



BONSAI NEWS

A Monthly Publication of the Lake Charles Bonsai Society

Volume XXX Number 12

December 2017

CALENDAR

- **Wednesday, 1 November 2017 at 7:00 p.m.:** The monthly meeting of the **Bonsai Society of Acadiana** (BSA) normally meets on the first Wednesday of each month at the Ira Nelson Horticulture Bldg., 2206 Johnston Street, Lafayette, LA.

- **Tuesday, 19 December 2017 at 7pm: LCBS December meeting is cancelled.** We will meet, as usual, at Alan Walker's bonsai studio at 916 Kirby (842-5203) for our next meeting on Tuesday, 16 January 2018.

- **19-21 January 2018: Louisiana Bonsai Society's Mid-Winter Workshop** at the Baton Rouge Garden Center, 7950 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA. **Friday, 19 January:** Bonsai Workshop 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Workshop \$40. Limited to 8. Supper social \$12. Observer \$10. 5:00 Demonstration by David DeGroot. **Saturday, 20 January:** Bonsai Workshop 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Workshop \$50 (LBS members \$40). Limited to 8 participants. Lunch \$12. Observer \$10 (LBS members-Free). 2:30 Demonstration by David DeGroot. **Sunday, 21 January:** Bonsai Workshop 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Workshop \$45. Limited to 8 participants. Lunch \$12. Observer \$10 Raffle of two demonstration trees at 2:00 p.m. Separate raffles. \$5 per ticket \$20 for 5 tickets. Need not be present to win. Pre-bonsai available: Workshops are bring-your-own-tree, or a limited supply of pre-bonsai is available for the workshop. Vendors: Rick Berrigan, A Little Piece of Heaven Bonsai; Bill Butler, Bill's Bayou Bonsai; and Byron Myrick, Myrick Bonsai Pottery will have a supply of trees, supplies, and pots. Silent Auction: Visiting clubs are encouraged to bring items for silent auctions to be held each day of the workshop. Proceeds will go 90% to the donating club and 10% to the Garden Center. Registration: To register, please call Lowell Tilly at (225) 241-2396.
- **Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 February 2018: The 19th Noelanders Trophy** organized by the Bonsai Association Belgium at the Limburghal in Genk, Belgium. Featured international demonstrators are Kunio Kobayashi, Bjorn Bjorholm, Giacomo Pappalardo, and Milan Karpízek. No photography allowed. Details TBA at <http://bonsaiassociation.be/>.
- **23-24 March 2018 from 9-5: LCBS Annual Exhibit and SWLA Garden Expo** at Burton Coliseum, 7001 Gulf Hwy, Lake Charles, LA 70607. Set-up is 7:30-5:30 on Thursday, 22 March 2018. Preview Party & Gumbo follows from 6-8.
- **19-22 April 2018: The American Bonsai Society, together with the Bonsai Society of Greater St. Louis, present: Gateway to Bonsai – 2018** at the Gateway Center in Collinsville, IL. Headliners are Bjorn Bjorholm, Marc Noelanders, and Matt Reel. There will be a juried bonsai exhibit with awards and prize money of \$1000.00 for Best in Show. Workshops, seminars, critiques, and

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vendors along with an ikebana display and workshop. Easy access from St Louis airport to the Convention Center with ample parking. Details at <https://www.facebook.com/events/196348750839850/>.

- 23-29 April 2018: **Malaysia-BCI International Friendship Tour & Exhibition** hosted by Bonsai N Stone Academy at Summit USJ, Persiaran Kewajipan, USJ 1, 47600 Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia. For details contact I.S. Ing at isng1818@gmail.com or ☎ +6019-3372539.
- 8-9 September 2018: **6th U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition** in Rochester, NY at Total Sports Experience (TSE), 435 W. Commercial Street, East Rochester, NY 14445. Featuring Minoru Akiyama, Michael Ryan Bell, Bjorn Bjorholm, Enrique Castaño, Kora Dalager, David DeGroot, David Easterbrook, Boon Manakitivipart, Larry & Nina Ragle, Kathy Shaner, Sean Smith, Suthin Sukosolvisit, Tony Tickle, and Peter Warren. Details at <http://www.usnationalbonsai.com/>
- 12-14 October 2018: **BCI 2018** at Mulhouse, France and hosted by the French Bonsai Association.
- For an excellent listing of known recurring bonsai events, please visit <http://www.magiminiland.org/Conventions.html>

LAKE CHARLES BONSAI SOCIETY

<http://LCBSBonsai.org>



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Lake Charles Bonsai Society
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Lake Charles Bonsai Society is a member of  **Bonsai Clubs International,**  **Louisiana Alliance of Bonsai Societies,** and  **Lone Star Bonsai Federation.**

DECEMBER BONSAI TIPS

by Alan Walker

Although your bonsai require very little attention this time of the year, don't neglect them in the rush of December. Root rot can become a big problem, if you haven't modified your watering procedure from the summer. Make sure that you water only when your bonsai's soil has gotten on the dry side. Your deciduous trees are not transpiring when their leaves have fallen, and the cool temperatures do not promote much evaporation, so your trees are not using much water. If you've been collecting and had to prune your newly collected material, be sure to seal all the cuts. They won't really start to heal until dormancy ends and by the exposure to winter winds will draw moisture from the wounds faster than the traumatized root system can replenish it. Coat all the cut areas with Calsmate or some other sealant to give that new addition a chance to survive.

December is a good time to rewire, since the branches won't begin to swell with growth again until dormancy ends. Be careful with your deciduous material, though. Even though they are denuded and easier to wire, there is less sap in the branches now, making them more brittle. Your pines, junipers, and most other evergreens are still fairly pliable. As always, remember to use wire that is harder to bend than the branch it is to train. That way you won't need to put your branches at risk from over bending

in order to get the correct angle to stay. Also, the heavier wire will be less likely to scar the branch, if you don't notice the branch thickening in time.

Prepare soil now for the potting season. There are so many things to do in the early spring, that any early preparation done now will be appreciated then. Tag any trees which will need repotting. Now is the time to order pots, so they'll be there when you need them.

The slow winter season is a good time to photograph your bonsai. Look up the article by Dan Barton in this issue of **BONSAI NEWS** or contact your editor for a copy. Your deciduous material is fully exposed, and there's nothing like a black and white photograph of a tree to reveal flaws in the branch arrangement. This can be your blueprint for pruning in the spring. Your photographs may also reveal a better front or potting angle. Keep these photographs with your record book. It can be quite rewarding to look over your bonsai records and note how your trees have progressed over the years. Bring your records to one of our general workshops or the meeting to get suggestions from other members for shaping and design. If you're afraid of being pressured into cutting more than you want, just having photos or sketches can save you from regrets and still allow you to get the input from others.



Bonsai Society of Acadiana

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BSA Notes

Bonsai Society of Acadiana held its monthly meeting on Wednesday, November 1st.

December is traditionally a holiday social. Details will be shared late.

PICTURE PERFECT: Photographing Bonsai

by Colin Lewis

The importance of taking regular photographs of your bonsai can't be overemphasized. I'm not talking necessarily about print quality portraits, but just simple records photos of each tree's progress year on year. This is more important than most people realize. Bonsai are like kids in many ways- you love them but they cause you grief! They also grow up before your eyes and you don't even notice. There have been many instances when I've looked at a tree and thought that I was wasting my time, the darn thing hasn't really progressed and it's been how many years? Then I'll look at photographs of the same tree that are only

three or four years old, and the difference is remarkable. Suddenly there is renewed enthusiasm for the tree- if it's developed this much in four years, what could happen in the next four?

Photographs are also a record of your own development as an artist. I look back at ten or fifteen year-old pictures of some of my trees and I blush at how mediocre they were. I wonder how I could have been so enamored with them at the time; was I seeing the tree as it really was or was I seeing the image of the future in my mind? Probably both.



When you look at the shambolic little scots pine on the left (pictured in 1992) it's hard to imagine that it would ever become an acceptable bonsai, yet it only took four years to develop it

to the image on the right. It seemed longer, but looking back at the photographs provides encouragement with current projects that seem to be going nowhere.

The camera doesn't lie

Photoshop might, but the camera doesn't. When you look at a tree in the flesh, your brain subconsciously registers that some of the branches are further away than others. The furthest are reduced in visual prominence- your brain almost ignores them- so any faults they contain are diminished. In a photograph, or even through the viewfinder of a camera, the tree is reduced to two dimensions- everything has equal visual impact regardless of distance from the lens. Faults that are hardly significant in the flesh by virtue of their position are now equally as prominent as the key front branches. Inter-branch spaces that register as empty in the flesh, now are filled by parts of rear branches, What appeared to be clean, refined silhouettes are now broken by wayward shoots from behind being thrust into the same plain as everything else. Whenever I finish a tree I will always set up the camera and look at the tree through the viewfinder. I find this to be by far the easiest way to spot all those minor flaws that are otherwise missed.

If it doesn't look right through the viewfinder, then it isn't right yet.

These days, with all the new-fangled digital cameras that can turn a dead chimpanzee into an expert photographer, taking decent photographs of your trees is easy - not so much fun, but easy. Having said that, here are a few tricks that will help improve the detail and usefulness of your picturesö .

Cell phones

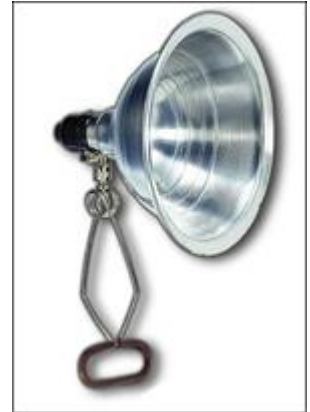
Please don't! Smart phones take pretty good photographs but to see them properly you need to download them to your computer and either print them or view them on a full-size screen. People are constantly saying to me: "What do you think of this?" and thrusting a cell phone with a matchbox

size picture under my nose. "I think it's a phone," is all I can muster.

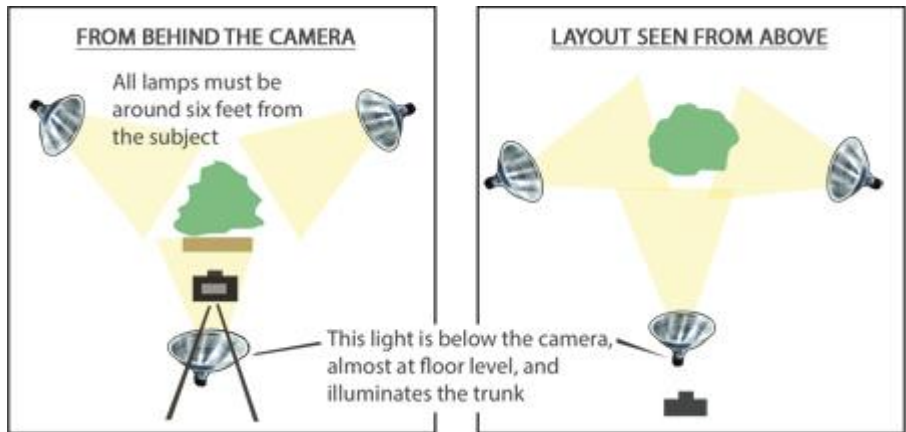
Lighting

If you have proper photographic lighting, I'll assume you know how to use it. If you don't have any, be not afraid- you really don't need them and there's no need to go to that expense for this purpose. If you're photographing indoors, you can always use flash (see below) but static lighting is softer and can be adjusted to illuminate different areas.

Grab three of these lamp holders with aluminum reflectors and spring clamps, they're in all the hardware stores and cheap as chips. Fit them with 200w bulbs, nothing fancy, just regular bulbs. Keep the lights at least five feet away from the subject, preferably more, otherwise there will be 'hot' areas where the light is too intense. You'll need to adjust the color temperature on your camera down, toward blue, a little to compensate for the reddening effect of tungsten light. Or you can use a photo-editing software later. The diagram below shows roughly the set up that works for me. It cost less than thirty-five bucks, including the bulbs.



Photographing outside will always give evenly distributed lighting, since there is light being bounced about all around you. However, avoid direct sun because that will create highlights that will 'burn out' and appear bright white, and deep shadows that will obscure all detail. Either choose a lightly clouded day or move your subject into the shade. Using sheets of white card as reflectors to bounce some light into the trunk is a good idea.



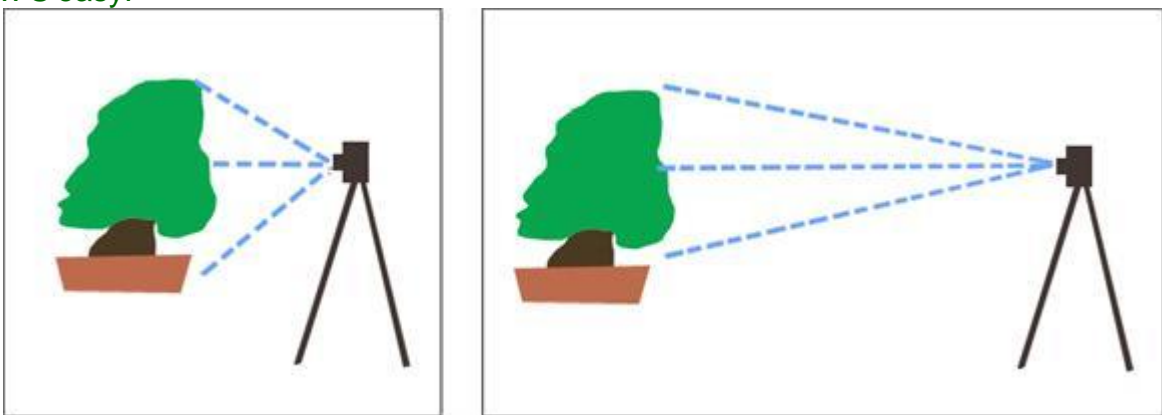
The two side lights are only slightly in front of the subject and a foot or so above. The fill-in light in front of the subject is almost at floor level.

Using flash

Sometimes your camera will tell you to use flash even if you don't want to. These days, the camera is usually right, but what can you do about that horrible 'ghost' shadow that the flash always casts on the background? Here's a little trick I learned a long time ago, before digital cameras were even thought of (it works for 'red-eye' in pictures of people too). Take small piece of white paper (you may have to experiment with tissue paper, printer paper, etc. until you get the best result) and hold it in front of the flash, angled at 45 degrees upward. This will diffuse the light and divert most of it up to the ceiling. There will generally be enough light bouncing around the room to take a good shot, but there will be no ghost shadow. S'easy!

Distance

Best results are obtained when the camera is as far away from the subject as possible, and maximum zoom is used. There is no discernible loss of resolution using the zoom, but there is a vast improvement in accuracy of perspective. Imagine the camera is only three feet from the subject: the lens looks up at the top of the tree and down at the base, which creates a subtle 'fish-eye' effect. This is because the middle of the tree is closer to the lens than either the top or the base. When the camera is twelve feet from the subject, the light from the top of the tree and from the base are nearer parallel, so there is no distortion.



When the camera is close to the subject (left) the middle is much closer to the lens than the top or the bottom, which causes distortion of the image. When the camera is further away the lines are closer to parallel and distortion is minimal.

Backgrounds

It should be a no-brainer to use a plain, uncluttered background, but it's

amazing how many folks don't. Fences, garage doors, greenhouse sides, even white clapboard walls are too fussy. Try an old

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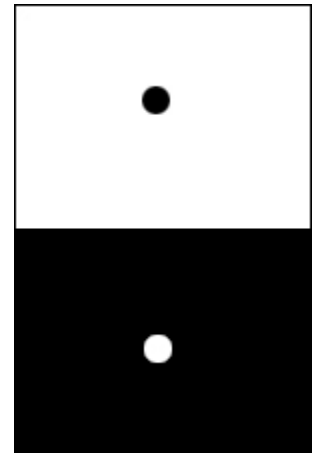
bed sheet, plain curtains, a sheet of painted plywood or similar. Photographic backdrop paper comes in rolls up to eight feet wide, and isn't all that expensive. There's certainly enough on one roll to last several bonsai friends a lifetime. You can even use the sky as a backdrop if you can get the angles right, but be sure to compensate for the backlighting when you expose - make sure the focus and light reading points are on the tree, not on the sky.

Keep the background as far behind the subject as possible. If you're using the 'auto' setting on your camera the depth of field will be fairly large, which means any blemishes, shadows, creases, etc., on your background will be in sharp focus if it is too

close to the subject. The further away you place the background, the more any blemishes will become hardly noticeable.

Black versus white

This is interesting. Look at the photographs below- they were taken with the same camera and same lighting within thirty seconds of each other. Yet you would swear that the tree on the right has had a years' extra growth and development.



This is because light from the white background pierces every space in the foliage. White light 'spreads' when it hits the eye's retina, making its source seem larger. Look at the two dots in the illustration. They are both precisely the same size, yet the white dot seems slightly larger. This is exactly what happens to every single pinpoint of space in the foliage, every tiny irregularity in the periphery. They are all made glaringly obvious.

Against a black background, not only do the smaller spaces and irregularities blend tonally with the surrounding foliage,

but the larger spaces also become slightly smaller and recede. The lighter, more colorful foliage becomes the more dominant factor and the foliage looks fuller.

Now, there is no such thing as black. That is to say that no matter how dark a surface is, you can still cast a darker shadow on it. Black non-reflective backdrop paper still reflects enough light to make all the undulations visible. The absolutely best solution is to use black velvet. Pricey, but the results are sensational. The textured surface absorbs 99% of the light that hits it and provides a totally jet black background.

Velvet can be pricey, even the synthetic version. Luckily, there is an unbeatable alternative that is totally free! It's called night. Most of us can find somewhere around the property where we can place a tree and light it, with nothing but the dark of night behind. A garage doorway, a floodlit deck, maybe even an open window. There

seems to be a different quality to the background achieved this way - less artificial yet just as black. Using the dark of night also gives you the opportunity to mess with the lighting, varying the illumination on different parts of the tree to achieve interesting effects without worrying about throwing too much light not the background.



Photographed against the night sky, with only two 'anglepoise' drafting lamps and a sheet of white reflecting card, this beautifully ramified English elm has almost a ghostlike appearance, yet it loses no detail.

If you want portraits, a black background is going to show off your tree at its best. If you want a true representation, or a quick snap for record purposes, a light color is better. If you can photograph your tree against a white or near white

background and it still looks absolutely 'finished', then it almost certainly is. **A tree has to be very, very good indeed to withstand a portrait against a light background.**

PHOTOGRAPHING BONSAI: SOME IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER

by Dan Barton

It is in consideration of the rank photo-amateur possessing minimum photographic equipment that I make the following suggestions regarding the photographing of bonsai. Having said this, I must assume that you know how your camera works and that you are already familiar with the focus and exposure controls. Obviously, if you intend using your photographs for reproduction purposes, more attention will have to be paid to technique than if you are

making casual photo-records of your trees to log their progress over the years. In any event, you should always strive to place your bonsai in front of a plain background in order that the outline and texture can be clearly seen without any interference from cluttered backgrounds.

Photography is totally dependent on reflected light in its various intensities, and it is vital that you take this into account when setting up your subject. Assuming you are

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using available daylight to photograph your trees, avoid excessive sunlight. This sort of lighting causes extremes of contrast in the photograph, making exposure very difficult to control. A bright, sunny day with a thin film of cloud filters the light beautifully, providing an even light spread with acceptable contrast. Place your subject so that the light source is approximately at 45° to the front plane of the tree. This will reduce disturbing shadows from immediately behind the tree. By not having too much contrast it is easier to appreciate more detail in the tree. On the other hand, avoid dull overcast days, as this will produce images that are "flat" and structurally boring.

If you find that the foliage of your bonsai is, adequately lit but that the trunk is too much shadow, you can direct light into this area by carefully reflecting it from a well-positioned mirror. Furthermore, if the lighting is too strong on one side of the tree, it is possible to remedy this by asking someone to hold a reflecting board (plain white poster board about two feet square) on the opposite side of the tree to "fill in" some additional light on the shadow side. This will also enable more detail to show.

An effective plain background can be made by suspending an 8'x4' piece of painted plywood against a wall. This background can have its color easily changed by painting with emulsion paint to suit individual trees. Alternatively, you can use a slide projection screen placed behind the tree, although this will not be suitable for very large trees. Avoid letting the tree "break" the edge line of the background, as this will be visually distracting.

When taking an exposure reading, I find the most consistent results can be achieved if you place a piece of mid-gray card about twelve inches square in the position of the tree, then take a local exposure reading from this card after which it can be removed. This will give an average tone which is ideal for overall exposures. If you take a reading directly from the subject in front of a white background, the chances

are that the background will adversely influence the exposure reading, often causing the subject itself to be underexposed. For consistent results, always use the same piece of card.

If possible, always use a stable tripod with your camera to reduce "camera shake". This will enable you to use the smallest aperture with extended shutter speeds in low light levels. The small aperture setting will give the maximum depth of field in your focus, resulting in plenty of detail in your subject.

If using an electronic flash, avoid pointing it directly at the subject, as this will cause distracting and unsightly peripheral shadows around the tree. It would be better to direct the flash away from the subject at a white or silver reflector board which will redirect the diffused light onto the bonsai, providing a much softer light with gentle shadows. Of course, if you do this it will be much more difficult to establish the correct exposure, and some experimentation will be necessary to establish a reliable working technique. As an initial guide, you can increase the exposure by two "stops" above what would normally be correct if you pointed the flash directly at the subject.

Always make sure trees are meticulously groomed and pots thoroughly cleaned, etc., before photographing them, as there is nothing less forgiving than a photograph to show off a bonsai's faults.

Choice of film is somewhat personal, but I usually use a medium speed film of around 100 to 124 ISO. If you are taking color pictures for reproduction in books or magazines, make sure you use color positive (slide) film and not color negative film which is suitable for making prints. (Editor's note: *This part is nearly obsolete due to the prevalence of digital imaging.*)

Always position the camera so that it is approximately equal to the mid-point of the trunk of the bonsai to give the best appreciation of depth and form. If you intend to use your slides for lecture purposes, it is best to stick with the same

format. That is, "landscape" (horizontal format) as opposed to "portrait" (vertical format), and always be as conscious of the composition as possible. It can sometimes be helpful if some device is included in the picture to give an idea of the scale of the tree.

Finally, if taking black and white photographs for reproduction in books, etc.,

it is better to have slightly "flatter" images rather than too much contrast, as this does not reproduce well. Always remember to make a note of the date that the photograph was taken.

Happy snapping!

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Lake Charles Bonsai Society

2018 MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL APPLICATION

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(if couple, please list both names)

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Enclosed are my 2018 membership dues for (select category/½ price after 30 June):
Individual Membership @ \$25 **Family Membership @ \$30**
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Happy Holidays! Please renew your membership now!

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