



TAUNTON & SOMERSET BONSAI CLUB

Bonsai Newsletter May 2022 - Meeting report



John and Brian admiring Ade's composition of a Japanese maple and accent planting. Both displayed on appropriate stands.

Almost half way through the year and it is time for our annual (except during Pandemics) Summer Bonsai Show. So the theme for this month's meeting was "Taking your trees to the next level". Sounds pretentious but in reality any work we do on our trees should improve them and also follow the plan that we have for creating our vision of the "perfect" tree. So were our members up for that? Well quite a few were and it was good to see such a diverse selection of trees.

Members who had offered trees for inclusion in our show had been asked to bring them along and to spend the evening getting them "show ready". Sounds good but what does that really mean?



Getting down to it. Members start on bringing their chosen tree up to show standard.

Our Chairman Ade has displayed trees at many of our large shows and knows how to make the best of any Bonsai; so we started off with a brief talk on what to do and why.

Point 1 Weed your bonsai.

The surface of your potting medium should be free of anything that was not put there by you with the intention of making the tree look natural. Weeds and other under plantings that obscure the nebari and even the trunk should be trimmed back or removed.

Point 2 Tidy up the foliage.

Trim back any shoots and leaves that break the silhouette. Remove any dead flowers, unsightly fruit or discoloured leaves. Clean off any moss that is growing on the trunk and nebari, unless it is intended as a part of the overall design.



Tony W and Michael possibly discussing the joys of working on Field Maples.

Point 3 Trim branches.

Really this should have been done as part of the ongoing design process however life happens and if, for example, a piece of wind blown debris had landed on your Cork Bark Chinese Elm, the one that was ready to go in the show, and took out two major branches, then now would be a great time to do some branch pruning and possibly some rewiring! Dangerous places, gardens! If you are making any major cuts, make sure that you seal them with a suitable sealant and do take some time to disguise it as best as possible.

Point 4 Clean old top surface.

If your tree was weed free, as all bonsai in bonsai pots should be, then have a look at the surface and if it doesn't look in keeping with the rest of the design then renew it. Moss and its use in bonsai seems to be a "Marmite" thing. Some people love it and others hate it with a vengeance! If you are going to use it, then make sure that it contributes to the overall design, use the appropriate size of moss for the size of tree, yes there are different sizes of moss, who knew! Try using a number of different mosses around the pot to suggest a more natural environment. One question asked was "where do you get your moss"? The answer was where ever you can find it. Mostly in damp, shady places where it won't get trodden on or dug up by birds, moss hunting adds a whole new experience to the bonsai hobby. Personally I have found that tarmac traffic island and cycle paths are a great source of a variety of different mosses. Just be ready for the odd weird look from passers-by.



Nigel working on a pine with Geoff giving hints.

Point 5 Clean the pot.

There is a big difference between a pot with "Patina" and a pot that is "dirty"! And whilst there is no substitute for the right pot with just the right level of patina, showing a tree in a pot that has mud, algae, water marks, not to mention cobwebs or snail trails will not make a good impression on your audience. Right then - remove all bugs from the drain holes, wash and if required, brush the outer surface of the pot until all non-essential grime is removed. Inspect the pot for any chips or cracks. If the pot is unglazed consider giving it a once over with some vegetable oil. Now doesn't that look better?



Richard and Richard comparing trees.

Point 6 Stands

Using a suitable stand with your tree adds a whole different vibe to your display. Unfortunately, unless you frequent Japanese flea markets, getting your hands on suitable bonsai stands can be expensive. However, there are sellers in the UK who stock bonsai stands and it is always worth looking at online auction sites for "oriental tables" or "Flower arranging stands" as you may be lucky. Alternatively, you can make your own or get someone who likes reducing perfectly good pieces of wood into "unrecognisable items" to make one for you. They can be simple to make - a suitably sized rectangle of wood with the edges routered to shape and then finished with stain or oil can look surprisingly good. You never know you might have a knack for making them and there are lots of online videos to help you improve.



An example of a simple bonsai stand with a routered edge

You can also go down the Ji-ita route. A Ji-ita is an irregular shaped flat piece of wood that is used in Japan for displaying flower arrangements and accent plants but work well with less formal styles of bonsai. These are expensive to buy but can be made, if you have access to a fret saw and some time and patience.



A Japanese Ji-ita with a hand carved edge. A simpler version can be made using a fret saw and router.

Whether you choose to buy or make your stand you should do your best to match the size of the stand to the tree or accent. The stand should allow the tree to sit comfortably on it and have sufficient space around the pot. Remember the pot is a frame for the tree and the stand is the frame for the pot and the tree.

Point 7 Bugs

Bugs are a natural part of growing bonsai but you don't want to show a tree that is covered in aphids or worse. If you have a tree that you intend to show then make sure that you spray it with a suitable insecticide a couple of weeks before and then give it a good jet spray with the garden hose a couple of times before you take it to the show. People will thank you!

Point 8 Accent plantings

These are often overlooked in the bonsai world. Accent plants work well with bonsai of all sizes as long as you follow a few rules.

- Match the size of the accent to the size of the bonsai.
- Go for a seasonal theme with leaves and flowers evoking the impression being given by the main tree.
- Choose a container that also follows the main theme. A rugged pine could have some alpine flowers in a craggy pot or on a rock. A brightly coloured maple would look good with some meadow flowers and grasses in a simple oval pot. Go online for more inspiration or use your imagination.
- Use a simple stand or ji-ita for your accent or even a small bamboo mat will work well with most accents.



A simple composition of flowers, grasses and mosses planted in an artificial stone container and placed on a ji-tta.

Following Ade's talk we all got down to "Pimping our bonsai" and it was great to see so much work getting done. That is after all, what bonsai is all about.



Good to see Tony M back at meetings and this time working on a nice Chestnut.

Fortunately we did take time out to vote for, and then judge, the tree of the month competition.

Tree Of The Month

The theme was 'Spring Colour' and the entries are below:



My root over rock Trident maple



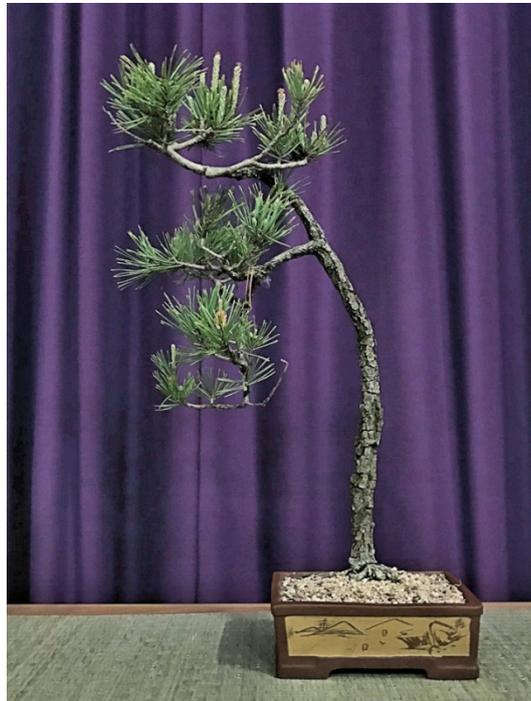
Richard C's Acer Deshojo



Michael's lovely little Satsuki Azalea. The delicate white flowers were very difficult to photograph.



Tony W's collected Hawthorn complete with flowers.



Richard M's Literati Scots pine.

And the winners are: Tony and Richard C joint winners of the members vote. For the full breakdown of the judges scoring see the link [here](#).

Well that's it for another month. If you are around the Taunton areas on the 28th or 29th May then drop in and see us at the Willowbrook Garden Centre.

Our next club meeting is on the 8th June and the theme is "Problem trees". Bring along that difficult tree and someone will tell you what to do with it.

Till the next time, stay safe and "keep doing bonsai".

Alistair