SNIPS 'N CLIPS

A Publication of The San Antonio Bonsai Society, Inc.
http://sanantoniobonsai.org

FBRUARY 2016 VOLUME 41 NUMBER 2

BONSAI CALENDAR

All meetings are held on the second Thursday, 7 pm, at Lions Field Adult Community Center, Broadway at Mulberry St., SA, TX. 78209

RICHARD HAYES BONSAI STUDY GROUP: —HELD THE SATURDAY AFTER THE THURSDAY NIGHT CLUB MEETING. VARIED LOCATIONS TO BE ANNOUNCED AND HELD AT MEMBERS HOMES. TOPIC OF DISCUSSION WILL BE A FOLLOW-UP TO THE THURSDAY NIGHT PRESENTATIONS.

February 11– Club meeting, 7 pm

February Host—Sally C.

February Mini-show: any bonsai demonstrating Windswept style..

February 20th - Soil Mixer and Juniper collecting, 9 am, Kevin and Hattie's House.

★ **February 13th - Asian Festival.**

★ **February 23: Native plant society.**
Topic:
UTSA's Monarch Research Project
6:30 pm – Native plant/seed exchange & social time
7:00 pm – Program, Lions Field.

★ **February 26 – 28th - Spring Home and Garden Show.**

President's Message

By Ryan O.
bonsaiode@gmail.com

Please pay Leydana your 2016 SABS dues. Your membership fee is due February 29th. Those that have not paid will lose out on the newsletter distribution.

We have a busy month this February. On **Saturday February 13,** is the annual **Asian Festival** at *the Institute of Texan Cultures* from 10 am to 5 pm. Set-up is from 7 am to 9 am and take-down is from 5 pm to 8 pm. I picked up parking, un/loading passes and wristbands that I will distribute to the members participating during February's meeting. The parking passes are good for parking in the **UTSA** area only and you will be bussed to the front doors. This will take about 20 minutes to get back to the Festival.

On Saturday February 20, is our rescheduled Soil Mixer at Kevin and Hattie's house beginning at 9 am. The club will have different ingredients for a common use bonsai soil for all to mix. Kevin is providing large buckets to take your mixture home. All you need to bring is a shovel. The Board is also asking members to help mix for Club usage and possibly to sell. A small fee per bucket will be required.

.Also in **February, beginning on the 26 (thru the 28),** we are exhibiting at the **Spring Home and Garden Show**. I will be presenting the art of bonsai on Saturday and Sunday. Volunteers and trees are needed.
We are still in need of monthly host volunteers for June and October. A full meal is not needed, but small nibbles to feed the group is required. Remember you could always share a month with another member to help with costs/cooking and set-up.

Continued next page

PROGRAM CORNER

David W.
redhawkbonsai@yahoo.com

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This month at our February 11th meeting we will be showing the why and how to repot. This is very helpful information, especially for beginners.

The club will be putting on a display at the **Asian Festival** on Saturday, February 13th. This is one of our biggest displays for the club so try to attend!

The next Saturday, February 20th, the club will be having a soil mixer at Kevin & Hattie's house. More information on that at the meeting, this is definitely a ***"the more the merrier event"***. This event benefits both the club and the members by providing good pre-screened bonsai soil. (Which is something you'll have learned about at the meeting!)

And last but not least, we have the **Spring Home & Garden Show** on Friday through Sunday, February 26th-28th. Gonna be a busy month y'all!

RYAN

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP DUES FOR THE SAN ANTONIO BONSAI SOCIETY

$30 individual
$50 family
$25 senior
$40 senior family

January Monthly Tips

David W
redhawkbonsai@yahoo.com

Are you prepared for the new growing season? It is closer than you think! Keep your eyes on your deciduous trees, you want to root prune/repot them before the buds start swelling. It's risky if you do root pruning after the buds have opened and there is new growth of leaves. The window of opportunity can come and go real fast for us. If you have several to do, then you can do like I do and start repotting them in early February and protect them from temperatures that get below 45.

When root pruning, remove 1/3 to 1/2 of the roots and leave the fine hair roots. If the branches need wiring or pruning, do it before you repot, because it is easier to shape them without leaves (remember to check the wire throughout the growing season as they will "cut in" as the tree swells with new growth). Make sure you tightly wire your repotted trees into their pot. We want to protect our newly potted tree from the seasonal high winds. Along with wiring the bonsai into the pot, I add the support of rocks around the base of the tree, be careful not to harm the roots. The first few weeks after repotting are a crucial time for the new roots; you must anchor the tree to the pot securely! The newly growing roots are delicate, so do NOT fertilize for a few weeks, the new soil will have plenty of nutrients.

After you repot, bring it out to get some well deserved filtered or shaded sun for few days, and then place it accordingly to the needs of the species. Watch out for cold weather that might come screaming in during the end of winter, be prepared to shelter those trees if needed.

Wait for a few weeks or so before you start trimming and pinching the new growth. Trimming branches increases branching and lets the light in so your plant will stay healthy. The more you trim and pinch, the better the ramification becomes. Trim the new branch down to 2 or 3 leaves; continue this through-out the growing season. When trimming remember the basics, remove crossing, spokes, and the up & down branches.

continued from page 2

Before trimming, check a species reference guide to see *when* it should be trimmed, we don't want to cut off any branches too soon that might be flowering &/or fruiting.

Watch the soils every day so they do not dry out. All soils must be free draining. It is best to screen all your soils to promote good drainage, air flow and to get rid of the "fines" or dust. A good mix should be around 50% organic such as pine bark or fir bark and/or Akadama, some good potting soil, and 50% inorganic such as, granite, Haydite, Kanuma, expanded shale, or coarse sand. Adjust your formula accordingly to suit each species. Experiment with your own combinations and see what works best for your trees.

Inspect the bonsai from top to bottom. With the ***warmer*** weather we have during "winter" we should inspect for ANY and all insects and treat accordingly. I try to apply the practice of "an ounce of prevention", I treat with insecticide and apply fungicide at least once every 4 weeks. If you discover an infestation, treat according to the label of the pesticide.

DAVID

BONSAI SOIL

By John R.
A follow-up to the January program

Trees normally thrive in the ground. Man devised the idea to grow them in containers. Our Bonsai are being asked to grow in an unnatural environment, the small confines of a bonsai pot. When a loose, well draining soil mixture is used, it creates an environment into which the tree can easily grow new roots while confined in a pot.

Because the growing space in a bonsai container is limited, it is important that soil placed into it performs perfectly.

There are many recipes for bonsai soil, everyone has their own idea for the perfect mixture. In my article, I will give a soil recipe that uses basic ingredients and is fairly easily obtainable locally.

Any usable soil mixture must perform the following: ***drain water quickly, aerate the soil, promote root development.***

Formula for a basic Bonsai soil mix:

75% INORGANIC, (LAVA, EXPANDED SHALE, GRANITE Grit)
25% ORGANIC (Pine Bark mix)

If your growing area is very sunny, add more screened pine bark to retain moisture. If it is shady, add more shale or lava so the soil can dry more quickly.

All Bonsai Soil mixes must be screened to remove dust. For most bonsai, the particles should be between 1/8" and 1/4 ". For *SHOHIN*, you can go 1/16 ". Sifting screens can be found at www.stonelantern.com and other Bonsai websites.

LAVA: Durable, air spaces momentarily hold water and release back to the roots, looks good. Purchase from Chuck Ware in Wimberley, TX @ **Jade Gardens, 512-847-2514 or Dallas Bonsai :**http://www.dallasbonsai.com/ in Garland, TX

EXPANDED SHALE: Durable, air spaces momentarily hold ,water and release back to the roots, looks good. Purchase at ***Rainbow Gardens, Milberger's*** or other local Nurseries.

PINE BARK: retains water, easily obtainable from garden center (soil conditioner). It does break down. Purchase at Lowe's, 100% Organic Compost, dry and sift.

Brigadier General Geoffrey P. Wiedeman MD, USAF, ret.

Passed away Jan, 16, 2016 in San Antonio, TX. He was 98.

32 Years of distinguished service– retired and worked as a civilian physician at Brooks, AFB until '89. Volunteered and served as a chairman for the San Antonio Zoo for 2 yrs. Early in his 80's learned he had a talent for watercolor using animals as his subjects.

He was a charter member of the San Antonio Bonsai Society and maintained a very nice collection.

Prune on General, your friends will miss you.

His full obituary is on the website.

TRANSPLANTING
a series developed and presented in *BONSAI TODAY, Issue 17, 1992-1*
Authors:
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48 Soils and soil mixes for bonsai

I. SOIL TERMINOLOGY

Soil:

Soil is that portion of the earth's surface that is composed primarily of disintegrated rock and varying amounts of decayed organic material. Clay, sand and humus are all types of natural soils.

Acid soil:

Soils in which the concentration of hydrogen ions (H^+) exceeds the concentration of hydroxyl ions (OH^-) are called acid soils. When the concentrations are equal, the pH is by definition 7.0, and the soil is called "neutral". A pH of less than 7.0 indicates an acid soil. It should be noted that the pH scale is such that to lower the pH by 1.0, there must be a tenfold increase in the concentration of hydrogen ions. Acid soils are often obtained from peat bogs. (see "peat moss").

Alkaline soil:

Soils with a pH greater than 7.0 are called alkaline and are usually associated with areas of low rainfall.

Clay:

Clay consists of the smallest particles that result from chemical action and weathering of surface rock. It is composed primarily of silicates of potassium and aluminum in colloidal form. Its color is due to the presence of iron minerals when it is reddish or of organic carbonaceous substances if it is dark. Clay can hold and later release nutrients in the forms of ions, a property important to plant health; this is called a high cation exchange capacity (see Section II). Clay is difficult to thoroughly wet and therefore relatively fast draining in particle form. Clay will deteriorate with time into small particles which tend to retain water as well as clog up pore space. There are several special forms in which clay is available:

Calcined clay: Clay is fired at 1300°F in a controlled environment then reground and screened into hardened pellets. This is called calcined, fired, blown or baked clay and is sold under a variety of trade names. It has a low cation exchange capacity and absorbs water much more readily than *akadama*.

Akadama: This is the most popular soil for bonsai soil mixes in Japan. It is naturally occurring inert clay granules of medium size (⅛ to ¼ in.) that give good drainage and thus provide oxygenation for the roots; its pH is neutral to very slightly acid with a pH range of 6.5 to 6.9. Its granules are quite tough resisting crushing and decomposition. In the same area where *akadama* is found, further beneath the surface, the clay deposits have a lower pH, very suitable for azalea culture; this clay is called *kanuma*. Both are very low in cation exchange capacity, a situation that is mitigated by the frequent use of organic fertilizers. Because of its inherently fast drainage, watering must be quite frequent, but the advantage is a very low incidence of root rot. Outside Japan, *akadama* is expensive and only found in specialized bonsai centers.

Sand:

Sands are sediments of medium sized particles coming from the disintegration of rocks by weathering or by chemical means; in general, the sediments are siliceous and they accumulate on the shores of oceans and on river banks. If they are rich in feldspars, they end up by forming clay, otherwise they are very stable and do not deteriorate with time when used in a soil mix. River sands, washed by the waters of a river, are more rounded in texture,

In this article the qualities of the various soils that are commonly used as ingredients in bonsai soil mixes are summarized. Following will be a discussion of some of the more popular mixes themselves. However, it should be emphasized that these mixtures should never be taken as absolute, because in different latitudes mixes can and should be varied in accordance with local climatological conditions. The best soil mix is the mix that you or others have found to be the most effective in your area considering the ready availability of the various soils. In selection of the soils consider the attention that you expect to pay to your bonsai, especially in the frequency of watering and fertilizing.

The article is divided into five sections:

I. Soil terminology: A brief description of the soils most commonly used as ingredients for bonsai soil mixes is given. In addition, properties important to the soil mix are explained.

II. Chemical properties of soil mixes. Essential to plant survival is the absorption of nutrients in chemical form through the roots. This process is briefly explained considering the influence of soil pH.

III. Physical properties of soil mixes. The physical properties of the soil mix influence the availability of nutrients at the roots. The significance of aeration and the relationship of soil particle size to porosity are explored.

IV. Soil mixes for bonsai. Specifics of some of the more common soil mixes are given.

V. Specific soil mixes by species. Recommendations are presented in tabular form.

whereas mountain sands are more sharp. Ocean sands are unsuitable for bonsai culture.

Decomposed granite:

As its name suggest this is a coarse sharp gravel resulting from the weathering of granite rock. In some areas of the country it is available naturally. It is packaged in various sizes and sold in feed stores to aid chickens and turkeys in grinding up their feed, hence the names chick grit and turkey grit. The best size for bonsai soil is the grower size.

Peat moss:

Peat moss is the product of peat bogs, continually flooded places in which plants die and decompose under very wet conditions. There are three distinct types:

Sphagnum moss peat is often sold as just "peat moss", it is light tan to brown in color, very light and porous. Almost all of the peat moss from Canada is sphagnum peat, so checking the origin of the bale is a good indication. Sphagnum peat is usually low in pH (3.0 to 4.5) which makes it ideal for acid-loving plants. It is low in nutrients, high in moisture retention.

Reed-sedge peat is formed from decayed swamp plants such as reeds, rushes, sedges, cattails, marsh grasses, etc. Reed-sedge peats can vary considerably in content, degree of decomposition and acidity. Reed-sedge peat has a pH ranging from 4.0 to 7.5, although often it is almost neutral.

Peat humus is also known as Michigan peat, dark brown to black in color, consists of plant material decomposed so fully that the water-growing plants of which it is composed are no longer identifiable. Of all the peats, it tends to be the most neutral with a pH range of 5.0 to 7.5.

Sphagnum moss peat is used as an ingredient in soil mixes for bonsai because of its acidifying, moisture retaining and nutrient-holding properties. Because of its acidity, it has quite an important capability for resistance to decomposition from the action of bacteria.

Pine bark:

Readily available in bales as pine bark mulch, this is another organic material used in soil mixes. Even the small grade must be screened to remove large pieces. It provides nutrients and absorbs water, but drains well.

Fir bark:

More even in particle size than pine bark, fir bark absorbs water less readily and tends to break down slowly.

Humus:

Humus is a dark organic material produced by the decomposition of organic matter. It is useful for water retention and may provide nutrients. Humus includes leaf mold, compost, etc. with a considerable variation in properties depending on its plant source.

Topsoil:

Topsoil, loam or just plain garden soil can vary greatly even locally in composition, in water retention and in nutrient content and hence in its usefulness in bonsai culture. Some may very nicely be used as a component soil in a bonsai mix while other more mucky soils may be quite harmful. Before using a local topsoil, determine whether that specific soil is being used successfully as a bonsai soil mix ingredient in your area. If in doubt, it is best to assume that it is unsuitable.

II. CHEMICAL PROPERTIES OF SOIL MIXES

There are 16 elements essential to plant growth. Carbon is absorbed from the air by leaves. Hydrogen and oxygen come from water that is absorbed by the roots. The remaining 13 are also absorbed by the roots and therefore must come from either fertilizer or from the soil mix itself.

Plant roots absorb these nutrients when they are in the form of ions. Ions are simply electrically charged atoms or groups of atoms, the result of a compound breaking down in solution. These may have a positive charge (cation) or a negative charge (anion).

Clay and humus particles have the important property of being able to store and later release these ions. If the ions in solution are absorbed by the roots as nutrients, then clay or humus particles can make up the loss by releasing more ions into solution. A measure of this capability for nutrient-holding is called the cation exchange capacity (CEC): the higher the value, the greater the capability of the soil mix to provide a plentiful supply of nutrients. Soils with a high CEC also provide a buffering action, stabilizing the pH.

Greater attention must be given to fertilizing practice as well as pH if the soil mix has a low CEC. For example, the Japanese make up for the inherently low CEC of *akadama* by careful attention to fertilizing practice; that is why the use of fertilizer cakes which release small amounts of nutrients with each watering is such common practice in Japan.

Calcined clay, so commonly used in this country also has a very low CEC. If it is used in a mix, its use should be based on its water retention capabilities, not for any ability to provide nutrients; other ingredients must serve that function.

Of course, there is a strong relationship between nutrient availability and soil pH. Whether in a container or in the garden, the pH of the soil must be between 4 and about 8. Outside those limits there is nothing much that will grow. The ideal pH depends on the species that is being grown, but the majority of horticultural plants need slightly acid or neutral soils with a pH of between 5.0 and 7.0. (a pH of 7 is neutral). In fact, if the availability of the 13 essential elements is the sole criterion, then the desirable range for container mixes is a pH of 5.5 to 6.5.

As a gross measure of soil pH, pour vinegar onto a piece of dry soil; froth will appear if it is alkaline (acid + base = salt + water).

A more accurate determination may be made with a commercially

nese practice is to water a bonsai three times in a single watering, once for the top, once for the middle and once for the bottom.

IV. SOIL MIXES FOR BONSAI

The chemical and physical properties outlined in the two sections above can be achieved with a variety of soil mixes. A 1983 survey by the American Bonsai Society revealed that the most popular mix among respondents was a soilless mix, ⅓ sand or gravel, ⅓ peat moss and ⅓ baked clay. A close second was ⅓ sand, ⅓ topsoil or humus and ⅓ baked clay. In both mixes, the organic material provides nutrients and nutrient-holding capability, the baked clay provides water retention as well as some buffering capacity and the sand provides porosity.

More recently, primarily because of the difficulty in removing the fine particles from peat moss, there is an increasing use of fir bark instead of peat.

If the plant requires a slightly acid soil, like azaleas for example, the soilless mix can be used as is or with a higher percentage of peat moss. If the basic soilless mix is used with a plant that requires a more neutral pH, then dolomitic limestone should be added to the mix.

These two basic mixes are suitable for most bonsai, but it should be varied slightly for trees with special needs. Pines, for example, prefer a fairly sandy soil and, old ones in particular, require a soil that is at least 50% sand.

In order to mix soils properly, it best to prepare the mix using dry screened soils. The ideal texture for a bonsai is one that permits picking up a handful of dry soil mix, opening the hand and letting it sift down gently without being lumped together. It should have a slightly spongy texture.

V. SOIL MIX FOR VARIOUS SPECIES

The following list is not intended to be complete; it is only an attempt to tabulate the trees most commonly grown as bonsai and provide some guidelines on appropriate soil mixes and other considerations at transplanting time.

APPLE	Basic mix, pH 5-6.5, in spring before buds open, annually.
APRICOT (P. mume)	Basic mix, transplant in very early spring as soon as flowers begin to whither, annually.
AZALEA	Acid soil mix, pH 4.5-6, transplant in spring after flowering, annually; older trees, less often.
BEECH	Basic mix, transplant in early spring before buds open.
BIRCH	Basic mix, transplant in early spring before buds open.
CAMELLIA	Basic mix, pH 4.5-6.5, transplant in spring after flowering every 2 or 3 years.
CEDAR	50% to 70% sand in mix, transplant in spring, prune roots lightly, every 3 years or so.
CHERRY, Flowering	Basic mix, pH 5.5-6.5, transplant in spring before buds open, every 2 years.
COTONEASTER	Basic mix, pH 6-7, transplant in spring before buds open.
CRAPE MYRTLE	Basic mix, pH 5-6, transplant in spring as buds swell, annually.
CRYPTOMERIA	Basic mix, transplant in late spring every 2 years; older trees, less often.
ELM	50% to 70% sand in mix, transplant just before buds open, annually.
EUONYMUS	Basic mix, pH 6-8, transplant in early spring, annually.
FIG	Basic mix, transplant in mid spring every 2 years.
FIR	Basic mix, pH 6-7.5, transplant in spring every 2 years.
FALSE CYPRESS	Basic mix, pH 5-6, transplant in mid spring every 2 years; older trees, less often.
GINKGO	50% sand in mix, pH 6-7, transplant in early spring when buds first turn green, annually.
HACKBERRY	Basic mix, transplant in spring when buds appear, annually.
HAWTHORN	Basic mix, transplant in spring when buds swell, annually

HEMLOCK	50% sand, 25% peat, pH 5-6, transplant in spring, annually; older trees, less often.
HORNBEAM	Basic mix, transplant in spring as buds swell, every 2 years.
HONEYSUCKLE	Basic mix, pH 6-7.5, transplant in mid spring, every 2 years.
IVY	Basic mix, transplant in early spring or early fall.
JUNIPER	50% to 70% sand in mix, transplanting in spring is best, other times with care.
LARCH	Basic mix, pH 4.5-6.5, transplant in early spring just when buds turn green, annually.
MAPLE	Basic mix, pH 6-7.5, transplant in early spring when buds swell, annually.
PINE	50% to 70% sand, transplant in early to mid spring very 2 or 3 years; older trees, less often
POMEGRANATE	Basic mix, transplant as new shoots sprout or after new growth has hardened, every 2 years.
PYRACANTHA	Basic mix, pH 6-8, transplant in early spring, every 2 years.
QUINCE	Basic mix, pH 6-7, transplant in late summer or early fall, every 2 years.
SAGERETIA	Basic mix, transplant in spring, every 2 years.
SPRUCE	50% to 70% sand, transplant in early to mid spring very 2 or 3 years; older trees, less often
STEWARTIA	Basic mix, use peat for acidity, pH 5-6, transplant in early spring, every 2 years.
WILLOW	Basic mix, transplant in spring or mid-summer or both since roots grow so rapidly.
WINTERBERRY	Basic mix, pH 5-6.5, transplant in spring, every 2 years.
WISTERIA	Basic mix, transplant in spring as flowers begin to wither, every 2 or 3 years.
YEW	50% sand in mix, pH 6-7, transplant in spring, every 2 or 3 years.
ZELKOVA	Basic mix, transplant in early spring before buds swell, annually.

IMPORTANT NOTES

It is important to reiterate that the best soil mix for a particular species is one that contains soils that are readily available in your area and has been shown through experience to be effective in your particular climate.

In a way, the table above could have had just two categories for mixes: basic mix and fast draining mix. Then a simple solution would be just to add more of the soil used for drainage to the basic mix used in your area. Remember that each and every bonsai enthusiast has his or her favorite soil mix, and without hesitation will be willing to share their experiences with you. But do remember to pay attention to the basic chemical and physical properties required for bonsai soil mixes: perhaps you can improve on a "tried and true" formula.

An article in the Winter, 1990 issue of the *World Tropical Bonsai Forum* presents a fine example of the need to adjust the properties of the basic soil mix to compensate for special climatic situations: "Very scorching hot windy days may be followed by many days of drenching rain and high humidity. Soil may be apt to dry out in just a couple of hours or remain soaked for days." A soil mix used in temperate regions would certainly not be the best for the tropics. Calcined clay, used extensively in mixes for temperate areas, breaks down quickly in a tropical environment. Just for the record, one of the soils commonly used in mixes in Southern Florida is FloweRock, a reddish volcanic pumice. For further details on soil mixes for the tropics, see the referenced article.

With respect to the transplanting frequency, older established bonsai need to be transplanted less often. The soil mix for older trees, as discussed in this issue, should be composed of soils of smaller particle size. Also, refer to *Bonsai Techniques I*, by John Naka.

In conclusion, a better understanding of your trees needs and the translation of that understanding into practice at the time of transplanting is essential to the health and well-being of your bonsai.

The informal upright style (Moyogi) is considered the most popular shape in all bonsai, especially suited to our native Ashe Juniper.

Our logo, represented by this informal style stands for the informal nature of the San Antonio Bonsai Society, Inc. This popular, interesting style depicts the objectives of the Society—promoting participation and enjoyment of Bonsai. The emblem was adopted as the official logo in September, 1977.

THE SAN ANTONIO BONSAI SOCIETY, INC.

sanantoniobonsai.org

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Snips 'N Clips is published monthly by The San Antonio Bonsai Society, Inc.
Subscription and membership is $30.00 per year.

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