



May 2025

The Bent Twig

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

Arboreal Abstractions

Ian Baker

You probably have a sense for what hard water is, even if the chemistry isn't entirely clear. Water is a complicated cocktail of dissolved ions, varying greatly depending on the source. The more salts that are dissolved in water, the more the water conducts electricity, which in the greenhouse business is measured as electroconductivity (EC). The higher the EC, the saltier the water. But EC tells us nothing about the exact makeup of the salts, just the overall total dissolved solids. Thus, a proper lab test is necessary to provide a detailed breakdown of your water. Also, some cities publish water quality data online without the need to run your own lab test.

There are many elements of chemistry to consider, but in bonsai, we care most about pH and hardness. pH is the concentration of hydrogen ions - or how acidic it is - and hardness is how much calcium/magnesium carbonate there is in solution. Most municipal water is good enough that most bonsai-heads don't need to think about it. If you can grow deciduous trees with perfect foliage and no tip burn throughout the season, consider yourself lucky! If you cannot, it may be time to dig into your water hardness. In the Sacramento area, the worst water comes from wells. Davis used to be notorious in the bonsai community for having bad water because it came from municipal wells, until the Davis/Woodland intake plant was installed on the Sacramento River about ten years ago, mixing cleaner river water with hard well water.

Last year, I moved out of Davis, onto a rural property fed only by a well. I have never seen water so hard. Limescale coated every surface of the bathroom and landscape plant leaves were all entombed in a white shell. My azalea immediately died and many other plants suffered. Though I work with industrial sized water treatment equipment professionally, I had a mental block against installing a reverse osmosis filter for my trees. I avoid RO filters unless necessary, because they can be expensive to purchase and they use more water in the process of making clean water. The psychology of denial is interesting; I had lab reports from the last two years showing the hardness in parts per million is about 450. Anything above 200 is considered high! Yet, I continued to hope instead of act.

A couple of weeks ago, looking at my plants with fresh eyes (i.e. Peter's, not mine!), it hit me like a ton of bricks. I need RO water BAD. This means I need a tank to store RO water and a pump to pressurize the output of the tank. Not only that, but hard water wrecks RO filters so it's best to install a water softener before the RO filter. I don't yet have the new softener and RO filter installed, but I am getting by with a small drinking water RO filter feeding into a 30 gallon drum. Watering is a chore as I have to schlep it one watering can at a time, but it is also satisfying knowing my trees are getting the best possible juice. I usually add a small amount of micronutrients back into my RO water because it's almost too clean after the filter. Watering in this way also makes it easy to adjust pH, and add soil disinfectants, or even pesticides like BT to control fungus gnats into each batch, so there is an upside to all the extra work.

Meanwhile, it's like Christmas eve for me; I've never been so excited for a water softener and filter to arrive. I will keep you posted on the progress and I am always happy to talk shop if you have any questions about water.



Next Meeting

Olives w/ Cesar Ordoñez

At our upcoming meeting on Tuesday May 27, Cesar Ordoñez will present on Olive Trees. Cesar is an up and coming bonsai professional specializing in mostly collected olives and other local trees that he vends.

Cesar has been doing bonsai for 6 years and he has spent over 3 years studying under Peter Tea. He likes to focus on what grows well in his area in the central valley. He started collecting olives about 4 years ago and he will bring an olive specimen to donate to the raffle.

In addition to Cesar's presentation, board candidates will be announced and nominations from the floor will be accepted.



Above: Cesar Ordoñez



Below from far left: Morning light North Fork American River, beach, and California natives blooming near Gualala May 2025





What to Work on May

Primary deciduous work should be well underway by now, with mostly pruning and thinning. Wiring can be done once new growth is hardened. 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. 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. 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. The big gun products like imidicloprid and dinotefauron are systemic and broad spectrum so these are best used for high value trees: those susceptible to borers, root mealy bugs or other hard to spot pests. Using more than one mode of action (active pesticide ingredient) and rotating pesticides helps to prevent pesticide resistance. Please do not spray flowering plants, so that bees are not bringing pesticide laced pollen back to the hive.



Last Meeting

Kusamono and Accent Plants w/ Lucy Sakaishi-Judd

At our last April meeting, Lucy Sakaishi-Judd led a program on creating kusamono and accent plants. Lucy opened with photos of various creative and lovely accent plants and stand-alone kusamono to give the group a sense of what is possible in styling these beautiful arrangements. She provided ample inspiration for creating unique plant arrangements while discussing the process. She also brought along a large selection of plants and pots from her collection so that eager members could create their own displays.

Following the break, a number of ABAS members got their hands dirty creating their own kusamono after selecting plants from the dozens of homegrown specimens Lucy brought. Anyone who has seen Lucy's garden can appreciate how much she has to offer in both materials and artistic grace in kusamono.



Above: Lucy at work with her magical selection of small plants



GSBF Bonsai Rendezvous All Club Exhibit

Golden State Bonsai Federation (GSBF) is hosting their biennial Bonsai Rendezvous in Santa Nella, CA on October 24 – 26, 2025. In addition to 8 educational seminars, 24+ workshops, headliners Suthin Sukosolvisit and Mauro Stemberger, live and silent auctions, raffles and the "Rising Star" Joshua Roth competition including ABAS' newsletter editor, Ian Baker, the Rendezvous is hosting an All Club Exhibit. GSBF is asking each member club to submit a complete formal display which includes 1-3 trees on display stands, accent plant or a shohin display. Suthin and Mauro will select the winning entries in conifer, deciduous, broadleaf evergreen and shohin exhibits. These four clubs will receive \$500 awards. Each clubs' display will be a six-foot table.

ABAS is very fortunate to have so many members with wonderfully developed trees thus it will be a challenge to narrow it down to one display but that we must do. Please submit a photo of your show display, pot dimensions and tree species identified. Trees and pots do not need to "show ready" for this submission. Simply place the tree on its stand and photograph it in front of a solid background. Please email your submissions to Dodie Newman at dodienewman@gmail.com by June 15th. Depending upon the number of submissions, the ABAS Board may select the display to represent ABAS or we may narrow down the submission and ask the membership to vote via electronic voting. If you have questions, please contact Dodie.



2025 Bus Trip

Ellen Evans

On Saturday April 26 the annual ABAS Bus Trip took place. Unseasonably cool and rainy weather was forecasted but we were prepared with warm clothes, umbrellas, and our wallets. Coffee and donuts were generously dispensed by our morning “hosts” Carol Greenfield and Allen Goldstein as the bus made an on-time departure.

This year’s stops were all located within 10 minutes of each other in the Santa Rosa area, which meant less time on the bus and more time shopping. First we checked out a previous ABAS favorite, Momiji nursery, for their unbeatable selection of Japanese maples, resplendent in a rainbow of available colors. Trees between 8 inches and 8 feet were purchased, while a handsaw and “the loppers” were summoned for their first deployment of the day.

People seemed to really enjoy our next stop, Botanica Nursery, a 7.5 acre botanic reserve with a nursery specializing in shade loving plants, azaleas, and camellias. The deciduous and perennial azaleas were in bloom and it was the perfect time to be visiting. As a light drizzle began to mist down through the dawn redwoods, people explored the nooks and crannies of the nursery, walked around the pond and boardwalks, and took time for lunch at the small picnic area. The owners were very happy with our visit. Our bus driver Armando perhaps less so, as he was required to make a fifty-point turn with the help of a neighbor’s driveway in order to extract us from the ample parking area onto the tiny sloping residential street.

The third stop, Lone Pine Gardens, was our tried and true bonsai and succulent source. As the rain came down more steadily, our gang spread out between the covered cacti and landscape plants areas, the finished bonsai benches, and the unsheltered area “down the hill” where more experienced shoppers knew the larger pre-bonsai material was to be found. The bus faced more parking challenges here, and while most were shopping after a curbside drop-off, Trip Coordinator Ellen and the driver found a nearby school parking lot in which to regroup and devise a pickup strategy. In this safe and stress-free location, trees and coolers were tetrised to maximize under-bus space. Ellen guided the driver back to Lone Pine’s address and safe parking was found on the shoulder a short walk up the road from the nursery. The owners were very excited by our visit and trekked back to the bus with us to take our picture.

The rain continued at the final stop of the day, but our spirits were not dampened. “Pond and Garden Nursery” has an unassuming name and most of us were not familiar with this decades-old business that specialized in ornamental conifers, hostas, ginkgos, and other landscape plants. They had a modest bonsai area and their bonsai artist Ernie was on hand to give prices and show some of us the larger, more unfinished bonsai hidden in a back area of the nursery. The owner, Scott, was also kept busy naming prices and was even happy to negotiate over some “not for sale” items. Participants were back on the bus in a more timely and punctual manner than the trip coordinator, who was frantically buying landscape plants to beautify her yard, which is a stop on the upcoming ABAS home tour. Like at Botanica, many were overheard to be already planning a return trip to this nursery. Armando was delighted at the large and easy parking area for the bus!

As is tradition, we raffled off donations and purchases from each business on the bus ride home. A friendly competition ensued between the back of the bus and the front of the bus over who was winning more prizes. When we finally returned to the park and ride, the weather precipitated our most speedy and efficient bus unloading ever. It will be hard to top this trip next year but Ellen is already full of ideas!

Stops included:

Momiji Nursery
2765 Stony Point Rd, Santa Rosa, CA
<https://m.yelp.com/biz/momiji-nursery-santa-rosa>
<https://www.farmtrails.org/business/momiji-nursery-japanese-maples/>

Botanica Nursery and Gardens
3970 Azalea Ln, Sebastopol, CA
<https://botanicanurseryandgardens.com/>

Lone Pine Gardens
6450 Lone Pine Rd, Sebastopol, CA
<http://www.lonepinegardens.com/>

Pond and Garden Nursery
6225 Stony Point Rd, Cotati, CA
<https://www.pondandgardenbonsai.com/>





Welcome New Members:

Xing Lei Zhu, Brian Fox, Kandie Fox, Mia Fox, Lyubou Karashchuv, Erin Helpio, Deborah Werter, Tim Treichelt, Lisa Davers, and Charles Rios. 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](#)'. Mention the word unadulterated for a chance at a free raffle ticket at the next meeting.

Member Workshop

The next member workshop is Saturday, June 14. Please specify morning, 8:30 am - 12:30 pm or afternoon 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. As always, the club provides wire for use; bring your own tools. Each workshop session is now \$20 payable to ABAS. Contact Renee Seely to reserve a spot [Renee breadcrust@comcast.net](mailto:Renee.breadcrust@comcast.net)

Home Garden Tour

The Home Garden Tour is a couple days away: May 24! Signups were taken at the April meeting in order to have a head count for lunch. You may still sign up at the last minute by emailing [Carol Greenfield](#) She can confirm if there is still space available for lunch or not. We will visit the gardens of Chris Rumery (Davis), Clarence Smith, Kirk and Ellen Evans, Renee Seely and Dodie and Paul Newman's for lunch. Details for carpooling will be sent to the group in advance.

Thank you to all who volunteered and led the spring show effort. It's a great deal of planning and work to make this show possible and it truly wouldn't be possible without all of your help. Consider volunteering next year or taking on a larger role if you are able. Any specific feedback on any aspect of the show may be shared with a board member for consideration next year. The comments received about the show so far have been in the vein of how excellent the show was and particularly, the rising tide of quality in trees being shown. The main area for improvement noted was that the potluck needed more lunch entrees instead of snacks and desserts! Thank you from the ABAS board.



Above: Scenes from the May member workshop



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 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.

2025 Events Calendar

Saturday, May 24, Annual Member Garden Tour [Field Trip!](#)

Tuesday, May 27, Olives with Cesar Ordoñez [In-person & Zoom](#)

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

Tuesday, June 24, Summer Splash-
[In-person](#)

Saturday, July 12, Member Workshop + Trees in Refinement [In-person](#)

Tuesday, July 22, Suiseki with Samuel Edge [In-person](#)

Saturday, August 9, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Mention the word precooked for a free raffle ticket at the next meeting.
[In-person](#)

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

Saturday, September 20, Fall Auction
[In-person](#)

Friday - Sunday, October 24 - 26, GSBF Rendezvous [Santa Nella](#)

Bring snacks to the meeting!

Club members are encouraged, as always, to bring snacks or drinks for each monthly meeting. The selection of available food depends on the generosity of each of us, so please step up and bring your favorite snack. You may also provide larger quantities of longer-lasting snacks to store at the garden center. Home made items are always deeply appreciated by all, but please consider portability and food safety. You may leave your food items on the back table with Carol Greenfield at the meeting start. Thank you Carol for coordinating snacks and drinks and thank YOU for contributing!





Dig In Update

Roger Steel

We recently completed a marathon 3 Dig In classes on 3 consecutive week-ends, with 29 eager students. I believe half or more are club members or will become members. We completed a root over rock exercise, an air layer exercise, and a trip to Green Acres Nursery to learn how to find bonsai in box-store outlets. In the picture, class number 3 was collectively working on a coastal redwood that was 8 feet tall when they started.

We walked through my collection with a question and answer format while drinking coffee and eating donuts, and built deli sandwiches for lunch before heading out to cut on the treasured trees brought back from the nursery.

Classes went from 8:30 to 3:30. Bill Burns, Will & Joleen, and Enrique who were there to help with the biggest class were all tired, but satisfied by the end of the day. I am looking forward to seeing all of these new bonsai artists moving forward.



Above: The Dig In gang getting after a redwood. Right: Scenes from the bus trip

