Garden's Burnstein Hall, located in the Regenstein Center.

The Chicago Botanic Garden informed the board that they are canceling all onsite Plant Society meetings for the balance of 2020.

Our next regularly scheduled meeting would normally be February 1, 2021. We will of course keep you posted based on Garden and COVID 19 considerations.

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## Membership Request

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to: **Midwest Bonsai Society**

Please Check If Renewal

Send to: Midwest Bonsai Society  
P.O. Box 1373  
Highland Park, Illinois  
60035-7373

**\$35** Electronic Newsletter **OR \$45** Newsletter by Mail

**Midwest Bonsai Connection**

### Library Resources

MBS has a fine collection of Bonsai books and journals which are available for loan. Please contact the Librarian for information.

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