



Preparing your Bonsai for Display

This booklet was prepared
from a 1973-1974 article
by Bob Bauder, founder of the
Descanso Bonsai Society
of California.

The information is as
pertinent today as
it was then!

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-Edited by Kris Z

PREPARING YOUR BONSAI FOR DISPLAY

The Milwaukee Bonsai Society wishes to encourage each member to exhibit at least one specimen at State Fair or at our annual Club show. If you don't exhibit, you are depriving the public and our members of the pleasure they will derive from viewing your favorite bonsai. If you do exhibit, you will enjoy the experience and be justly proud of your contribution.

PREPARATION TIMELINE

90 days	Read show rules - select entries
90 to 75 days	Major pruning and wiring
75 to 60 days	Fine wiring & detailed grooming
60 to 35 days	Acquire secondary materials-stands, moss, soil dressing, accent pieces
35 days	Prepare for pre-show fertilizing
28 days	Fertilize; Repeat fine wiring and detailed grooming
21 days	Fertilize; Pot accent pieces
14 days	Fertilize
7 days	Fertilize
7 to 2 days	Final detailed grooming
1 day	Water thoroughly; Clean pots and stands

90 DAYS

Review the rules for the State Fair Exhibit

(the Club Show uses similar rules - see newsletters):

- +Any active member of a Bonsai Society or 4-H club is eligible to exhibit a bonsai.
- +There shall be six classes of entries:
 - Youth Class - Exhibitors 18 years of age or younger
 - Novice Class - Exhibitors with less than five year's experience in bonsai
 - Intermediate Class - Exhibitors with more than five years experience in bonsai
 - Advanced Class - Exhibitors that have previously won an Award of Merit in the Intermediate Class or Best of Show in any Class at the Wisconsin State Fair
 - Open Class - Open to all exhibitors
 - For Exhibit Only - Not eligible for any award
- +A tree may be entered in only one class. Each class will be judged separately and the "Best in Show" and Awards of Merit may be selected.
- +All trees submitted for exhibition must be healthy and free of disease and infestation and must be exhibited in a bonsai container.
- +Any tree submitted for judging must have been in the direct care of the exhibitor over two winters. Youth and Novice Class entries are exempt from this requirement.
- +Exhibitor's names will NOT be displayed on any exhibited tree. As a matter of security, the bonsai identification cards will identify only the club affiliation of the tree's owner.
- +Specimens exhibited for judging may be awarded prizes according to the guidelines below:
 - White Ribbon - A very good example of the art of bonsai
 - Red Ribbon - An exceptional example of the art of bonsai
 - Blue Ribbon - A highly exceptional example of the art of bonsai
 - Award of Merit - A superior example of the art of bonsai, which exhibits unique characteristics or design
 - Best of Show - The specimen which best exhibits the highest quality of the art of bonsai

After you have pinpointed your objectives and strategy, you are ready to select your potential entries. Objectively appraise your trees as the judges will look at them. The overall impact, the root structure, the trunk, the first strong branch, the overall branch structure,

the apex, the general aesthetics (relationship of height to width, overall triangle effect or other acceptable overall outline) and of course the appropriateness of the container as to size, shape and color. Select a few alternates in event any of your original selections have the "blahs" at show time. Don't be overly critical of your trees. In my experience, members who have felt that they do not have worthy trees, were pleasantly surprised after being encouraged to enter and they have the ribbons to prove the point. If you have doubts about the worthiness of an entry, consult with more experienced members who will be glad to advise you.

As a bare minimum, select your most worthy specimen and plan to enter it in the show. At this point, make a list of your selection identifying which of the exhibits it will be entered in.



90 to 75 days
75 to 60 days

Major pruning & wiring
Fine wiring detailed grooming

Aside from the basic merits of your exhibit, grooming is the most essential element in your presentation to the public and the judges.

The best groomed exhibit will win every time between two bonsai of equal merit. You wouldn't think of making an important personal appearance without being groomed to perfection. Give your bonsai the same consideration.

It is important to accomplish the major grooming effort on the above time table to avoid the " I just had a haircut" appearance at showtime as well as bright wire and unhealed cut marks.

MAJOR PRUNING & WIRING

Overall Perspective

See that the overall outline of your specimen is in a triangular or other acceptable shape and is clearly definable. You may wish to accentuate the basic shape in order to make as dramatic an appearance as possible in the confined space with which you are working. Remove all old wire that has served its purpose. Replace any poor wiring. Accomplish any additional wiring of the trunk and primary wiring of branches necessary to create the desired overall outline. Branches should be uniformly at the same angle from the trunk unless you are depicting a younger tree and want the upper branches to be angled slightly upward. Looking down from the apex, no branch should be directly over another branch and sufficient branches should be located in the rear 180 degree to provide the desired third dimensional depth.

Branches

Judiciously accomplish secondary wiring and pruning to create an overall outline of your branches in an arrow, diamond or other acceptable shape. The maximum width of the branch should preferably be about one-half the length of the branch.

FINE WIRING & DETAILED GROOMING

The most neglected of all grooming activities is the fine wiring and detailed grooming. While this activity is time consuming and tedious, it is absolutely necessary if you want a finished bonsai that is a winner instead of an also-ran. Remove undergrowth on each branch. Complete the desired plane by judicious tertiary wiring and pruning. Resist the temptation to prune foliage that can be fine wired down into the plane simply because it is too much work. Pay particular attention to the fine wiring of the apex. The apex is a key focal point and deserves special attention. Remove any remaining brown needles and undesirable foliage. Critically examine the trunk for any improvements which can be made such as removal of excess bark (e.g. on some junipers), removal of unsightly stubs of branches previously removed and any small power tool work that will enhance the groomed appearance of the trunk. Critically examine any exposed roots and make improvements in their placement and natural relationship to the soil level. Exposed roots should never extend to the inside edge of the pot, but should disappear into the soil short of the edge. To complete the fine grooming remove debris from soil, re-establish soil level, cut off any small exposed roots which are above the soil level and wipe off the pot with a damp soft cloth. You are now ready for your reward. Stand back and soak in the justifiable pride and satisfaction which radiates from your masterpiece.

60 to 35 days Acquire secondary materials: stands, accent pieces, moss and soil dressing.

When you view and admire a painting or display, you can be sure that the artist has expended considerable thought and artistic talent in the choice of frame, appropriate lighting and the way the painting is displayed. All of these factors are co-ordinated to enhance and highlight the presentation without distracting from the masterpiece. In a like manner, you will want to give considerable artistic thought to selecting a stand, an accent piece, moss and soil dressing to enhance your bonsai masterpiece.

STANDS

A stand is required for each bonsai entry. It is important to identify the specific stand to be used with each specimen a month or two before the show and to record your choice on the list of entries previously prepared.

A stand is the frame for your masterpiece. It should enhance your presentation without detracting from your bonsai. If anyone comments, "Isn't that a beautiful stand" instead of, "Isn't that a beautiful bonsai," you have made the wrong choice. Stands range from elaborate and expensive to inexpensive, homemade ones. The suggested timeframe for acquiring your stands can save you money. There is time to accommodate your budget by judicious shopping or to design and construct your stands.

The size, style, shape, texture, finish and color in relationship to the bonsai and pot are all important considerations in your final selection of a stand. As a starter review your bonsai books and magazines. Observe how bonsai are displayed on stands and what is favorable or unfavorable about the presentation. This exercise will give you some idea on how they can be used, how they are constructed and the proper relationship between your

bonsai, the pot and the stand you select.

Line up your available stands and place your entries on the one you preliminarily think is most appropriate. Then study each one, making whatever switches you deem appropriate until you are satisfied with your selections. If you do not have an appropriate stand for each of your entries at this point, you will know more specifically what type of stands you need to either acquire or make.

Space does not permit an extensive discussion on making your own stands, but here are a couple of inexpensive ideas to stimulate your thinking. First, I have a very satisfactory large stand made from an unused wooden picture frame with a hardwood veneer panel inserted where the picture would be. Four wooden drawer pulls were attached to the corners to serve as legs. The finished product was sprayed with flat black enamel. Secondly, a stand can be made by cleating together with glue and nails two 1" pine boards of the desired width and length, attaching 1" x 3" pieces under the entire width of the ends for legs and spraying the finished piece with flat black enamel.

Bonsai are all too frequently displayed on stands which are too small to esthetically accommodate the pot size. The stand should extend 3" beyond the edges of the pot on all sides as a bare minimum. Although it requires a larger stand, consider placing your bonsai off-center on the stand, that is, to the rear of center and to either the left or right of center. In this way you can achieve an un-cramped feeling and prove an appropriate spacer in the front corner of the open side for a balancing accent piece.

Slabs of redwood, olive or other woods well sanded, finished or unfinished, make excellent stands. Their unique shapes add interest and their naturalness compliments your presentation of nature in miniature. Bamboo of uniform sizes lashed together make very durable, natural and effective stands. While cork boards are inexpensive and color-wise blend well, they are not recommended because they shed particles and give your display an untidy appearance.

The bottom tip of a formal or vertical cascade should be at least 1" above the level of the display table. This fact makes the height of your stand very critical. Remember to use delicate stands with delicate bonsai and more rugged appearing stands with bonsai of like character. Clean, wax or refinish your stands.

ACCENT PIECES

While not required in competitive, judged shows such as Wisconsin State Fair or the MBS Club show, accent pieces can add another dimension to compliment your presentation. They serve as a point of balance, add interest, tie your display together and assist in establishing the setting you wish to suggest for your bonsai. A slender upright accent goes well with a formal upright tree, emphasizing the illusion of regal, straight lines. When the overall feeling of your display is gentle and rounded, you might consider a soft-folliaged accent.

The variety of material available for accent pieces is limited only by your imagination and good judgment as to appropriateness. Small weeds / flowers found along roadsides can be very interesting!

MOSS & SOIL DRESSING

Although moss is frequently used to enhance the appearance of a bonsai presentation, it should be used with judgment. It may be more effective to have moss only around the trunk and exposed roots as it would appear in a natural setting as opposed

to completely covering the ground area.

Moss can be gathered from shady parts of your yard, acquired from someone with a greenhouse, be cultivated in separate pots or as a last



resort be acquired from a bonsai nursery. Moss thrives best in fine soil that is on the acid side. It is, therefore, encouraged with application of fish emulsion diluted per directions. Moss likes lots of water, high humidity and needs some sun each day, preferably in the morning. If you grow moss separately, you will have healthier moss and healthier bonsai.

A very effective soil dressing that gives bonsai a well-groomed appearance is uniformly screened decomposed granite. First I screen decomposed granite through 1/4" hardware cloth to eliminate large particles. The remainder is screened through 1/16" window screen to eliminate fine dust. The remainder can be used as part of your soil mix or as a ground cover for your bonsai at show time.

35 days	Prepare for pre-show fertilizing
28 days	Fertilize. Repeat fine wiring & detailed grooming.
21 days	Fertilize. Pot accent pieces.
14 days	Fertilize.
7 days	Fertilize.
7-2	Final detailed grooming days
1 day	Water thoroughly. Clean pots & stands. Deliver exhibit to show.

Pre-show Fertilization

For your entries that need an improvement in color, plan to fertilize them on a weekly basis for four weeks prior to the show, using the method suggested herein. Thirty-five days before the show, put 2 tablespoons of blood meal in a quart size mason jar and add a pint of water. Put the lid on tight and shake it up daily for a week. Twenty-eight days before the show, strain liquid through an old piece of discarded pantyhose. Add water to the strained liquid to make a gallon of the mix and fertilize your show specimens. Repeat the preparatory and fertilizing process weekly until the show time. You will find that the fertilizer will make your trees very green and lush and will not harm the moss. To further enhance the appearance of your moss, use 1 tablespoon of fish emulsion to a gallon of water and spray the moss thoroughly 28 days before the show and again 21 days before the show.

Fine Wiring & Detailed Grooming

Reread the suggestions offered on page 5. Apply fine wiring on your trees 28 days and 7 days before the show. Each succeeding repetition requires less work and really

NOTES

perfects your specimen. You can avoid the appearance of bright copper wire applied prior to the show by putting a small amount of lime sulphur on a cloth and pulling the wire through it before applying the wire to your bonsai. Fresh cuts can also be camouflaged by rubbing a little moist soil into the cuts.

Pot Accent pieces

Pot your accent pieces 21 days before the show so they will be well established and not look like they were thrown together the night before the show.

Final Preparation

The day before the show clean all of your stands and wax them if appropriate. Thoroughly water your exhibits, then clean your pots. Dust them with a brush and wipe them off with a wet cloth followed by a dry cloth. A small amount of baby oil on a cloth rubbed on the edge and sides of the pot followed by a dry cloth will return the original luster to the pots.

It is important to deliver your exhibits to the show (or pre-designated area) within the time schedule established to permit the show committee to accomplish their herculean task of setting up the show and displaying your exhibit in the most advantageous way.



Be prepared to take home your share of ribbons!