



# Kitchener-Waterloo Bonsai Society



## Newsletter

May 2005

www.kwbonsai.com

### President's Message

This month's meeting will host Les Betka from the Ontario Cactus & Succulent Society. Les was scheduled to present his demonstration and slide show last Fall, but could not make it due to witnessing a traffic accident. He did arrive but too late for the meeting.

Les has been growing and training succulent bonsai for many years and has won many first place ribbons for his unique collection. Les will be returning with a van load of succulent bonsai for sale following his presentation. Members are invited to bring any succulent bonsai they have for display and questions. Les will discuss pruning, repotting, watering and light and temperature requirements. Come check out the unique world of succulent bonsai! As always, members from the Guelph club are invited.

Spring was on its way until we had this cold spell, keep your trees protected from any hard frosts as it could damage the emerging leaves and flowers. If you have lost trees over the winter, try to learn by your mistakes and adjust your over-wintering plan to have better success next year. Don't be discouraged if you lose a tree or two, it happens to everyone.

Thank to everyone who helped collect the Larches last month, especially our Vice President, Les, who organized the expedition. The work shop was a great success!

Keep your eye on the upcoming events calendar for the Toronto Bonsai spring show.

Nigel

### Upcoming Events

#### Next General Meeting:

May 18, 7:30pm

**Topic: Les Betka** on Cactus & Succulents

**World Bonsai Convention**, Washington D.C. **May 28-31**, Details in March Newsletter.

**Toronto Bonsai Society**, Bonsai Show and Sale, May 28 (noon to 6 pm) and May 29 (10am -5 pm)

**Workshops with Brook Zhao** Guelph, **June 3-5**, see March Newsletter for details.

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### Time and Place.....

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month (except July, August and December) at 7:30 pm at the Adult Recreation Centre, corner of King and Allen Streets in Waterloo.

### Zen Wisdom

A good Bonsai should be like a punch in the stomach – it should take your breath away.

## Mike's Musings

We restyle our trees. We change the pots. We create group plantings from single trees. We collect trees in the wild. We imagine beautiful solitary trees. Or mysterious forests. We think ourselves fortunate to find little gems. But nothing in this world is free...we get our cars stuck in the mud. We even locked his keys in the car – all in the name of Bonsai. All in the name of Yamadori – the path of the collector. But judging by the 2-year old group plantings some of you brought to the last meeting, it is all worth it.

If you couldn't join us on the collection trip but are still interested to add a few larches to your collection, here are the directions: take Rest Acres Road South, off the 403, west of Brantford, until you come to the hydro corridor. The collection area is on the west side, under the hydro lines. If you drive past the Esso station, you've gone too far.

See you at the next meeting...  
Michael Eckardt

## Tips & Tricks

Here are some hard-earned lesson in tree collecting:

- Even if the path off the road looks solid, walk, don't drive.
- Large, dead tree trunks make excellent levers to lift your car out of ruts.
- Always, always, always take your keys out of the ignition in the wild, especially if you leave your car for only a second.
- Bring a second pair of shoes to drive back home.
- Gloves and garden pruners are invaluable.
- Bring water. Not only for the plants.
- Tie a bright ribbon to your tools to easily spot them again in the wilderness.
- Remember – you are your worst enemy.

## Vendor's review

The BonsaiHouse  
Canal Road West, off 400N,  
north of Major Mackenzie.  
I drove up to the Bonsai House  
after spending an afternoon at  
Vaughn Mills, a mega mall, with  
my wife and children. Driving  
into the yard was a bit of a  
shock – it was the opposite of  
the mall culture!  
But the proprietor (I didn't get  
his name) was very friendly and  
immediately opened his shop  
for me. He obviously  
specializes in indoor trees and  
has a nice collection of pots in  
various sizes and price ranges,  
and a few other bonsai related  
items – fertilizers, tools, wire.  
The prices seemed in line with  
being so close to Toronto. He  
also showed us his greenhouse  
where he prepares his  
Taiwanese grown trees for  
sale. The selection consisted  
mainly of tropical trees, from a  
massive – huge!- jade tree, to  
pepper trees, Chinese elms,  
Serissas etc. The few maples I  
saw seemed a little too pricey  
for my personal taste.  
In summary, don't let the  
condition of the yard put you  
off. The Bonsai House might  
just have the right pot or tree  
for you.

## Trading Post

I'm looking for a few old and  
weathered 2x10s for a bonsai  
stand. Contact me by email  
meckardt@sentex.ca  
or call 662-6991. Thanks!

## Mining the Newsgroups

This month I selected a discussion on a topic that has confused me for some time ...

Rastislav Kralovic of Bratislava, Slovakia asked:

"I'm really puzzled about using sealants to cover cuts. The information I managed to gather seems to be pretty inconsistent; basically, there are people who

- 1) say that basically no sealant is needed as trees heal best without any interference
- 2) say that (almost) each large cut should be sealed with the original Japanese cut paste
- 3) give a number of recipes for a home made cut paste (Elmer's glue, modeling clay, plumber's putty, bee wax, gardener's wax, etc...) which works the same way as the Japanese original

I'm a beginner to bonsai and I have to decide what to use (if anything). Is there any general study /resource about it or is it a trial-error for each particular location? I guess the healing process (and hence the sealant application) depends on the species and climate?"

To which received the following responses:

From Marty Haber:

"Using a patch over cuts is largely aesthetic. It used to be thought that patches keep diseases out and sap in. Actually, unless the patch is perfectly sealed and is waterproof, it can encourage bacteriological infestation by providing a dark cavity in which a disease can incubate. For this reason, most tree professionals forgo the use of any covering over the wound. Yet, many bonsai growers still use cut paste over large cuts. I believe they do it because a small tree does look better with it. My personal preference is an acrylic filler, mainly because it is waterproof and can be purchased in many colors to match the bark. Besides, the cost is a couple of bucks vs. \$10 for a small jar of imported cut paste."

From Jim Lewis:

"Like so many other things in bonsai, 'it depends . . .'  
Some species' bark tends to dry and peel away

from wound sites, some of them badly, others less badly. For trees with thin bark (maples, azalea, etc) I often use a bees wax-base paste that I got from an arborist friend who also does bonsai and smear it thinly around the edges of the cut, almost as a "glue" to hold the bark in place. Otherwise, I usually make a mud mix (often by spitting in my palm and mixing some common dirt in), and rub that over the cut site to help staunch any bleeding and to darken the wood so the cut doesn't stand out so. ... Water soluble white glue also works well and has the advantage that it lasts just long enough for the bark around the wound to heal before it is washed away. My bee's wax paste has to be cleaned off with alcohol or witch hazel after a month or so."

and from Michael Persiano:

"Major wounds resulting from trunk chops can hold water and promote decay if they have not been cut at the proper angle. As for the aesthetic manipulation of the wound site, carving can become part of the solution. There are many schools of thought surrounding the application of sealants. I have never seen any of my trees incur a fungus because a cut paste or putty was applied. I have seen the positive effects ranging from stopping the undesirable flow of sap in Maples and Pines with a cut paste to the accelerated the healing of wounds on Elms, Boxwoods, Hornbeams, and Pines with cut putty.

The aesthetics of bonsai should also enter into consideration when applying sealants. For this reason, I often rebark the site where the sealant has been applied. This is accomplished by shaving bark from the pruned branch and pressing it onto the sealant."

From bonsai.org, the German Bonsai Club's webpage, a contribution from Martin Schillings (translated by yours truly):

Cheaper and clearly better [than the green wound paste] is Vaseline. While it does not seal up the wound for a long period of time, it protects the cambium layer from desiccation and enables the wound closing mechanism to

get started immediately. It is completely harmless for the plants and well suited to shine up unglazed bonsai pots. I can, therefore, only recommend that everyone adds a little tub to their collection..."

Looks like the debate continues... To misquote the Bard: "To putty or not to putty, that is the question!" Indeed.

What is the consensus here in the Club? Do you or don't you? Let me know.

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In response to the last newsletter's column on Superthrive, Club Vice-President Leszec Rybak sent his take on the issue:

Since I got interested in bonsai (September 2003) I have visited numerous web sites on the subject and also read and purchased quite a few books by renowned authors. The topic of Superthrive comes up quite a lot.

The best description of the formula action I found was in Dave Joyce's book "The Art of Natural Bonsai". In my opinion this book is the best written on the subject of bonsai and the author definitely knows what he is talking about based on his over 30 years experience in growing the trees, writing books and lecturing. This is what he says about Superthrive: "...Always add Superthrive or a similar vitamin and hormone transplanting formula to your first watering of newly repotted tree...". He then proceeds to describe the test he did on 165 bare-rooted larches that he divided into two groups and watered one of the groups using Superthrive solution (initial watering after potting up and follow up watering after 10 days. The other group was watered with normal water. The results were as follows:"... after two months the two groups had equally high death rates,. However after three months the trees that I had used the Superthrive on had twice the growth as the other group. After five months I had lost 56 % of the trees treated with Superthrive compared to 66 % of the other group. After one year the final death toll was 56 % vs. 69%. Combined with the staggering difference in vigor this convinced me once and for all of the reviving power of Superthrive. As a result, I always add

Superthrive (10 to 50 drops per gallon) to the water for the first watering of newly repotted trees of all species. The exact dosage is not critical as long as it is within range of 10 to 50 drops. These solutions are a bit pricey, but are well worth the money..."

So this is what Mr. Joyce has to say on the subject. My personal experience with Superthrive: I have bought a bottle, have been adding to the water periodically, have also been using it as Mr. Joyce recommends. Did not see any results, some trees lived some died most likely from other causes. One thing though; the label on the Superthrive bottle suggests that it has this almost supernatural reviving power and I don't think this is a case. I have tried to rescue the trees that were weak or dying but not dead yet and even soaking of bare roots in Superthrive did not do any good. The trees died regardless.

To summarize the whole issue, I tend to believe in the value of the Superthrive as a vitamin and hormone supplement for the trees especially since it has been recommended by people who know much more about bonsai and horticulture in general. On the other hand I think it is a bit overrated as a panacea for all the problems one may have with plants in general (it is recommended for anything that grows by the manufacturer!). I will keep on using Superthrive because even if it will not perform miracles on my trees it does not seem to be harming them either."

### How-to ...

Speaking of larches ...in the Bonsai International magazine, 3/1986, I found an article on larches. The author, Andrew N. Lentz, described how to build taper in the larch trunk. Apparently, the tree will not taper naturally. Therefore, he suggests to wire a low branch straight up, and bend the rest of the tree out of the way. After some time, cut off the old trunk, and build a tree from the old branch. Once the new trunk is sufficiently thick, repeat the process by finding a new branch low on the trunk. By following this method, you'll have nicely tapered trunk eventually.

A slightly faster approach is to forget about the taper and design a literati (free-style) tree.