



June 2024

# The Bent Twig

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

## Arboreal Abstractions

It's been a while, but I am back from three weeks in Japan! Allow me to indulge you in my experience.

Hello, excellent train service, exquisite food, and the most polite civilization on earth I have yet experienced. Also, you haven't experienced life until you've ordered sushi from an iPad that is teleported to your table by a servo controlled conveyor. It is interesting visiting a place that has had a massive influence on culture the world over and seeing through the stereotypes and assumptions into daily life, to the extent it's possible in three short weeks!

My primary destination was to visit a friend in Okinawa, which was a wild first exposure to the country. It is in many ways the Hawaii of Japan. Think humid subtropical climate, coral reefs, dense jungle, mangrove forests, sugar cane plantations, aloha shirts, and things that want to bite and sting you. Our nighttime quest to see a habu snake was unsuccessful, probably fortunately. I was a couple of weeks late for the azalea bloom and sakura blossoms were a distant memory by April this far south, but I did manage to track down one of the few bonsai nurseries on the island. Thus began my efforts to bring home as much pottery as a carry-on would allow, with support from on-base USPS flat rate shipping. It was meant to be.

After ten days of reef diving and snake hunting, I was eager to take in mainland Japan. I checked off some of the requisite tourist stops, like the thousands of vermilion torii gates at Fushimi Inari shrine in Kyoto. I studied the trees of shohin master Tomohiro Masumi at Koju-en, regretting that I couldn't stuff any in my luggage. The Daitoku-ji temple complex was yet another magical stop, primarily to see the New Kyoto Bonsai Garden, but no less for the myriad other Zen Buddhist sub temples and gardens.

As a train nerd, the Shinkansen was a particular delight. I would have enjoyed a longer ride, but 200 MPH gets you to your destination fast. Suburbs blurred into terraced tea farms, and like conveyor belt sushi, I was smoothly teleported into the mountains near Nagano, where the cherry blossom show was just peaking. The objective here was to hike and poach myself a la an onsen egg, which was successful. It was a particular delight to amble along the well-preserved wood buildings of the post town Narai-juku, which had similar vibes to the California gold rush town I grew up in.

My spouse surprised me with an unplanned night in Tokanome en route to Tokyo. This is where it became clear I needed to buy a suitcase dedicated to pottery. While it was a delight to see what is left of the kilns, most of my purchases happened at an outlet in the Ceramall complex just outside town. I was in a version of heaven that was a two story warehouse filled with premier Japanese bonsai pottery.

With my carry-on bag stuffed to the gills in carefully wrapped pots, teaware, cute cat ceramics, and a few tools, I moved on to Tokyo. Without time to make arrangements to visit private gardens, Omiya Bonsai Village was a perfect way to efficiently visit as many gardens as possible in a day. It was interesting to see the range in presentation of the gardens, from world-class bonsai teaching centers, to a collection that seemed like someone's chaotically neglected private garden. The bonsai museum was also very much worth visiting and should be on anyone's itinerary for a first trip.

Three weeks abroad means three weeks not spent working in my own garden, but the inspiration to double down on my own practice is invaluable. This trip provided a great deal of context for this art we have chosen to dedicate so much of our time to. --Ian Baker

## Azalea Care and Lifetime Achievement Honor with Timm Johnson Tuesday May 28

May's ABAS meeting on Tuesday, May 28 beginning at 6:00 pm will be two fold. Long standing ABAS member, Timm Johnson, will be honored and receive the "ABAS Lifetime Achievement Award". Timm has been a valuable part of ABAS since the 80s which makes him one of our longest tenured members. We encourage everyone to attend our May meeting so we can properly honor Timm and show him our appreciation for his decades of service to the club. We also encourage members to bring in trees that they have either obtained from Timm or received his assistance with development. Let's fill the tables with "Timm's trees" and share stories of how he has assisted you.

Timm's presentation will continue to guide and educate us about bonsai and lessons he's learned over the decades. A hands-on portion of the meeting will focus on post-bloom azalea care. Timm will demonstrate proper technique to trim spent flowers and reduce branching. Members are encouraged to bring in their own azaleas and tools to carry out post-bloom care. One lucky raffle winner will take home an outstanding Japanese Maple from Timm's personal bonsai collection. Show-n-Tell: Timm's Trees - trees obtained from Timm or trees that he has helped you work on.

During the business meeting, candidates for the 2024-2025 Board will be announced and nominations from the floor will be accepted. Voting will occur next month.



Above: The master himself in deep contemplation



## What to Work on May

The spring work window is coming to a close, but of course nature doesn't care what month we say it is. Especially for those of us with too many plants, it's important to wrap up deciduous work, wiring, and defoliation before moving on to conifers. Once we have defoliated and set the profile, keep up with pinching new shoots throughout the season, especially on species that require control of elongating foliage. 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. This can be a hard concept to grasp. Also, do whatever it takes to remember to take wire off before you strangle your branches, especially as foliage grows back and shrouds those wired branches! Neon flags and calendar reminders are a great help, and some of the better bonsai apps allow you to set reminders specific to each plant. Conifer work is just around the corner, so if you have completed deciduous work, keep an eye on your conifer growth.

In some instances, it may already be ok to start cutting and wiring conifers. 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 only large bonsai in June, saving smaller pines for July.

This is generally the time to begin fertilizing deciduous trees once branches and internodes are set, but as always 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 for fertilizer. Younger trees may benefit from more fertilization to accelerate growth. Refer to the 'Yearly Care Calendars' on our website. Remember that these are just guidelines and techniques vary depending on the health or stage of development for each tree. Pests and disease are active so stay vigilant. As always, be proactive in seeking knowledge!



## Last Meeting - Defoliation Party with Renee and Carmen

Our last meeting in April was the second edition of Renee and Carmen's defoliation party. Like last year, it was primarily a hands-on meeting. Our presenters opened with a bit of theory on when, why, and how to defoliate, but the main event was working member's deciduous trees that warranted defoliation. The garden center was set up with work tables and senior club members made rounds to support the process and answer questions.

Overall, the defoliation party was another excellent hands-on learning opportunity and a space to work socially. Thanks go to Renee and Carmen for spearheading this, as well as the club members who lent their expertise throughout the night. Congratulations to Kathy Owyong for winning the maple forest raffle prize!



Above: Scenes from April 2024 Defoliation Party

## 2024 Spring Garden Tour

Last month's ABAS Garden Tour will be fondly remembered for the four beautifully kept bonsai gardens of Debbie and Steve Ballanti, Ed Slomovic, Roger Steel and George and Kathy Wyatt. Each garden offered unique features. Many asked about the newly constructed free-standing wooden pedestals in Debbie and Steve's garden. (Steve could likely create a side hustle building these pedestals for others if desired). Ed's garden impressed many with his compact bonsai garden filled with over 75 small and well developed bonsai. Roger's yard was fun to meander its numerous paths and turns while admiring his varied and well developed trees. The Wyatt's yard was a horticulturist's delight as it was filled with flowers, succulents, bonsai and lovely garden plantings. George, a trained chef, adeptly demonstrated his expert cooking skills via the massive and tasty spread of Greek specialty dishes he served for lunch. It's safe to say that no one left hungry and George set the bar incredibly high for future ABAS Garden Tour luncheons.



Above, middle: Another season of happy people at the 2024 Garden Tour

## 2024 Spring Show

ABAS' 64th annual Spring Show was a success due to the tireless work of organizing club members, exhibitors, vendors, and our headliner this year Tyler Sherrod. Over the weekend, guests and members alike enjoyed the showcase of years of member work on top trees, accent plants, and displays from our collections.

The spring show features a consignment sale as well as local professional vendors promoting their goods. Members had a chance to secure consignment items during the presale period. Developed and pre-bonsai material, pots, stands, suiseki, and sundry bonsai items like tools and books were all available.

We welcomed Tyler Sherrod from Dogwood Bonsai Nursery in North Carolina as our show headliner. Tyler is highly regarded in the US bonsai circuit. He trekked out to California to lead demonstrations on both days as well as a bonsai clinic for members on Saturday morning and a show critique on Sunday morning. Tyler worked on native California yamadori material, a California juniper and a Sierra juniper, for his demonstrations. He kept the audience engaged as he shared his expertise in transforming raw collected material into the beginning of a true bonsai.

Tyler's circumspect observations during the Sunday morning critique were greatly appreciated by the group. His thoughtful way of complimenting the positive aspects of trees and displays as well as offering suggestions for further development highlight his maturity as a bonsai professional.

Feedback for the event overall was positive, with special attention paid to the quality of the exhibition. This is an important event for ABAS and serves as an opportunity to show off our work within the club and to the general public. As always, none of it would be possible without the support of everyone involved. Thank you!



Above: Spring show, Tyler Sherrod, beginner bonsai class, and adoring fans



**Welcome New Members: David and Gwynne Anderson, Andrew Galang, Maia Friedman, Jennifer Shively, Sandra Lewis, Irma Rodriguez, Patricia Chadwick, and Jonathan Schultz**

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.

**Member Workshop** The next workshop is Saturday, June 15. 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. As always, the club provides wire for use; bring your own tools. Each workshop session is \$10 payable to ABAS. Mention the word Nihon at the next club meeting for a chance to win a free raffle ticket.

**Wire Recycling Program** Debbie Ballanti has spearheaded a wire recycling program to make it easier for members to properly dispose of their used wire. The wire will be recycled and any money received will benefit ABAS. Wire will only be accepted if it is clean and sorted by aluminum or copper.

**Dig In / Chop In Classes**  
Next Dig In class will be Saturday, June 15, followed by a Chop-In class on Sunday, June 16. Chop-In attendees need to have participated in a Dig-In class prior. Both classes are approximately 6 hours and cost \$20 each. Please see <https://www.abasbonsai.org/about-4> for more information. To sign up for a class contact instructor, [Roger Steel](#).



Above: More photos of the Spring Show

## Events Calendar

- Tuesday, May 28, Azalea Care w/ Timm Johnson [In-person & Zoom](#)
- Saturday, June 15, Member Workshop [In-person](#)
- Saturday, June 15, Dig In #9 [In-person](#)
- Sunday, June 16, Chop In #4 [In-person](#)
- Tuesday, June 25, Development of Oak Bonsai with w/ John “JT” Thompson [In-person & Zoom](#)
- Saturday, July 13, Member Workshop [In-person](#)
- Tuesday, July 23, Summer Splash [In-person](#)
- Saturday, August 24, Member Workshop [In-person](#)
- Saturday, September 14, Member Workshop [In-person](#)
- Tuesday, September 24, ABAS Live Auction and Consignment Sale [In-person & Zoom](#)
- Saturday - Sunday, October 5 - 6, SGAAC Fall Sale [In-person](#)
- Saturday, October 12, Member Workshop [In-person](#)
- Saturday, November 9, Member Workshop [In-person](#)
- Tuesday, November 26, Hands On Fall Care w/ Renee and Carmen [In-person](#)
- Wednesday, December 11, ABAS Holiday Party [In-person](#)
- Saturday, December 14, Member Workshop [In-person](#)





**DOING OUR PART AND  
FUNDRAISING TOO!**

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## **WIRE RECYCLING PROGRAM**

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**BRING YOUR CLEAN, SEPARATED AND  
USED ALUMINUM & COPPER WIRE TO THE  
MONTHLY GENERAL MEETING. THERE  
WILL BE LABELED COLLECTION BOXES  
AVAILABLE.**

Email Debbie Ballanti at [juno@pacbell.net](mailto:juno@pacbell.net) with  
questions.

**Sponsored by ABAS**