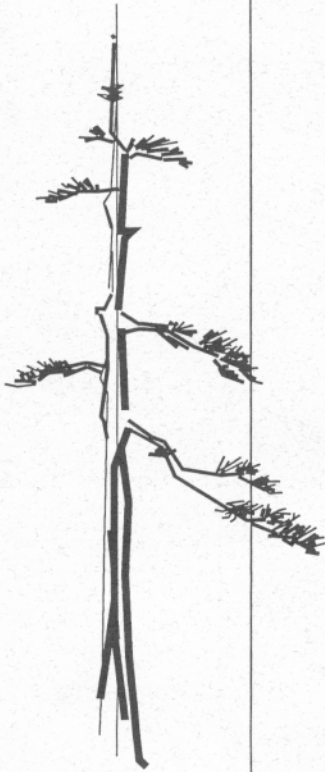


# BONSAI NEWS



## Milwaukee Bonsai Society

P.O. Box 198  
Brookfield, Wisconsin  
53208-0198

Information Line  
414-299-9229

## May Meeting

Warren Hill will show us how to assemble a "Forest Planting" at our regular May meeting on Tuesday May 6 at 7 PM. Warren is an exciting and talented bonsai artist as well as an outstanding teacher. The meeting is free to all members and guests. So bring yourself and a friend to enjoy watching one of the world's premier bonsai artists at work. Warren will be working with seven Japanese Hornbeam with the largest tree about 1" in diameter. We have had the material for several weeks and it is spectacular! All of these will go into a 24" tray. After Warren is finished, the completed planting will be raffled off to Club Members. Raffle tickets are \$5 each or 5 for \$20 so bring your checkbook. This is one program that you *do not* want to miss. See you there!

Warren will also be doing a "Forest Planting Workshop" on Saturday, May 3rd from 8 AM until 12 Noon. The workshop will be held at Grace Lutheran Church in our usual meeting space. Although the workshop is sold out, you can still come as a "Silent Observer" and join in the learning experience.

## President's Message

The "Group Slash" at the April meeting was a lot of fun! To those of you who missed the meeting, you missed an excellent and fun program. And after all of the work was done on the trees, our Judge Al Durtka, President of the International Institute of

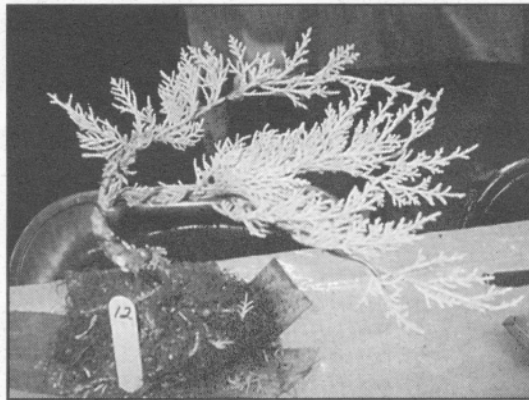
Wisconsin, rendered his decisions with insight and humor. In fact, we have it on a very good (but anonymous) source that Al is under consideration as a fill-in for Jay Leno next time Jay is on vacation! Each member of the winning teams selected by Al received \$100 grand for their efforts! Then the trees were sold in a silent auction. Congratulations to Houston Sanders, Kris Ziemann, Jean Sher and Erskine Tucker for producing this exciting event.

The *Friends of Channel Ten* produces an annual auction to raise money for public television programs. They called our Voice Mail looking for a donation from the Club. At the April meeting, the Board of Directors, decided to provide nine family memberships to the Auction. That will provide one membership for each day of the auction. This is an unusual, but effective way, for us to get our name out into the public arena.

The "Forest" workshop for Warren Hill is sold out but there is lots of room for "Silent Observers" at the workshop. Being a silent observer is a great way to learn bonsai at a minimum cost. It costs \$5 to be a silent observer and the only requirement is that you must be "Silent!" So come to the workshop, pay your money, watch and listen. In addition, there are still one or two openings for the private workshop with Warren Hill. Cost will depend upon the number of participants. The private workshop will be held at Jack Douthitt's house on Saturday afternoon.

## What's Inside?

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*Gold Tip Juniper – First Place – Before and After*

If you have any concerns or questions about club events, the best way to contact any of the Officers or Directors is to call the voice mail number listed on the newsletter. Kate Kerner, who checks the voice-mail on a regular basis, can then forward your question or concern to the appropriate person.

## Group Slash a Smash!

*Kris Ziemann*

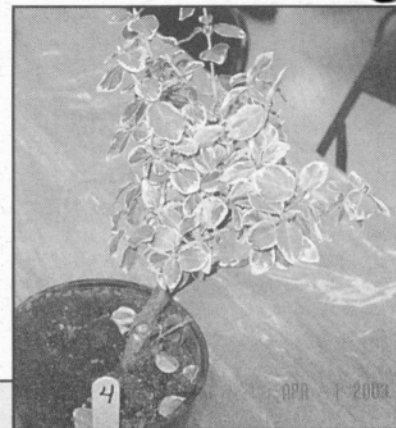
What a terrific time we all had at the “Group Slash!” Lots of trees, lots of people, lots of ideas, lots of excitement!

Teams of enthusiasts grabbed a tree and began working. Some tables had a couple of trees they worked on. Everyone tossed around ideas as to what they saw and how the trees could be shaped – a true collaborative effort.

Our judge was Al Durtka from the International Institute of Wisconsin. He investigated the happenings at each table and gave entertaining comments on many of the trees. Finally he chose his top 3 picks: 1st place – Gold Tip Juniper styled by Erskine Tucker's team; 2nd place – Euonymus styled by Yvonne Szatkowski's team; and 3rd place – Boulevard Cypress styled by Tony Plicka and Allen Koszarek. All in all, we had a great time sharing and learning. Join us next year!

## Upcoming Events

Our June meeting (Tuesday, June 3rd) will feature Ivan Watters from Chicago, who will present a



*Euonymus – Second Place – Before (top) and After (left)*



*Boulevard Cypress – Third Place - Before*



*After*



demonstration on “mame” bonsai. These are sometimes called a “bonsai of a bonsai” because they are so small. A “mame” bonsai is generally considered to be a bonsai that is less than six inches in height. In addition, the June meeting will feature our “Club Show” so get your best trees groomed and ready to be exhibited. It will be a feature packed meeting, so plan on coming early and staying late! Ivan will also be doing a “mame” workshop on Saturday May 31st. Sign up sheets will be available at the May meeting.

Also in June (Saturday, June 7th) will be the “refinement” workshop with Jack Douthitt. This was a very popular event last year. It is an opportunity to learn some of the refinement techniques that will provide continuing improvement in your bonsai. Sign up sheets will be available at the May meeting.

*The following excerpt is from an article written by Vance Wood, reprinted here with permission.*

### The Ubiquitous Mugho Pine

Of all the trees that can be grown as bonsai, the Mugho pine is still one of the least respected. This may be because it is so common in the nursery trade, no self-respecting bonsai grower would consider the tree worth the effort. Then there are the reports that the tree is difficult to cultivate and hard to transplant. Whatever the reason, the Mugho Pine is not commonly grown by those who are considered masters of bonsai. Many have one or two, but seldom are they shown at exhibits or conventions. The tree is not taken seriously within the bonsai community; instead it is more of a novelty than a specimen. However, anyone who decides to try the Mugho and treats it properly, will be rewarded with a bonsai that is at least as beautiful as the Black Pine and almost as lovely as the White.

When I first started growing bonsai, I desperately wanted a Japanese White Pine. Availability, cost and the difficulties of cultivation hampered my desires then, as they do now. I instead opted for the affordable, and often cheap, Mugho Pine. This of course was before I was aware that no one of any stature in the bonsai community would even touch this tree.



**Tony Plicka**  
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One tree evolved into many. My experiments with them have made the Mugho a tree of choice and not a tree of convenience. I discovered that the tree was capable of enduring the kind of treatment that would kill most other pine trees. The best part was finding that the trees response was remarkable and that the finished product was in appearance much like the Japanese White Pine I had so coveted.

Today, because of an assortment of fine publications, books, touring international Japanese Masters and domestic experts (who could be considered Masters in their own right), we have at our fingertips a mountain of excellent information from which to draw concerning the cultivation of two-needle pines. The Mugho Pine having two needles would be one. We concentrate on this information to such a degree; we often forget how things are learned. We tend to depend on existing information and avoid blazing our own trails. When this literature lets us down, we assume it cannot be done at all. Our thinking becomes almost dogmatic in believing, if the methods originating in Japan do not work then nothing will work. With Mughos this is incorrect.

It is widely taught today that there are two major categories for pine cultivation: two-needle pine culture and five-needle pine culture. To a degree this is true, but there are some major differences between the Mugho Pine and the Japanese Black Pine, (the model for all theory and practice surrounding two-needle pine cultivation). The Mugho Pine is a two-needle pine and can be treated like any other two-needle pine with some major exceptions.

### *"All Two-Needle Pines are Treated Alike"*

This statement pretty much defines itself and is a fairly accurate portrayal of what the current literature presents as factual. It is, however, only partially true. You can treat all two-needle pines in this manner but the end result will not bring the result the literature seems to indicate it will on all two-needle pines, and the Mugho is one of the major exceptions. In return I have found that there are some things I can do with a Mugho Pine that will not return the same result on other two-needle pines.

### *"Two Needle Pines Should be Kept Dry"*

This seems to be the major difference between the classic two-needle model and the real live Mugho pine. The Japanese Black Pine and its closest counterpart in North America, the Ponderosa Pine, need to be kept dry, first to control the length of the needles and second, their roots will rot if over-watered. The Mugho Pine, on the other hand, is capable of surviving mild drought conditions but it will not prosper. And if kept bone dry, as some are prone to do, there is the risk of losing the tree. The Mugho's needles are kept short by the way the tree is pinched – and not by withholding water. It is surprising to me that there are people that think keeping a tree on what amounts to the verge of straw is the way to keep the needles short. True, this will work but there is a better way. They seem to like a lot of water but must have excellent drainage so that they do not sit in soggy soil. I have found a method of pinching, coupled with an abundance of water that makes the needles take on the appearance achieved with the Japanese White Pine.

### *"Two-Needle Pines Should be Potted in the Spring"*

It is possible to transplant the Mugho in the early spring along with a host of other two-needle pines, but in fact I have had more difficulty with this tree when transplanted and root pruned in the spring. I don't consider myself a master horticulturist. Most of what I have learned has been through a seat-of-the-pants experience and personal observation. I do believe there are fundamental differences between the Black Pine and the Mugho in the way they grow and respond that indicates the individual tree's differing

patterns of growth; differences that, to me, seem significant.

It seems that the Black Pine is more dominant in its above ground response, whereas the Mugho is more dominant in its root response. This would account for the Mugho's ability to tolerate more water than the Black Pine and in this case be more agreeable to transplanting later in the season than the standard literature suggests. This would also account for the rapid and vigorous response obtained with Japanese Black Pines in response to the pruning and pinching described in the literature, whereas the Mugho does not respond in the same manner. My theory also suggests that this trait is correct, accounts for the necessity of transplanting the Black Pine only in the spring when its overall growth pattern is producing the majority of its new root growth.

I transplant Mughos on a regular basis throughout the entire summer, up to and including September. I have been known to do some very extreme root work on Mugho Pines through July and August, the hottest months of the year where I live, a time the literature says you should never repot a two-needle pine. It would seem from my observations that the Black Pine concentrates the majority of its growing resources on the upper portion of the tree while the Mugho Pine focuses more on the roots and buds after the initial spring growth. Therefore it is possible to transplant the Mugho all summer long because the tree is not so genetically geared toward producing a lot of above ground growth as is the Black Pine. The tendency toward foundational growth seems to give the Mugho the ability to endure having the roots disturbed at a time the same process on a Black Pine would severely damage or kill the tree.

### *The Never Do's of Two-Needle Pines:*

The literature is quite explicit about what should never be done with a two-needle pine. At the top of this list is wiring and repotting at the same time. Growers new to bonsai are not aware of the amount of stress wiring can put on a tree. The fact is wiring puts a great deal of stress and trauma on the cambium layer, which transmits the water and nutrients up and down the tree. It is believed that wiring and root pruning simultaneously can kill a tree.



With the Mugho Pine. I have found that this is not a fatal error with the possible exception of very old and collected trees. It is also taught that you never do drastic pruning and wiring at the same time for the same reasons, though I see this one violated all of the time, (especially by me). In fact I do all of the above all summer long and all at the same time, a practice most experts would consider the kiss of death to any tree involved.

When I first started doing demonstrations for clubs and organizations, I would use Mughos from my inventory of "material in waiting." I have always held in contempt the "traveling minstrel show" mentality where some club member's tree is destroyed for the sake of a demonstration. I believe that if a tree is going to be ruined or destroyed, it should at least belong to the destroyer and not be the property of some unsuspecting club member. These programs usually imply, if not demand, that the demonstrator comes as close as possible to creating the instant bonsai. This in turn usually means doing things to a tree that good sense or knowledge of fundamental practices suggests that you should not do. I quickly began to notice that the trees I did this with not only survived but also seemed to prosper through the process. This I know for a fact because I have been able to witness the recovery of many of these trees. I also know that their recovery in most cases did not involve any kind of extreme care and attention.

I now believe that not only is this method of working on a Mugho Pine possible, the results seem to indicate that it is favorable. Do I suggest that everyone do it this way? No! I do suggest that it be tried, because it opens up avenues for spreading out the work that normally would be carried out in the early spring, to include the entire summer period, (leaving the spring window for the more critical plants). Anyone with more than a few trees knows how hectic the early spring can become, and how easy it is to miss an opportunity, or just plain put it off for another year.

### *Pinching and Pruning:*

I have saved this subject for last because not only is it the most complicated, but also the most misunderstood. Pinching is the process of controlling the growth and the length of the needles. The main focus is to develop and or control, the concepts of design and style established by pruning and wiring. There are fundamentally three different ways pinching can be approached, depending on what needs to be accomplished, and three different levels of development they are assigned to:

- The first would be to stimulate back budding on newly styled trees
- The second, to develop ramification of small branches
- The third, to maintain and refine a finished and near finished bonsai, and shorten the length of needles, making the growth more compact and mature looking. It is in this area where the Mugho really shines if the work is done correctly.

Too often I see beginners trying to accomplish the end without understanding the beginning. With all of the publications available concerning the development and pinching of two-needle pines, beginners are often left confused about what they should be doing and when. Consequently many are practicing needle reduction techniques on trees that should be encouraged to back bud. Seldom, if ever, is the point made that needle reduction principles are reserved for the finished and near finished tree, the fact is, if you have a "just starting out stage Mugho Pine" and you practice all of the needle removal and needle reduction techniques described in many publications you will have a Mugho Pine that will never be a bonsai.

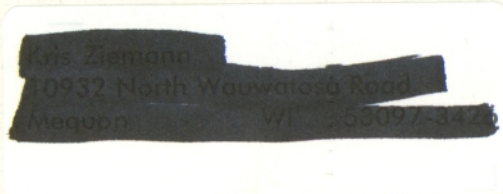
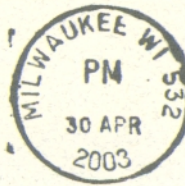
#### **MBS Meetings and Information Line:**

The Milwaukee Bonsai Society meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. at Grace Lutheran Church, 3030 W. Oklahoma Avenue. Call the MBS Voice Mail/Message System at (414) 299-9229 to learn about upcoming events and meeting times. To contact the club via email: [mbs@asapnet.net](mailto:mbs@asapnet.net) Look for us on the web at: [http://www.asapnet.net/milwaukee\\_bonsai/index.html](http://www.asapnet.net/milwaukee_bonsai/index.html)





P.O. Box 198  
Brookfield, WI 53008-0198  
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*Next Meeting of MBS  
Tuesday, May 6  
7 p.m. at Grace Lutheran Church*

**MBS Board - 2003**

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- Houston Sanders, *First Vice President*
- Jean Sher, *Second Vice President*
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- Kris Ziemann, *Treasurer*
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- Dr. Erskine Tucker, *Director*
- Pam Woythal, *Director*
- Brian Palevac, *Past President*
- Ron Fortmann, *MABA Representative*
- Yvonne Szatkowski, *Newsletter Editor*

*Trees awake slowly  
from a long, wintry slumber.  
My heart wakes with them.*

~ Yvonne Szatkowski

Members with questions or concerns  
for the Executive Committee should  
contact Russ Weiss, Club Secretary at  
[cowbell@wi.rr.com](mailto:cowbell@wi.rr.com)