



May 2026

The Bent Twig

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

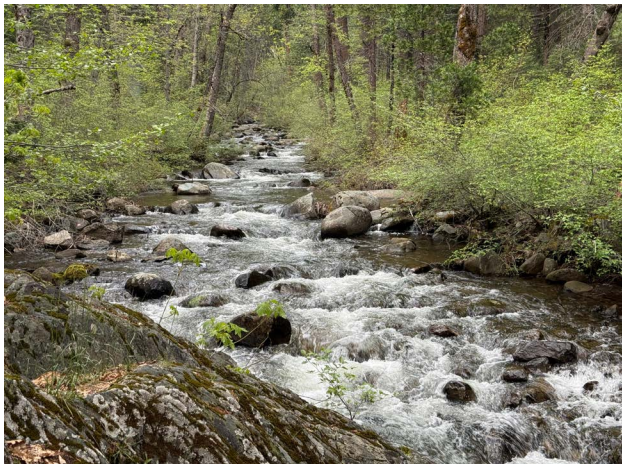
Arboreal Abstractions

Ian Baker

It is unfortunate that it takes the passing of someone to be able to really heed the oft told lesson of appreciating what you have, when you have it. But in our short human lives, it usually takes impactful events to cause meaning to resonate. Now is a moment of that resonance, a time for us to reflect on our past experiences and seek paths forward.

Carpe tuam vitam - pluck your life. Not *seize* your life, but *pluck* your life, like the ripe fruit that it is. *Carpe diem - seize the day* is in fact a subtle mistranslation. *Carpe* is not to *seize*, but to *pluck* the day. It is to be mindful of what you have now in the day (*diem*) or in life (*vitam*) and to savor its delicious fruit. Not to grasp onto, capture, and hold it, but to pluck and enjoy it. It is a gentle gathering of the day's opportunities, rather than a forceful capturing of life.

This resonates beautifully in bonsai. Undoubtedly, you have to work hard to be good at making bonsai; you cannot harvest without sowing. But that hard work exists in harmony with a deeper appreciation of bonsai. I guess you could learn to be rather good at technique without developing appreciation, but why? A soulless execution of technique misses the point of appreciating what is on offer and working with it. Further, deep appreciation amplifies your technical skill many times over. I mean appreciation in the simple sense of taking time to enjoy what we have created and collected, but also developing the keen, slow eye that notices change over a slower, botanical time scale. Appreciation as in the ability to see the potential in a tree. Appreciation as in the deeper meaning that art gives to life.



Above: Views from the Bear River on a soggy day.



Wire Recycling

Reminder that ABAS has a wire recycling program every month, so remember to bring in your sorted and debris-free aluminum and copper wire to be collected by Debbie and Steve Ballanti. The wire is recycled and all money earned goes back to the club.

Next Meeting

Spring Care & Wound Maintenance w/ Renee and Carmen

Tuesday May 26 Renee and Carmen will lead a spring care and wound maintenance working meeting. Like prior spring care meetings, it will be a fun, hands-on event. We encourage you to bring trees for defoliation, cut-back, and thinning. If you have trees with long shoots, we may be able to perform thread grafts to create new branches. We will also discuss the treatment and care of both new and old wounds, including techniques to improve healing and development.

Healing wounds is an inevitable part of developing bonsai. Large wounds are most often created during the early stages of development, when major branches are removed and the basic structure of the tree is established. Significant wounds may also occur on older trees when a large branch dies and must be removed. If a wound is properly prepared and treated, it will gradually callus over and become far less noticeable with time, allowing the beauty and character of the tree to emerge naturally as it matures. However, if a wound is poorly cut or neglected, it can remain unsightly for years and permanently distract from the overall quality and appearance of the bonsai.

Some species heal readily, such as Japanese maples and trident maples, while others—including Korean hornbeam, ginkgo, and many conifers—heal much more slowly. Regardless of the species, careful wound management is essential to achieving the best possible result. Proper carving, clean cuts, timely sealing when appropriate, and attentive aftercare all contribute to faster healing and a more natural appearance as the wound ages. Please bring your bonsai tools, a drill with bits, and cut paste. The club will also have supplies and Dremel tools to share. Experienced members will be there to assist.





What to Work on May

Deciduous work, defoliating, pruning, and thinning, is well underway. Wiring should only be done once new growth is hardened. Defoliation is performed in order to weaken a tree, reduce foliage size, and allow easier access for wiring. This is an advanced technique that is best learned in person, like at the upcoming meeting! Once you have defoliated and set the profile, keep up with pinching new shoots throughout the season. In some circumstances, leaving branches that you intend to cut in the future can help control the internode length of other branches we want to keep, as part of the energy and hormone balance.

It may be ok to start cutting and wiring some conifers heading into June. Decandling timing for double flush pines depends on the size of your tree and the desired size of the secondary candle growth by the end of the season, so decandle larger pines in June, saving smaller pines for July.

This is the time to begin fertilizing deciduous trees once branches and internodes are set, but the amount and frequency depends on the species and stage of development. Experience (yours or borrowed) is the best way to find the goldilocks zone. Younger trees may benefit from more fertilization to accelerate growth. Refer to the 'Yearly Care Calendars' on our website

Pests and disease are active so stay vigilant. Try to reserve your broad spectrum, systemic "big gun" pesticides like imidicloprid for where they are needed most, rather than applying prophylactically to everything in your garden. Insecticidal soaps, dusting sulfur, azadactrin, and pyrethroids are a few good options to keep pest numbers in check (Refer to [pest control chart](#)). Always test new products for phytotoxicity before large applications. Yellow sticky traps can help keep whitefly and fungus gnat numbers down and also track their populations. Using more than one mode of action (active pesticide ingredient) and rotating pesticides helps to prevent pesticide resistance. Incorporate a few different fungicides into your sprays as well. Please do not spray flowering plants, so that bees are not bringing pesticide laced pollen back to the hive.

Last Meeting: Lebanon Cedar w/ Kaya Mooney

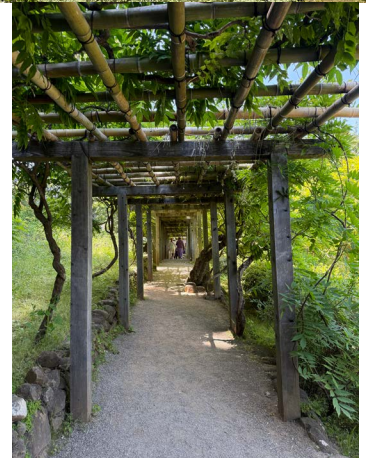
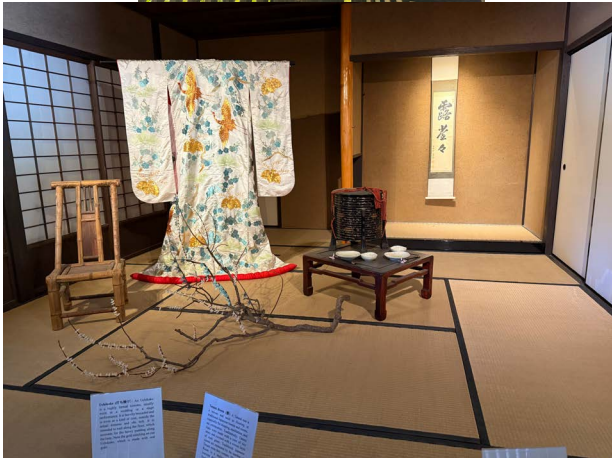
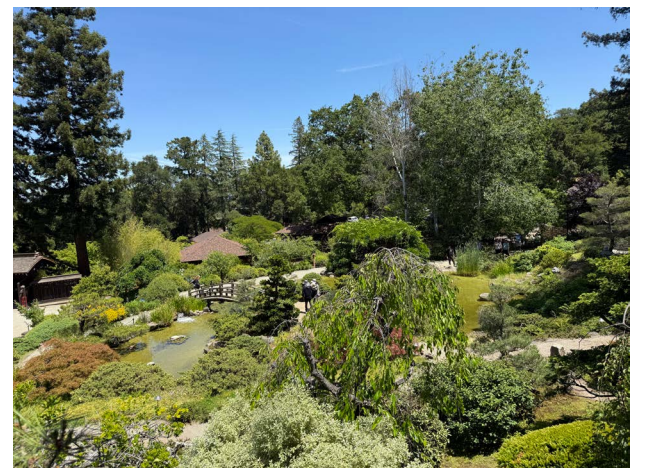
Our last meeting Tuesday April 28 ABAS hosted Kaya Mooney. Kaya, a 29-year-old American bonsai professional, has recently completed his apprenticeship with bonsai master Keichii Fujikawa. The evening was a treat as he masterfully developed a Lebanon cedar into a bunjin composition. We also saw examples of his work from the workshop earlier in the day with member trees that demonstrated a high level of ability and keen eye.

After years of intensive training in Japan, Kaya is making rounds in many countries leading workshops and managing client trees. He is definitely an artist to watch out for. Congratulations to Kevin for winning the Lebanon cedar!



Above: Kaya working the Lebanon cedar

Below: Scenes from the Hakone Estate. See article next page. Mention regional recommendations for a free raffle ticket





Welcome New Members: Michael and Amelia Lawless, Patricia Sobhi, Colin Crane-Smith

New members are connected with their area liaison and will receive a welcome letter with a free pass to one of our member workshops. Liaisons are listed on our website under '[Member Resources, Club Liaisons](#)'.

Member Workshop - June 27

The next member workshop is Saturday, June 27. Contact Renee Seely, breadcrust@comcast.net to reserve a spot for the June workshop. Please specify morning, 8:30 am - 12:30 pm or afternoon 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Each workshop session is \$20 payable to ABAS. Reminder that the club owns a set of tools for more advanced work like tools for grafting, wood carving, and heavier bending.

2026 ABAS Bus Trip - Saturday, May 30

The May 30 ABAS Bus Trip to the Bay Area is full!

Members who have reserved seats have been contacted by organizer Ellen Evans with more details. If you did not receive the email or have questions or cannot attend, please email abasbonsaiclub@gmail.com. (Ellen is travelling May 18-28, emailing the club address will ensure someone can answer your question/concern!)

Like last year, the trip departs from the Power Inn Road Park and Ride at 7:30am sharp!!! 5800 Folsom Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95819

Regional Recommendations

Ellen Evans

Our region is blessed with a wealth of parks, gardens, and plant retail businesses. When selecting stops on the bus trip, there are several criteria that not every location can meet- No cost? Capacity to fit 50 shoppers? Nearby bus parking? In my research for the bus trip, I have come across many places that can't meet the requirements as a bus trip stop, but they are places club members might appreciate visiting on their own. My intention with this recurring newsletter feature is to raise awareness within ABAS of these places.

This month's featured location is Hakone Estate and Gardens in the Palo Alto / Los Gatos area. I start with this location because although it is too late to catch wisteria and cherries blooming, there are probably still azaleas in flower and we are still in the pleasant time of year to be visiting gardens. First established as a private summer retreat in 1915, Hakone is one of the oldest residential-style Japanese gardens open to the public in the Western Hemisphere. The 18-acre grounds feature a koi pond, bamboo forest, traditional Japanese landscaping, and historic buildings crafted in Japan over 100 years ago. There are rotating cultural exhibits, classes and demonstrations, and docent tours (currently fully booked for peak season). They do not have a bonsai collection. Expect to spend 1-2 hours.

Due to the distance and cost Hakone is not a reasonable bus trip stop, but I have visited it on my own and it is a lovely way to spend a Saturday or Sunday, combined with shopping, lunch, or dinner in San Jose. Some nearby retail businesses to look up are Nichi Bei Bussan NB gift shop, Nikkei Traditions, and Kogura Co. For a fun grocery/lunch experience, try Tokyo Central Cupertino grocery, Mit-suwa Marketplace grocery, or Nijiya Market Mountain View grocery. Indulge at Satura Patisserie, which looks well worth the detour to Mountain View.

Hakone Estate and Gardens
21000 Big Basin Way, Saratoga, CA 95070

<https://www.hakone.com/>

Admission:

Adult (18-64): \$12

Seniors (65+): \$10

Youth (5-17): \$8

Children (4 and under): Free



2025 Events Calendar

Tuesday, May 26, Wound Care w/ Renee and Carmen [In-person](#)

Saturday May 30, ABAS Bus Trip

Saturday - Sunday, May 30 - 31, Bay Area Satsuki Aikokai & Yamato Bonsai Kai **Lake Merrit Oakland** [In-person](#)

Saturday, June 27, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, June 23, Azalea Care w/ Timm Johnson [In-person & Zoom](#)

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

Tuesday, July 28, Summer Splash [In-person](#)

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

Tuesday, August 25, Native Junipers w/ Sam Tan [In-person & Zoom](#)

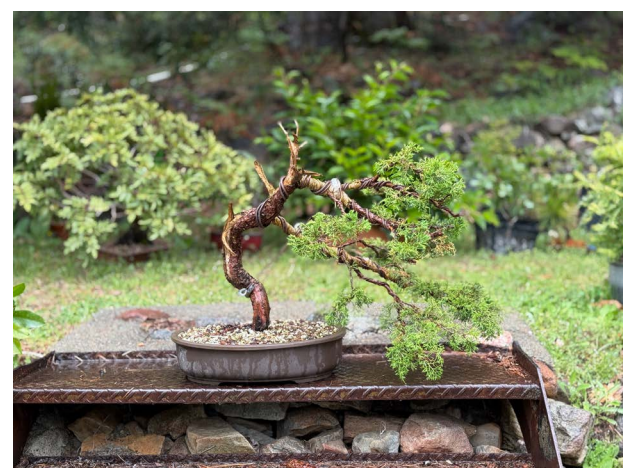
Saturday, September 12, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Saturday, September 19, 1:00 - 4:00 pm, ABAS Annual Live Auction and Consignment Sale [In-person](#)

Saturday, October 10, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, October 27, Shohin Pines w/ Adam Toth [In-person](#)

Saturday, November 14, Member Workshop [In-person](#)



If you know, you know. Thanks a million times over KO.



In Memoriam - Kathleen O'Donnell

The ABAS family and bonsai community lost a great friend and champion on April 14 with the passing of Kathleen O'Donnell. Kathleen was a truly extraordinary human; she embodied fierce determination, gentle persuasion, and boundless generosity with a rare gift for seeing the good and potential in everyone she met. This is no exaggeration. Everyone who knew her, either briefly or for many years, has personal stories confirming this. From bringing in new members, to empowering people to take action, to literally enabling through gifts and financial resources, these stories paint the picture of someone whole-heartedly dedicated to living a generous life.



Kathleen served as a tireless ambassador for bonsai for many years, acting directly and enabling others to act, to reinforce education, diversity, and community in our local and state-wide clubs. She has been a member of ABAS since the late 1980s and served on our board in various positions since 2011. Kathleen's forward-thinking efforts are a primary reason ABAS thrived and grew through 2020. She has also had a direct hand in making improvements at GSBF that have had lasting impacts.

It is not a surprise then that this generosity continues, with the donation of her bonsai collection to ABAS. She would have balked at the announcement of such a gift and yet we would have insisted, not at putting her on a pedestal, but ensuring we all knew from which direction the sunlight was coming. Below are a few personal stories.

I met Kathleen at the ABAS show in April 2018 and she lured me into joining the club with the enticement of the garden tour. We became close friends. One of the special elements of our friendship was our ability and willingness to share openly. She was a very special lady and friend whom I greatly miss. I find myself thinking: what would Kathleen think/say? how would she feel? what would she do? She organized a bonsai trip to Japan for several of us to see the Kokofu exhibition, guided for a fabulous week by Bjorn Bjorholm. To thank her, we got her a kimono, although she was not interested in clothing. She wore it for dinner the last evening, looking quite stylish. Although she was uncomfortable being in the spotlight, she did seem to enjoy the gift.

She had a gift of being present, whomever she was talking with. She focused on the individual and often deflected when attention was directed toward her. That was both an endearing and frustrating characteristic, as I, and many others, liked to acknowledge her.

I held her hand while we said our goodbyes the day before she left us. Even lying in the hospital bed, knowing time was short, she still focused on reminiscing with each one of us, acknowledging something specific about each person, an experience, thoughts to pass on.

Without her encouragement, I may never have found the confidence to join the GSBF convention planning team as a web designer—a role I went on to hold for five conventions. Her steady, gentle persistence pushed me to take that step, opening the door to a creative path I came to truly love. Through that experience, I gained not only valuable skills but also meaningful personal growth.

She continued to encourage me in other ways, especially through ABAS, where she urged me to move through various board positions and ultimately serve as President for six years. That journey became another opportunity for growth and allowed me, in my own way, to make a positive impact on others.

Kathleen had a remarkable ability to see potential in people and inspire them to reach beyond their comfort zones. Just as importantly, when she encouraged you to push those boundaries, she was there beside you with unwavering support. Her influence has left a lasting mark not only on individuals like me, but on the entire statewide bonsai community.

Kathleen was forthcoming from the moment I first met her and she was exceptionally inclusive. In one instance, she encouraged me to introduce myself with an upstart bonsai artist to ask them to lead a meeting. This was a simple encouragement to do something outside of my responsibility, a gentle nudge to growth. Some people hoard and some people trust and give; this was clearly an act of trusting. Beyond the encouragement, she was exceptionally generous with her resources. I possess one of those gifts in my collection, which has taken on a great deal of meaning to me throughout the last few months. It is a marker of an important time in my life and an even more important friendship.

With heavy hearts, we bid farewell, but we will never forget your joyous impact on our lives.



In Memoriam - Kathleen O'Donnell

