



YAMA KI BONSAI SOCIETY

"Learning from each other ~ Sharing with the community"

Tips on Preparing Bonsai for Display

by Colin Lewis

Nobody has trees that can just be taken straight from the bench and placed in an exhibition. The major exhibitors in Japan and Europe will begin to prepare their trees for display up to a year before the event, sometimes longer, making sure that it is as near to perfection as possible. You may not have trees of that quality, but you can - and should - still make sure that your exhibit is also as near to perfect as possible.

Wire or no wire?

Deciduous trees should not have wire on when in an exhibition. Why? ...because aluminum wire is thick, brown and unsightly. If you want to make minor adjustments to small branches with thin wire that is hidden by foliage, then perhaps that would be okay, but it must be very discreet.

On the other hand, conifers almost always need wire to bring the image to completion. Use ONLY copper wire (because it is thinner and its color is less obtrusive) and apply it neatly and discreetly. Don't use any more than necessary and measure to use the thinnest possible to achieve the purpose.

If you use guy wires or ties, use only #20 or #22 wire, and it is less noticeable. Remember that an exhibition should be a display of finished works of art not of the engineering involved in their shaping.

Foliage

- Deciduous:
 - Clip off any oversized or diseased leaves
 - If you prune shoots, don't allow the cut end to be visible - cut it back so it's hidden by other foliage. In fact, it's best to prune two to three weeks prior to the show so that the leaves read just their positions.
 - clean off any lime or chemical deposits on the leaves.
 - make sure there are ABSOLUTELY NO bugs or diseases.
- Conifers:
 - remove all dead or yellow needles
 - do NOT cut through pine needles to shorten them - pull long needles off or live with them.
 - do NOT cut through juniper shoots, pluck them.
 - Define the undersides of the pads by removing all foliage that dangles below a horizontal base.
 - thin out over congested areas in pines, so all the needles are in tufts at the ends of the shoots.

Trunks, branches and nebari:

- Clean trunks, nebari and branches with a toothbrush to remove all algae and moss.
- On junipers, remove the flakey outer bark to reveal the red under-bark. Do this a week or two before the show so that the bark has a chance to weather and look more natural.
- cut away any fine straggly roots from the nebari, and clean out "between the toes".



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Deadwood:

Clean deadwood and apply lime sulphur at least THREE WEEKS before the show. This will allow time for the harsh white to weather down to a more subtle shade. Also, if it remains slightly yellow, you have time for another application.

Soil surface:

Bonsai soil is downright ugly! The surface of the soil should be absolutely weed-free and, where not covered by moss, dressed with a thin layer of fine (eighth-inch or less) single ingredient so the soil doesn't too much like a kaleidoscope.

Moss should be applied at least two weeks before the show, so it has time to become established and look natural. Make a natural-looking patchwork of different mosses, placing each piece close against its neighbor and pressing the edges down into the soil to prevent dehydration. Some people prefer to moss the entire pot surface, others leave an irregular margin - either is okay.

Pots:

Pots must be scrupulously cleaned. Unglazed pots can be smartened up by burnishing, but don't make them look highly polished. A tiny amount of oil (olive, vegetable) on a lint-free cloth will enrich the color without causing sheen. You can also use a small shoe brush with a little amount of oil or polish - but again, emphasis is on "little amount".

Stands:

No pot should stand directly on the table. If you don't have proper display stands you can use bamboo place mats, cutting boards or anything that is serviceable and subtle and suits the tree.

Accessories:

Accent plants, suiseki etc should not be so large or visually powerful that they compete with the tree. If you don't have a suitable accent, best not to have one at all than to have one that is wrong. Ideally, the accent should harmonize with the tree: a mountain tree should have a mountain suiseki or mountain accent plant; a forest should have a forest plant as an accent, etc. Also, bear in mind the seasonal aspects of the display when choosing accents.

Labels:

Name tags and labels should be placed near the pot but not in it nor directly in front of it.