

# BONSAI NEWS

March 2025



## Upcoming Meeting

You loved the group slash last year and now we're bringing it back, focusing on juniper styling.

Preliminary styling was discussed in our February meeting and now we will work to apply this to nursery junipers. Six tables, each with a tree and an experienced member will be set up after Andy Smith's talk on tree collecting.

We will have the last half of the meeting to work on the trees.

Bring your tools (with ID on them) as well as cash or a check book. The trees will be auctioned off at the end of the meeting.



## Next Meeting

March 1, 2025

9 am

Boerner

Botanical

## March

March 1 – General Meeting: Juniper Work/Guest Artist:  
Andy Smith-Collecting

March 1 – Workshop: Andy Smith\*

March 2 – Workshop: Bring your own Tree with Andy Smith\*

March 8 – Class: Fundamentals\*

March 22 – Class: Fundamentals\*

March 22 – Workshop: Root over Rock Follow-up\*

March 29 – Class: Skills 101\*

March 30 – Class: Skills 201\*

## April

April 5 – General Meeting:  
Pinching/Mugo Pine Work

April 12 – Class: Skills 101\*

April 13 – Class: Skills 201\*

April 19 – Class: Fundamentals\*

## May

May 3 – General Meeting: Multi Flush Deep Dive/Accent Plant Placement

\*Open to MBS members only

## President's Message

I have long been fascinated by epistemology, the area of philosophy that contemplates the theory of knowledge. More specifically, it explores what differentiates justified belief from mere opinion. This is not new stuff, by the way—about eighteen hundred years ago Marcus Aurelius wrote that “Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, and not the truth.”

A little further down the rabbit hole is the area of social epistemology, which concerns itself with how ‘truth’ comes to be known among a social group. One of the key concepts in this area is the notion of ‘testimony’—not in the courtroom sense, but as in “When does the belief that X is true, because someone told me it is true, become actual knowledge?” I find this to be particularly problematic in bonsai literature. I would venture that if you pulled ten general surveys, all about bonsai-type books from the library cart, many of them would uniformly repeat directions that are simply bad information. It gets repeated because someone wrote it before in another book, ergo it must be the real deal.

My current example is the assertion that the time to repot an azalea is after it flowers. A domestic landscape azalea, maybe—those things are so durable you can do anything, any time except not water them. But with Satsuki azaleas? No. That’s not only wrong, it’s stupid. [Note that stupidity per se is beyond the scope of this month’s rant and may be covered at a later time. In the interim, read Dietrich Bonhoeffer.] How could it possibly make sense to take a tree that has just finished expending an astonishing amount of energy, subject it to the trauma of repotting, and expect it to be healthy going into dormancy? And yet I’m three for three in pulling books from my shelf and finding the same bad information in each.

The point I’m trying to make is that it can be a big mistake to take rote regurgitated ‘gospel’ as sound advice unless one knows WHY it’s supposed to be true. This, to me, is the core value of Ryan Neal’s teaching—he explains everything he teaches from a perspective of horticulture. What we do and when must be an extension of the life processes of the tree. Not by coincidence, this is the principle that lies in all three levels of classes we offer and is the rationale behind how the education committee structures its sequence of monthly presentations.

It is also worth mentioning the dangers of ignorance [as very much distinct from stupidity—again, Bonhoeffer]. Medieval cartographers would draw maps of the extent of the world which was known to them, and when they got to the edge, the map might say “and here there be dragons”. Having been an investment professional for three decades, I learned early on that the biggest, scariest risk lay in not knowing the extent of what I did not know.

This is perhaps the biggest challenge facing the education committee as it designs our curriculum, most especially as it concerns our novice members. For our more experienced members, it’s difficult to step back and try to see the progression of knowledge from the perspective of someone who knows a little. If one wishes to teach effectively it’s imperative to know what the student doesn’t know, which is a question they may not be able to answer.

It is also part of the continuing struggle in our programming—to keep our presentations at a level that does not put the experienced person to sleep, while not making the beginner feel that it's going right over their heads. We really want to be successful at this, so please, don't be reluctant to share your thoughts on the programming with the education committee or with anyone on the board.

For what it's worth, my advice would be:

- ~ If you have any doubt, ask somebody; better still, two or three somebodies.
- ~ Don't just ask what to do without asking why.
- ~ Resist any urge to take action without a pretty solid confidence that it's the right thing at the right time.
- ~ Remember that mistakes in bonsai are often difficult to undo.

Generally speaking, few things can happen to your tree that can't abide waiting a day or two spent finding the right answer, but many bad things can come from shooting first, to coin a phrase. You might find that the very best thing to do is nothing.

Rick

## **Ancient Arts Bonsai**

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in 2005**

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Services – Lessons, Consults, Repotting, Wiring, Boarding

See our updated Website: [aabonsai.com](http://aabonsai.com)

Email – [aabonsai@charter.net](mailto:aabonsai@charter.net)

Phone – 262-490-8733

## MBS Skills 101 Class

This educational offering is directed to the **novice bonsai hobbyist** who would like to grow in their bonsai understanding, skills and practice. It will include 6 days of classes spread out over the bonsai season from late winter through late autumn, during the months when appropriate work can be performed safely.

There are 12 spots available in the class. The class will be held only if all 12 spots are filled.

The fee for all 6, 6+ hour sessions, will be \$380.00

The instructors will be Brian S and Steve C

The class will be held at Night Owl Bonsai in the River West neighborhood of Milwaukee. There are 12 workstations at the studio.

The class will be structured as a **lecture/demonstration style class**. The earlier part of the day will be spent discussing pertinent topics related to the scope of work that is appropriate for the season at hand. The balance of the time will be spent discussing trees. Some trees might be the presenter's own trees which demonstrate seasonally appropriate work, but most will be the personal trees of the class participants. **One tree will be discussed at a time while the other participants listen** to the issues of the tree presented. All will learn from each tree discussed. **If there is time permitting**, some work might be performed on these trees. Any recommended work will be directed by the instructors and performed by either one of the instructors or by the member themselves, if appropriate.

It should be understood that all will benefit from each tree presented and each person or tree may not receive the EXACT amount of time or attention. A younger tree may be able to be discussed in a shorter time than a larger, more involved tree. Remember that younger trees grow into larger trees and when a younger tree matures, the member will be familiar with the work necessary by observing the procedures done on another member's more mature tree.

The class will be an open, casual, and thorough learning experience... and it is always a lot of fun.

Class dates for the 2025 season:

Saturdays, 9AM-4PM

- March 29 - Repotting
- April 12 - Wiring and Styling, Deadwood creation
- June 28 - Post flush-Harden-prune, Wiring, Styling
- August 16 - Final summer cut-back, Wiring, Styling
- September 6 - Wiring, Styling, Deadwood creation
- November 15 - Fall cut-back, Deciduous Wiring, Fall Pine work

All classes will be held at:

Night Owl Bonsai  
3728 North Fratney Street  
Milwaukee

There are currently 5 spots available.

Sign up on Eventbrite: [Skills 101 Class](#)



**WISCO BONSAI**  
www.WiscoBonsai.com

**WISCO BONSAI NOW HAS THE AREA'S LARGEST SELECTION OF ARTISIAN, HANDMADE BONSAI POTTERY, MUCH OF WHICH CONSISTS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ARTISTS.**

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**THE SHOP NOW HAS REGULAR HOURS IN THE SPRING, SUMMER AND FALL. HOURS ARE UPDATED WEEKLY ON MY GOOGLE INFO SITE. OR, TO BE THE AMONG FIRST TO KNOW ABOUT ALL THE WORKSHOPS AND OTHER FUN GOING DOWN AT WISCO BONSAI, JUST SHOOT AN EMAIL AND I WILL ADD YOU TO THE EMAIL LIST.**

**"BONSAI IS THE ART OF NATURE, GUIDED AND NURTURED BY HUMAN HANDS" - KMS**

## Bonsai Pot Making Class

At our February meeting, the students brought in their pots from the January pot making class. The pots are what is called “green wear”, still just dry clay. The students did a great job on these pots. Now the pots will go in for firing, glazing and a second firing.



On April 19th there will be another pot making class. For \$50.00 you can make a pot of your choice up to 12” or if you have taken one of the previous pot making classes you can make a fancier pot using one of the 10 templates for cutting out the clay to special shapes. <https://youtu.be/FyBxtNqENSI?si=R591VR6KuEOJ0n43>

8 students maximum in the class. Five are signed up at this time. We will keep a waiting list to get you into the next class.

The class will be held at Cream City Clay - 7105 W Greenfield Ave. West Allis, 10AM to 1PM or so. This event is not sponsored by MBS.

Contact Val to get registered:

Text 414-412-0511 or email: [valerie.strukel@icloud.com](mailto:valerie.strukel@icloud.com)

## MBS supports Bonsai in Our School (BiOS) at Milwaukee Lutheran HS.

By John R

MBS and the Milwaukee Bonsai Foundation have provided funds to jump start the BiOS (Bonsai in Our School) project at Milwaukee Lutheran High School recently. Andrew Steinke, who teaches biology at MLHS, was working in the horticultural building at the State Fair 2024. Inspired by our exhibit and demos, Drew approached John R. to bring bonsai into his classroom. BiOS has two missions: 1) introduce bonsai to students; 2) use bonsai to teach science. Following advice from Irene H., we obtained 19 *F. microcarpa* from Wigert's and local vendors in August. Additional trees were acquired at our Holiday Meeting in Dec including several burning bushes that are now pushing leaves indoors after 60 days of cold dormancy (thanks Ron S!). Under grow lights donated by several club members, the trees have been growing vigorously. Students in the biology class have been conducting randomized controlled longitudinal experiments to study the effect of clip-and-grow on measures of ramification and of heating mats on the rate of rooting. These experiments tie in with course material in scientific measurement, experimental design, and botany. Students have learned about styles and have started learning to style their trees using wiring, cutting, and clip-and-grow. With guidance from Greg R., a student in the ceramics class and her teacher have been learning how to make bonsai pots. A student in a design course has been working on a logo for an afterschool MLHS Bonsai Club (which is still waiting to get off the ground!). Students in the class volunteer to be lab assistants and monitor the experiment each day at the beginning of class. To date, over 180 students have been exposed to bonsai through hands-on activities!

If anyone has (small) trees or bonsai tools they'd like to donate to BiOS, we'd be very grateful. (Because of the school schedule, we need to work with tropical or short-dormancy trees)



Students record water temperature and the number of buds and roots on *Ficus* clippings growing in glass vials at room temperature or on a heat mat.



Find the nebari!

# Bonsai Trees for the Soul

By Ben H.

February is coming to an end. Thank Goodness. I have always found that February is the shortest month when you count the number of days but feels the longest. Bonsai has not made February any easier. Now, not only does my skin long to feel the heat of the sun - not the chill of a stiff breeze – but my fingers itch. They itch to be holding a root hook or my favorite pair of pruning scissors. I cannot wait to get that one tree out of the ugly plastic pot and finally into the nice ceramic pot I bought last year. My poor topicals would probably quake with fear each time I passed by if they could. It is silly the number of times I have placed them on my turn table to see if they need a pruning, or maybe this branch needs to come down a bit. Inevitably I put them right back in their spot (maybe turning them a bit) because this is the fourth time I have looked at this tree this month; and there really is not anything else to do at this point. How anxiously I wait for “repotting season.”

But why? Why do I count down the days to March like a kid counts the days to Christmas? As I have been asking myself this question another question has arisen. Are there any benefits to doing bonsai? I think the answer is yes. I think the psychological and emotional benefits are one of the reasons I cannot wait to work on my trees again. I remember a Vox article I read back in 2021 when my interest with bonsai was really beginning to pick up. The article was called “Bonsai and the delicate art of feeling better.” The article describes the author’s experience with bonsai and his struggle with mental illness. He also interviews several other bonsai practitioners who have their own struggles with mental health. I love this article for its ambiguity. It admits freely that practicing bonsai is not always exactly “Fun,” but somehow it is healing.



Are there any studies on the psychological benefits of bonsai. There are some, but not many. There is one that studies the effects of looking at bonsai on people who have spinal cord injuries, and it finds that they report less pain after looking at bonsai. There is another that delves into the effects of observing bonsai on the elderly and finds that it puts them in a physiological and emotional relaxed state. The most interesting study I thought was one in South Africa where they used the practice of bonsai together with group therapy to help treat people with traumatic experiences. This study reports that for all but one patient the practice of bonsai aided in treatment and recovery for these individuals. Often the tree became part of a story that they could tell about themselves (“This tree grows big and strong like me”). The rest of the studies were a little less robust. They relied on responses to questionnaires given to bonsai professionals and hobbyists. The questionnaires focused on why and how people got into bonsai, if bonsai practitioners felt bonsai provided therapeutic qualities and the experiences of caring for bonsai. While these studies do not present hard data, there are some themes that came up in the answers provided.

**Ecological Awareness:** Many bonsai practitioners reported feeling more aware of the environment and their place in it. Other themes that emerged included respect for nature, empowerment and a respect for ecological health and balance. I know that I have become much more aware of the changing seasons. I have a much better sense for when it will get cold in the end of November and beginning of December. I

am also the first in my family to begin to see the signs of the landscape trees beginning to wake up in spring.

**Spiritual Awareness:** Bonsai has often been associated with spiritual and meditative practices. Practitioners talk about getting a better understanding for harmony and order. Finding transcendence and pleasure in bonsai. Some talk about finding a deeper respect for life or just finding contentment. As a religious person myself; and someone who has struggled with feeling anger towards God, I have found peace in thinking of Him as the bonsai master and myself as a humble stick in a pot

**Emotional Awareness:** The connection that we have with bonsai promotes emotional well-being. There has been a long practice of ecopsychology, showing that simply being in nature promotes emotional wellbeing. Bonsai, it turns out, taps into that as well. I have learned that when I am feeling emotionally off kilter – a walk in the woods helps rebalance me.



**Aesthetic Health and Creativity:** Many studies have shown that having a creative outlet is important for a healthy person and bonsai offers that creative outlet. More specifically for most bonsai practitioners it is the creative act for its own sake – not for fame or fortune that is so important. Much like ecopsychology, art therapy has long been used in psychology to promote healing. I find that there is nothing more satisfying than finding that defining branch that makes the tree work or adjusting the angle of the trunk in such a way that a boring tree suddenly has interest.

**Social Health:** This one was surprising to me as I think of my bonsai practice as mainly solitary, however many practitioners reported finding friends and a support network in the various clubs and associations focused on the art and practice of bonsai.

**Resilience and Adaptive Health:** Sticking with Bonsai implies durability and patience. It takes years to develop a fine bonsai. It is also a daily practice, even when the practitioner is not doing the exciting things (big trunk bends or drastic pruning) there is watering. The every-day act of bonsai develops resilience and the ability to adapt to changing conditions. I don't feel patient often with bonsai, but I also know that I am planning and working for something that is going to take five to ten years to pay off.

Often when doing bonsai we agonize over the details. What is the right shape of the tip of the chopstick we are using? Should the soil have 50% akadama or 33%? Should I seal my cuts or not? Should this tree lean slightly this way or that? Should I use an oval pot or a rectangular with rounded corners? We have every right to agonize because we know that when perusing perfection every little detail matters. And bonsai is very much an art where we pursue perfection knowing deep down, we will never achieve it. But maybe, this year, we can stop and smell the azaleas. I know that I will pause briefly in my pursuit for the insurmountable perfect tree and find a little joy in the fact that my trees need me, but even more importantly I need my trees. Then I will go back to trying to figure out which branch to cut and where.

## 2025 Burning Bush Yamadori Dig

This is a great way for new bonsai addicts to jump into bonsai for no money.

We will go back into the woods near Boerner Botanical for free burning bushes. Isn't that where babies come from? It's a great way to get a tree that will become a bonsai. They are tough, they flower, get berries and their foliage turns red in the fall.



<https://photos.app.goo.gl/BvEdra6G3Uu1Vss7>

Please bring the below with you on April 5<sup>th</sup> for after our meeting.

- Shovels
- Branch clippers
- Small saws
- Bags and pots to put the trees into
- A small cart. It's maybe 300 yards from the parking lot to the woods.
- Bring other family members for the walk in an old woods
- Be prepared at home with pots and wooden boxes and soil to plant your trees in

Bryan 414-364-5253

Please check out the following information concerning the upcoming North American Bonsai Pottery Competition coming up in September in conjunction with the American Bonsai Society Learning Seminars and the US National Bonsai Exhibition.



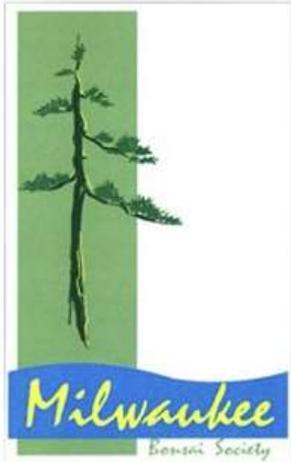
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APPLICATIONS OPENING SOON



PO Box 240822  
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[www.milwaukeebonsai.org](http://www.milwaukeebonsai.org)

Next MBS meeting will be  
March 1, 2025 @ 9am

#### **2025 MBS OFFICERS**

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*Winter fights to stay.  
Sweet Spring always wins her way.  
Flowers bloomed today!*

*~Patricia L Cisco*