



Kitchener-Waterloo Bonsai Society



Newsletter

April 2005

www.kwbonsai.com

President's Message

Well, spring is finally here, the birds are chirping in the morning and the buds are swelling on the trees. Soon we will be busy getting the trees ready for another growing season.

We are organizing the Larch collection day for the Saturday (April 16) before the next meeting (if the ground is not frozen). This site is underneath some hydro towers near Brantford. The trees are small, as they spray this area to keep the trees and weeds from growing. We will meet at the Adult Recreation Center at 10:00 am and head down there by car. It is advisable to take your own car so you will have room to fit your trees in and so you don't mess up someone else's car. I will be looking into getting a letter of permission from the property owner, who I believe is Ontario Hydro. Les will provide a map for everyone, so no one gets lost.

Please remember that you should never collect trees without the permission of the property owner.

This month's meeting will be a Larch workshop, we will be potting and styling the trees collected on Saturday. If you can't make the collection day, I'm sure someone will have an extra tree for you. These small larches are excellent material to create a forest or for individual specimen trees.

Depending on the root structure of your tree, you may not want to pot the tree in a bonsai container the first year or two until you get a fine compact root system developed. A large clay pot or a wooden box is advisable to help your tree transition from the ground to a pot. I will be potting a Larch that Les collected last year. You will need a pot, drainage material, bonsai soil, root pruners, a root rake, branch pruners, a watering can, some wire and a tree! Be sure to have a plastic tray or sheet to work over.

This is an excellent year for demonstrations and shows from other clubs, be sure to sign up for any workshops as space is running out.

Nigel

Upcoming Events

Next General Meeting:

April 20, 7:30pm

Topic: Larch workshop

Larch Collection Trip

Saturday, April 16, 10 am

Workshop with Boon

Manakitivipart at the Toronto Bonsai Society, April 30, "bring your own tree". \$100. Call Otmar 416-755-6366 to register.

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

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.

Editor's Note

To beginners in any field of interest it appears that they only use the resources of a Club like ours. Often, they also feel that they have nothing to contribute. Therefore, it was with great pleasure that I was able to volunteer for the position of newsletter editor after Lynn Howlett had to resign in February, and I welcome the opportunity to give something back to the Club.

First of all, I would like to thank Lynn for her previous work and passing on all the required "how-to's" of getting the Newsletter out to all of you – Thanks, Lynn!

Each editor has a particular style that leaves his or her mark on a newsletter. In my case, I would like to print articles with relevant local issues penned by members of the Club, a review of hot Internet topics, how-to articles and more. I hope you like the new look and find the expanded content interesting. Please talk to me at the meetings or email me with your contributions or comments!

For this Newsletter, I have found an interesting Internet discussion on Superthrive, the Vitamin B solution advertised in the Bonsai magazines. Also, I discovered a how-to article on virtual bonsai: snap a picture of your tree before you style it, feed it into your computer - and voila – a masterpiece. Somehow I doubt it will be THAT easy. But judge for yourself.

Enjoy the newsletter ... and happy repotting.
Michael Eckardt

-- Wanted --

Articles written by YOU. Please share your experiences in the South-Western Ontario region with the rest of us. What works. What doesn't. Your way of dealing with the winter cold or the March thaw. Your favourite places to go for Bonsai supplies. Your ways of doing things that might help others in the Club. Useful DIY projects. Come on... I know you're just itching to write your story.

Tips & Tricks

You can kill scale insects on infested cuttings by submersing the entire cutting in a brightly light aquarium for a period of time. I put 4" cuttings of crepe myrtle in an aquarium for three days and the bugs drowned or were eaten by the fish. ME

Do you have any tips you could share with the rest of us? Let me know and I'll included them in the next newsletter.

Future Columns...

Member profile – introduce yourself to those who are new to the Club and don't know everyone. You can write your story here ... or I will have to volunteer someone at the next meeting!

Trades! Giveaways! Wanted!

Do you have too much of something and not enough of something else? Need a certain pot? Too many seedlings, not enough space? List it here! And maybe you're lucky!

Mining the Newsgroups**Discussions on Superthrive**

Someone asked about the value of Superthrive earlier and Jim Lewis-jklewis@nettally.com responded:

"We've been though this many, many times. If someone has done a truly scientific test of Superthrive, I'd like to see both the procedure and the results, as published in a reputable journal. There aren't any.

The basic ingredient ... is vitamin B. Vitamin B does NOTHING for plants. Quite rigorous scientific tests have shown that experiments done in the 1920s or 30s indicating otherwise could NOT be replicated. They were, in fact, most likely fakes or corrupted. The "virtues" of Superthrive are a matter of faith, not science. ...

For me, Superthrive is, and shall always be, 100% Snake Oil, and the only benefit to be gained from it is to the wallet of the guy that makes it and charges such exorbitant prices for a horticultural hoax."

To which Andrew from Australia added:

"Well, I recently did another scientific test of my own. Scientific meaning in normal use, not in a lab, not with scientific readouts generated by expensive equipment, but a "visible to the naked eye" scientific test. Done with petunias, all raised from seed, all ones picked were at same height, rate of growth. All were potted up at same time, in same amount of media, watered with same amounts, received same amount of sun, etc etc.

2 (plants) were control, only watered with water. 2 (plants) received Seasol (a seaweed based fertilizer), 2 received Superthrive only, 2 received Superthrive and Seasol, 2 received

Miracle Grow... The Seasol, Miracle Grow and Superthrive were given fortnightly, then watered with water at other times. ...

Results were, after 2 months:

Control, well they grew.

Seasol only, no bigger than control, but had a darker looking green in them.

Superthrive only, same as control, no bigger, greener.

Superthrive and Seasol, again, darker looking green, much like the Seasol only.

Miracle grow. Large, lush green growth, roots just starting to come out of drainage holes.

Upon checking roots after the experiment, they were all much the same size, except for the Miracle grow ones.

As I said, this was not a lab type experiment, but IMO done where it should have been.

Outdoors where they will grow. ... To the naked eye there was no benefit from Superthrive at all.

Again, IMO if it's not noticeable then this Superthrive is certainly not worth the money. I did take utmost care in amounts of water when they were watered, and soil amounts, and handling when I potted them up. Still what I'm getting at is this experiment was enough to prove that in normal gardening practices, or I should say above normal care, Superthrive showed no benefits.

Even if you got the stuff for free it wouldn't be worth adding as the time taken to mix it, and add it isn't worth what it does for the plant.

Anyway, I'll leave it at that. Just my little research into it, and my findings.

Cheers"

So, what are your experiences here in the Club?. Is this stuff worth it? Let me know!

Michael

How-to ...**Virtual Bonsai**

Contributed by H. Gistvall & K. Bailey, reprinted with permission

Source:

<http://internetbonsaiclub.org/content/view/142/124>

A thousand year old horticultural technique and the latest in digital photograph manipulation might sound like an odd coupling. But as a matter of fact they fit like a hand in a glove.

There are several advantages to styling a bonsai with the aid of a computer. First and foremost you can get a picture of how the tree will look before you cut off that branch you have been thinking of removing.

You can also get input from other bonsai growers from all over the world if you upload it on one of the many bonsai forums on the web.

This can be both fun and interesting. Another good thing is that you will experience the tree quite differently in a photo. You get the same effect from looking at your tree in a mirror. But this can also be a problem. You look at two dimensions of a 3D object. A branch that looks strange in a picture can look good in real life. A short anecdote from my early attempts at virtual styling. The tree in question was a larch that belongs to Reiner Goebel. The two lowest branches looked like bar branches growing from the same height making the tree look static in the picture. One of the branches was actually growing towards the front, also a fault if you go by the rules. Reiner became quite inspired by my virtual suggestion, where I had removed the the branch, but decided not to cut it off. Later that year this tree received an award as best conifer during the MABA exhibition in USA, the judge was Kimura.

When is it suitable to use this method? We can start with when it's not suitable. It's not uncommon that beginners ask for virtuals of shrubs from a nursery. Making a decent virtual

from such a tree will take almost as long as styling the tree in real life. Using virtual styling is only possible when it is quite obvious how the tree should be styled, with a visible trunk and few branches. Not uncommon with yamadori scots pines for example. Of course one can make an sketch of the trunk and the branches. If this is done with pen or paper or the computer doesn't matter, but you can hardly call it a virtual styling. A potensai which has undergone basic styling is a suitable candidate for a virtual styling. You can easily see which branches to keep or cut off, like "sacrifice branches" and how the tree will look when the foliage fills out.

The best way to use this method is for a "finished" bonsai. Here can you also see if some branches need to go, or if they should be turned in to jin and shari. Maybe you are thinking of lowering the apex and shortening the trunk. Of course the virtual styling has to be done with common sense. Sometimes I see fantastic suggestions that are totally unrealistic. There is no way branches will sprout from the base of an old yamadori pine. That's not the best way to use this method.

Another good way to use this method is for testing pots. Here in Sweden there is no such thing as bonsai nurseries, so it's not possible to match the bonsai with a wide range of pots. Often one buys a pot and hope for the best. I think we can all agree that the pot must be perfect regarding shape, size and style. By using the computer you can test a wide range of pots and also get some new creative ideas from others. Working in 2D is not a problem when it comes to pots. The shape, colour and size you find suitable on the screen will often give a good indication of the perfect pot for your tree.

How to get started

You will need a digital camera or a scanner. Some companies also offer to make a photo-CD when developing pictures. And of course you will need some sort of software. The most popular is

Adobe Photoshop. Sometimes a limited edition – Photoshop Elements - is included when buying scanners and other similar products. It is possible to download a free trial version from Adobe's web site www.adobe.com.

Jasc make a similar product – Paint Shop Pro - that is cheaper, has all of the required tools and is slightly easier to learn. Again a free trial is available from their website at <http://www.jasc.com/en/products/paintshoppro/psp-trialreg.asp>

Another program is completely free - GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program) - is rapidly gaining in popularity, though it requires greater effort to learn. This can be found at <http://www.gimp.org/downloads/>

To be successful the tree must be photographed against a plain background, either black or white. A brick wall or a bamboo fence is not good. You will easily see where the picture has been altered which is disturbing to the eye when studying the end result. You also need to portray the tree from the right angle. Focus should be approximately two thirds of the way up the trunk. You get the best photos by placing the camera at a distance using as much tele as possible and a slow shutter speed, making sure the light comes from the side. Photoshop is jam packed with all kinds of effects, filters and tools. It is easy to be overwhelmed by all the possibilities but try to avoid psychedelic backgrounds and other strange effects.

Simple tool guide

Here follows a simple guide of the most common tools you will need to learn to use. Like most things practise is the only way to be really skilled. I use an old Mac version of this software so some things might be different on new editions.

Marking areas of the image

Lasso tool



With this tool you can mark areas by free hand. By pressing Shift or Alt it is possible to add or subtract marked areas.

Magic wand tool



The magic wand tool marks areas in the picture that have a similar colour. When using the magic wand tool a plain background in a neutral colour comes in handy. By marking the white background and the inverting the marked area it is easy to mark e.g. the foliage of a tree. The other way would have been to trace the outline of the foliage by hand with the lasso tool which can be a tedious job. By changing the tolerance it is possible to control how much the tool will mark.

Pen tool



The pen tool is probably the most difficult tool to learn. It comes in handy if you want to mark symmetrical shapes like pots. If you are familiar with software like Illustrator or Freehand it can be a useful tool.

Draw and erase

Clone stamp tool



The most important tool is the clone stamp tool. With it you can copy one area to another, copying foliage, branches or deadwood. You can also use it as an eraser by cloning the background over an unwanted area.

Choose the area you want to copy, press alt and click with the mouse.

Now you have chosen a starting point. Move the cursor to the area to "paint" and start drawing. When you move the cursor it moves in both places, the area you choose to copy and the area where you are "painting". This means you must check the starting point so you don't slip and copy the background, for example, or other unwanted parts of the picture. It takes some practise to learn to think in the right way and not to clone too much.

Airbrush tool



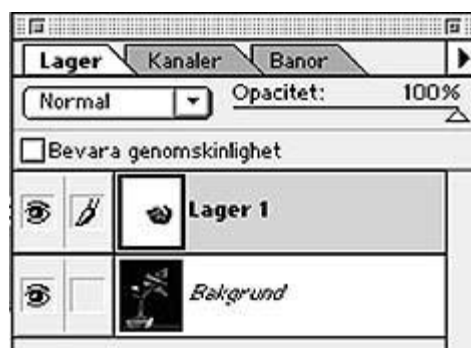
If it's difficult to use the clone tool, for example to increase a shari, you can use the airbrush instead. You will not get the structure as you get with the clone stamp tool, but you can copy the colour by using the "pipette" or "eyedropper" tool.

Eraser tool



The eraser tool does what it says. It erases parts of the picture. I prefer to use the clone stamp tool to cover unwanted areas with the background colour. The Eraser is best used if an object is in a layer of its own.

Layers



Copying and pasting parts of the picture in different layers makes it easy, for example, to move branches around, scaling or rotating them.

Often you have to have several layers when making advanced virtual pictures. It might feel difficult and awkward in the beginning but makes it so much simpler.

“Distort” or “Reshape free”

Under the menu "Layers" (or by pressing "apple" T (mac) or Ctrl T (PC) you can find "Reshape free". With this option you can rotate or scale any object in a separate layer. A useful function if you want to change the angle or size of a branch for example.

Case study of a spruce



I bought this spruce from a garden centre some years ago and made the initial styling in its original pot. At the first repotting I discovered that the trunk continued almost 3" (10 cm) under the soil. I choose a new front (Picture 1 above) but as soon as it was placed in the pot I could see that

this was not the best option. The trunk has a bow shape, there is a strange kink in the trunk where the first branch is placed and the tree lacks nebari on the right.



The best front is this. It has a much better flowing trunk line. There is nebari on both sides which also provides better taper.



To get an idea how the tree could look in the future I decided to make a virtual styling. The first big problem is that the large jin to the left on the first picture is an eye poker when the tree is turned counter clockwise. This is made in to a shari with the airbrush tool (A).



The main branch now faces towards the back. The main branch (B) and a too thick branch near the apex (C) is erased by copying the background with the clone stamp tool.



I now mark the main branch from picture 1 with the lasso tool. I copy it and paste it in a layer of its own. I can rotate it and place it in the right position. This how I want the branch to look on the finished tree (D). I have also changed the angle of the third branch on the right in the same way as the main branch (E).



The final virtual image. As you can see I have used the clone stamp tool to copy foliage to create dense foliage clouds. Finally the tree has undergone a virtual repotting. It is the goal to strive for, a dramatic slanting bonsai.

The real thing



This is a close up of the shari I made from the eye poking jin.



The tree after its initial styling. It is on good way of becoming the tree in my virtual image.