



February 2024

# The Bent Twig

A monthly newsletter of the American Bonsai Association of Sacramento  
<https://www.abasbonsai.org/>

## Arboreal Abstractions

Peak repotting is upon us. As I hustle to repot everything in my garden that needs to stretch its legs, the critical nature of root work has revealed itself more than ever. It's perhaps one of the more daunting things to learn for someone without a background in horticulture, but it's one of my favorite activities. It is literally the foundation of our tree and should be treated as such.

Bonsai is of course a constellation of different skills together as one and each skill set is its own rabbit hole. Artistic design is pruning, pot selection, display design, tree angle, etc. Horticulture on the other hand is repotting, pruning, light and water management, pest control etc. These are intricately linked together and there is a near infinite spectrum of ability to be attained in each.

Bonsai is this set of skills, but maximally refined and improved. We aren't just repotting; we are designing a display, selecting fine pottery, screening and mixing potting media, carefully arranging particle size for best drainage and aeration for root respiration, and thoughtfully placing the tree in the best position and angle. We aren't just pruning; we are looking decades into the future while considering the growth habit of the species, allowing light into the lower canopy, improving airflow, and defining negative space. Along each of these axes we strive to improve our skills and delve deeper into the nuanced technique of bonsai.

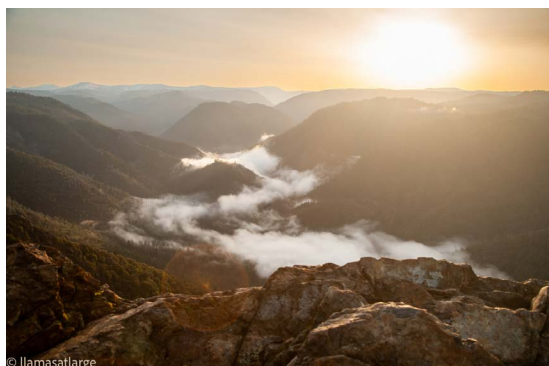
Yet much attention is spent on the visible upper half of the plant relative to the other half. Root work and repotting is arguably more important than shoot work, but it takes a backseat during presentations and discussions. Roots are literally the foundation of the plant, the mechanical attachment of the plant to the earth — or to our carefully screened potting media mix.

Visual inspection of roots can provide a great deal of information about the health of the plant, vigor, pest, and pathogen status. A root mealy bug infestation will not be known until your plant shows symptoms or you inspect the root zone. In my life as a greenhouse manager, when diagnosing a plant, one of the first things I do is pop it out of the pot. Casual inspection isn't possible when our trees are properly secured to the pot, but removing the wire to allow root inspection should always be an option if you suspect root issues. Many advanced practitioners will repot a new acquisition regardless of the need, in order to fully understand its status.

Design-wise, regular and early root work is critical to developing nebari and good design overall. It is far easier and more beneficial to do good root work early in the development process, just like developing the primary trunk line. Fixing bad roots only becomes more difficult with time.

Repotting time provides an opportunity to learn the advanced techniques that make the perceived magic of bonsai possible, so my advice is to embrace it. Repotting and root work are also critical levers that slow down plant growth, so don't be reckless, learn from someone with experience, and keep good notes. But don't be scared either of freeing your trees from their pots and spending much needed time working root structure.

Ian Baker



Above: I am a sucker for amazing light. Pacific Bonsai '23, Lover's Leap Dutch Flat CA

## Bonsai Structural Development - Peter Tea

Tuesday February 27

Our coming meeting on Tuesday February 27 will feature a presentation from Peter Tea on bonsai structural development. This presentation is not to be missed. Peter has been advancing the concept of sequential tree development through recent talks he has given. The idea is deceptively simple, yet profound and will benefit newcomers and seasoned artists alike. Peter emphasizes learning to read and design a tree from oldest to youngest tissue, starting with the primary trunk line. Learning to read a tree from the bottom-up, as opposed to our western (and beginner) tendency to read from the top-down, is the most efficient way to develop great lines without wasting energy on irrelevant portions of the tree.

Peter started his bonsai career in 2001 and served as a board member and president of Midori Bonsai Club for several years. In 2003 he commenced a 3-year intensive training program with Boon Manakitivipart. In 2011, Peter traveled to Nagoya, Japan to complete an apprenticeship under Junichiro Tanaka at Aichien Bonsai Garden. He returned to California in 2013 to become a full time bonsai artist and instructor. Today, he is a key figure in bonsai and bonsai education providing a complete care, materials, and instruction tailored to each client and tree.



Above: Mr. Tea working his magic

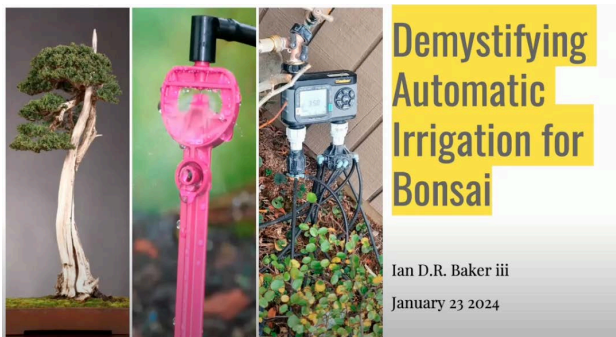




## Last Meeting - Demystifying Automatic Irrigation for Bonsai

Last month, I had the pleasure of leading a discussion on setting up automatic irrigation for bonsai during our January meeting. It was a fruitful discussion and audience engagement was high, which is every presenter's dream. We carefully threaded the needle of understanding that there is more than one way to solve for auto irrigation, while zooming in on key considerations to setting up an effective automatic irrigation system. We also looked at specific examples of how members have already set up irrigation and shared hard-earned wisdom with folks looking to set up a new system or rebuild an existing one.

As with everything, the best place to start is with goals and the same was true with our irrigation discussion. The amount of effort to build a system that provides infrequent vacation watering is far less than trying to build a system that waters daily with the same level of care and detail that hand-watering provides. This [discussion](#) was uploaded to our ABAS YouTube channel and I am almost always eager to talk shop, so don't hesitate to bring your questions and successes forward next time we see each other. - Ian



## What to Work on February

Re-potting continues! Deciduous trees are beginning to leaf out so the priority should be to finish those and then progress to conifers. As we move through February to March, our trees begin the spring push of growth. This is a great time to graft pines and junipers. Most trees will be allowed to grow freely until May/June. The exception is Japanese maples. They should be pinched back to one node (2 leaves) unless the branch is weak or you are trying to thicken it. As your knowledge of bonsai development increases, you will realize that there are nuances to all techniques and methods used to create our living works of art. Be proactive in seeking out knowledge.

## SGAAC Japanese Garden Monthly Work

Travis Hendrix has taken the initiative to improve and maintain the ABAS sponsored Japanese garden at the garden center. He has made great progress overall and recently transplanted a long-planned showpiece black pine with help from Phong Nguyen and Paul Newman. After the tree settles for the next 6 - 12 months, branch work, pruning, and repositioning will commence.

While Travis has done an excellent job improving the garden, one person alone cannot keep up with the weeding and other work. Traditionally, work in the Japanese garden was done seasonally, but the increased monthly attention has greatly improved its condition. In anticipation of the March 16 & 17 Spring Sale, we are planning an ad-hoc work session **Saturday March 2, 9:00 AM to noon**. Bring pruning / gardening tools, shovels, gloves, broom, dust pan, container/ bucket for debris etc. thank you!

Volunteers are also encouraged to join Travis for monthly garden maintenance on the second Wednesday of the month from 9:00 AM to noon.



Above: Recently acquired and transplanted black pine in the Japanese garden

## ABAS x Social Media

What makes ABAS such a wonderful and welcoming community is our passion to share our knowledge and love of bonsai with each other. To reach out into the Sacramento area more we are hoping to kick start a stronger presence on social media. This includes our Facebook page, Instagram, and Twitter accounts. If you are on any of these platforms, please follow ABAS and use these hashtags to connect all of our posts together as one big community. This can include photos of ABAS workshops, meetings, events, and even your own bonsai as members! If you have photos to share of work in progress, please feel free to post and tag or send to [Gina](#) directly to share online.

#AmericanBonsai  
#ABASbonsai  
#SacBonsai

Our accounts:

Instagram : @american\_bonsai\_sacramento

Twitter: @BonsaiAmerican

Facebook Group: American Bonsai Association, Sacramento



## Dig In and Chop In

Roger Steele

Dig In and Chop In classes are underway. Sixteen students made the jump to intermediate with February Chop In classes. With these classes, club workshops, and our great club meeting demos there is no wonder our club is growing and getting better all of the time. Check out the attached photos of trees worked during these classes.

Dig In and Chop In are bonsai jumpstart classes led by me, Roger Steele, with the aim of rapidly improving new student's technical ability and eye for high quality bonsai. Every bonsai enthusiast has suffered the same set of initial mistakes – the twig phase of bonsai practice – so the idea is to raise the bar for everyone and zoom past the twig phase. Concepts covered in Dig In are material selection, intro to tools and materials, and basic styling. Chop In is the intermediate course after Dig In in which students are given styling suggestions, but perform the work independently. Contact [Roger](#) for any questions or inquiries into future classes. Mention the word rootlet for a chance at a free raffle ticket at the next meeting.



Material and work from Dig In and Chop In sessions. From top left: redwood, root over rock liners, student display, myrtle, myrtle, and redwood.

### ABAS Seasonal Bonsai Series, January 2024

Renee Seely & Carmen Scott

Due to technical difficulties, the release of the January video has been delayed. It will be out by the end of February. Throughout 2024, our video series will continue with updates as developmental work continues. Throughout 2024, our video series will continue on the [ABAS channel](#) with updates as developmental work continues.



### Support and Stewardship Program

The American Bonsai Association of Sacramento prides itself on its strong and caring community of bonsai enthusiasts. In that spirit, we would like to remind you of our Support and Stewardship Program which offers assistance in times of need to ABAS club members and other bonsai collectors.

The program aims to keep your valuable bonsai collection alive and healthy with support from the club's advanced bonsai artists if you are unable for any reason. We can arrange for short term

support like watering or, if necessary, help with the sale of some or all of your collection. The reasonable rates for these services vary on the extent of services required and club membership. In addition, we can provide basic language and documentation for estate planning purposes. Now is a great time to discuss your collection, its value, and how to best preserve it with your loved ones. Please reach out to our club president [Dodie](#) for inquiries or visit our Stewardship & Estate planning [resource guide](#).





### Welcome New Members: Jake Meyer, Priscilla Guan, Gage Marchini, Paul Psik, Beverly Wilkinson, Ryan Johnson

New members are connected with their area liaison and will receive a welcome letter with a free pass to one of our member workshops. The mentors are listed on our website under 'Member Resources, Club Liaisons', with contact information.

**March Member Workshop** At the March 10 workshop we will finish the re-potting for this year. Contact [Renee Seely](#) or sign up via our website to reserve a spot. Remember to specify if you prefer morning, 8:30am - 12:30pm, or afternoon, 1:00pm to 5:00pm. Wire and potting mix are generously provided, so please be mindful of this resource.

**Membership renewal time** - \$40 per individual or family. You may renew [online](#), at our February meeting, or by mailing your dues payable to ABAS to PO Box 161767, Sacramento CA 95816.

**March Meeting, Jonas Dupuich: Evaluating a Bonsai Exhibit.** We need club members to bring in more advanced / refined trees for Jonas' March presentation. Your trees don't necessarily need to be show worthy but further along in their development. Jonas will use our trees as subjects for his evaluation method. This is a great opportunity to show off your work, receive feedback, and advance trees to show-worthiness. Feedback will be constructive, but consider leaving your thin-skinned trees at home.

**Bob Bugay Memorial Grove** The ABAS board has purchased a memorial grove to be planted in honor of our friend Bob Bugay who recently passed. May the memory of Bob thrive along with these trees.



Above: display from the recent BABA show

### Events

**SGAAC Japanese Garden Clean-Up** Saturday March 2, 9:00 AM to noon. Volunteers are needed to prune and weed the garden. Bring gloves, bucket, pruning tools, broom, small rake, etc.

**ABAS Spring Show April 13 and 14** It is time to scrutinize your collections for a tree that you want to show. Also, many volunteers are needed to help make our show a huge success. Volunteer sign up sheets will be available at the February and March meetings.

**ABAS Garden Tour Saturday, April 27** We will visit the homes of Debbie and Steve Ballanti (Carmichael), Ed Slomovic (Sacramento), Roger Steel (Fair Oaks) and George Wyatt (Folsom). Sign-up sheets will be available at the February and March meetings or email [Dodie](#) to save your spot

**ABAS Bus Trip Saturday, May 25** Cost is \$50 each. Itinerary includes Lotus Bonsai Nursery, Moonshine Bonsai Ranch, Peter Tea's Bonsai Nursery, Redbud Nursery and Golden Pond Nursery. Sign up in person or by emailing [Ellen Evans](#). The bus trip sold out last year; spots will only be reserved upon receipt of payment! You may pay in person at the next meeting or by mailing a check payable to ABAS to PO Box 161767, Sacramento CA 95816.

### Events Calendar

2024

Saturday, February 24, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, February 27, Bonsai Structural Development w/ Peter Tea [In-person & Zoom](#)

Saturday March 2, Japanese Garden Work Day [In-person](#)

Saturday March 9, Dig In #7 [In-person](#)

Sunday March 10, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Saturday - Sunday, March 16 - 17, SGAAC Spring Sale [In-person](#)

Tuesday, March 26, Evaluating Bonsai in Exhibit w/ Jonas Dupuich [In-person & Zoom](#)

Saturday, April 6, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Saturday - Sunday, April 13 - 14, ABAS Annual Spring Show w/ Tyler Sherrod [In-person](#)

Tuesday, April 23, Defoliating Party w/ Renee and Carmen [In-person](#)

Saturday, May 11, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, May 28, Azalea Care w/ Timm Johnson [In-person & Zoom](#)

Saturday, June 15, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, June 25, Development of Oak Bonsai with w/ John "JT" Thompson [In-person & Zoom](#)

Tuesday, July 23, Summer Splash [In-person](#)

Tuesday, September 24, ABAS Live Auction and Consignment Sale [In-person & Zoom](#)

Saturday - Sunday, October 5 - 6, SGAAC Fall Sale [In-person](#)





## ABAS BUS TRIP– Saturday, May 25, 2024

ABAS welcomes all area bonsai clubs to join us on our annual bus trip!



### Trip Highlights:

The bus departs promptly at 8am. Enjoy club-provided donuts and coffee on the 45-minute ride to our first stop.

**LOTUS BONSAI** (Lotus, CA) – Finished bonsai, pre-bonsai, pots, tools, wire. Wide variety of species, sizes.

**MOONSHINE RANCH BONSAI** (Grass Valley, CA) - Finished bonsai and pre-bonsai, potential for suiseiki. Wide variety of species, sizes, specializing in lodgepole pines, root over rock.

**PETER TEA BONSAI** (Auburn, CA) – Finished bonsai, wide range of sizes and species, pots. (LUNCH STOP)

**REDBUD WHOLESALE NURSERY** (Newcastle, CA) – Starter material for wholesale prices! We will provide loppers in case it is necessary to prune material so that it can fit under the bus.

**GOLDEN POND AQUATIC PLANTS** (Loomis, CA) – opportunity for accent plants, unique water plants, shrubs, and possibly a few bald cypress.

We will raffle a variety of items the club acquires during the trip during return bus ride at the end of the day!

### Items to bring:

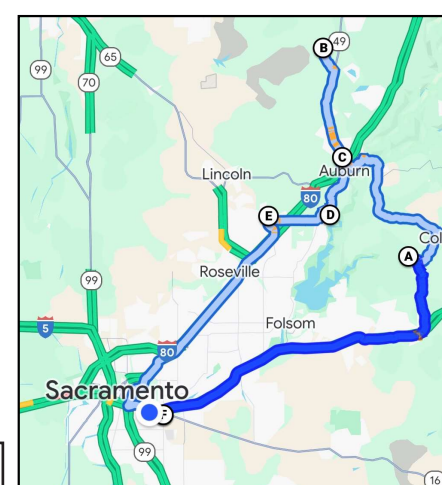
- Sack lunch + drink
- Tags / tape / return address labels to tag your purchases.  
(They ride in the luggage compartment with everyone else's.)
- Cash to tip driver if you wish
- Vendors take cash or credit card, and some also take checks, Venmo, or Paypal.

Sign up or questions, email Ellen at: [kde2@comcast.net](mailto:kde2@comcast.net)

**Tickets are \$50 per person.**

This is an all-day event, we expect to be back in Sacramento around 5:30pm

Seats will be reserved upon receipt of payment by mailing a check payable to ABAS  
PO Box 161767 Sacramento, CA 95816



**Please arrive by 7:45 am at the Power Inn Road Park and Ride at 3009 Power Inn Rd, Sacramento, CA. . The bus departs promptly at 8am!!!**

