



April 2026

# The Bent Twig

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

## Arboreal Abstractions

Ian Baker

Having recently culled a significant number of trees from my collection and witnessed a record number of trees sold at consignment during the show, I'm left pondering a crucial question: when is a tree simply not suitable for bonsai? While Jennifer Price and Peter Tea's recent lessons have emphasized the importance of focusing on a tree's assets, positivity alone cannot rectify inherent flaws. Too many long term charity projects get in the way of a good tree collection. There is a difference between learning to develop early stage bonsai versus material that is truly flawed. Young plants are not inherently bad; without propagation and nursery material, we wouldn't have new material coming into circulation.

This perspective may prompt us to reconsider our design or approach; thinking creatively is one way to solve for flaws and emphasize assets. But I believe (and have been taught!) there exists a threshold below which a tree simply isn't worth the time and effort to develop into bonsai. This threshold varies based on numerous factors and may differ from person to person, skill level, and interest. All of these facts point to a very complicated and shifting line of being "worth it," like trying to measure antimatter in a particle accelerator. I do wholeheartedly agree with Jennifer's comments about the tendency to focus on flaws and the general value of flipping that perspective to see strengths first. I contend that by developing an eye for strengths, we can better choose where to spend our time.

So what does this mean? First, as far as our own intentions, only we can decide for ourselves what qualifies as worth our time. Second, only we can decide for ourselves when to take a tree out of circulation that is not "worth it." I don't intend to be mean and I am certainly no saint on the matter, but my point is that as we develop in skill and eye as a community, we can collectively raise the quality of material in circulation.

We tend to cling to the trees we value the most, which often translates to the most valuable ones. Consequently, the trees that are for sale are frequently - but not always - the rejects or those with flaws. While this is understandable, it's also important to recognize that circulating decent material benefits the bonsai community as a whole. In reality, most trees are not cut out to be top-tier bonsai material, and there comes a point when it's wise to acknowledge this. Some trees are better suited for being planted in a yard or not subjected to the intensive care required for bonsai. If we want to avoid sunk costs at all, the best way is to not collect unsuitable trees or purchase unsuitable nursery material in the first place and the only way to do this is to develop a discerning eye. The sunk cost fallacy is real; having held on to something previously does not justify holding on to it henceforth. I realize this is a very subjective point and I want to emphasize, nobody should ever feel bad about doing or not doing something AND what really matters is if a tree speaks to you.



Above: A 19th century ten-stamp mill, still (half) existing because it is too hard to access and pillage on the American River from Foresthill Divide @ Sailor Flat. "Ten-stamp mill" will get you a raffle ticket at the next meeting.

## Next Meeting

Kaya Mooney

This coming Tuesday April 28 ABAS welcomes Kaya Mooney to give a demo on an atlas cedar tree for our monthly meeting. The cedar he chooses to work on will be the key raffle prize for the evening. Kaya, a 29-year-old American bonsai professional, has spent the last several years immersed in the world of bonsai. His journey took him to Japan, where he studied under renowned bonsai master Keichii Fujikawa, learning the fine art of cultivation, design, and tree care through hands-on apprenticeship.

After years of intensive training, Kaya earned his professional certification from the Nippon Bonsai Association, marking a major milestone in his career. Now independent, he continues to refine his craft, working on client trees, sourcing unique bonsai pots and tools, and sharing his knowledge through workshops. With a foot in both Japan and the U.S., Kaya is committed to bridging the gap between Eastern and Western bonsai, helping enthusiasts deepen their appreciation for this living art form.



Above: Kaya Mooney



## 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 recycling and all money earned goes back to the club.



## What to Work on April

April is a continuation of spring work. Growth on deciduous and broadleaf trees is peaking, while conifers are just getting started. Fertilize conifers and pinch new growth on species that require control of elongating foliage such as Japanese maples, trident maples, etc. Restricting fertilizer is important on more refined trees where it's important to control internode size. Younger trees may benefit from more fertilization to accelerate growth. Refer to the ['Yearly Care Calendars'](#) on our website for general guidelines. New growth is very tender and easily damaged so this is not a good time for wiring.

Pests and disease are becoming active so stay vigilant. As temperatures warm, so does pest activity. Reserve your broad-spectrum, systemic "big gun" pesticides like imidicloprid for where they are needed most like high value trees or with borers, 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 the [pest control chart](#) for more spray options. Yellow sticky traps can help keep whitefly and fungus gnat numbers down and also give visual evidence of their populations. Using more than one mode of action (active pesticide ingredient) and rotating pesticides helps to prevent pesticide resistance. Please do not spray flowering plants, as much as it can be helped, so that bees are not bringing pesticide laced pollen back to the hive. All pesticide applications should be judicious and well informed. Stay on top of weeds both in pots and around your garden!



## Last Meeting: Tree Evaluation w/ Peter Tea

Tuesday March 24 we welcomed Peter Tea to discuss the broad topic of tree evaluation. This discussion covered the technical, philosophical, and design elements of the skill of evaluation, laying a groundwork for developing one's own eye across species and styles. Peter covered many of the elements of what defines traditionally excellent bonsai, while encouraging the audience to develop a personal sense of taste and understanding.

The evening was discussion oriented as the group worked to identify the positive elements of different trees, rather the focus on flaws. This approach aims to emphasize the assets of a particular specimen or species, like deadwood on a juniper or uniform nebari on a deciduous tree.

This was a higher level presentation than a typical demo; evaluation is a skill in bonsai that is not usually treated in such a direct manner. Normally, evaluation comes secondarily to tree manipulation and design, so it was valuable to spend time thinking about the elements of good trees in such a candid and demanding way. Peter brought some excellent examples of trees from his collection to guide the discussion.



Above: Peter Tea teaches tree evaluation and holds aloft the tombola trophy

Below: Scenes from the 2026 Spring Show





Welcome New Members: LaVerne Bilsend, Victrinia Ridgeway, Robert and Tracey Churchill, William Chase, Catlin Lam  
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 - May 9

The next member workshop is Saturday, May 9. Contact Renee Seely, [breadcrust@comcast.net](mailto:breadcrust@comcast.net) to reserve a spot for the May 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

We have less than ten empty seats remaining for the bus trip, so if you have been waiting to decide whether to sign up, the time is now! We will meet at the Power Inn Park and Ride off Highway 50. The bus will leave at 7:30am sharp!

We have a fun and interesting program for the day. First, the bonsai nursery of Jonas Dupuich in Alameda, which some of you may remember from the 2021 bus trip. This nursery is open by reservation-only. Jonas is the author of two books, a co-host of the Bonsai Wire podcast, owner of the Bonsai Tonight online store and blog, and co-founder of the biennial Pacific Bonsai Expo. Expect highly refined trees and a wide selection of quality pottery, as well as tools and supplies. Next door is Encinal Nursery, which is run by Jonas's family; we are welcome to explore there as well. Ninety minutes are allotted for this stop.

The next stop at 11 am will be the Bay Area Satsuki Aikokai and Yamato Bonsai Show, taking place at the Lakeside Park Garden Center by Lake Merritt in Oakland. This show features flowering azaleas, pines, junipers, and more, as well as vendors. You can take time to view the show trees, shop the vendors, have lunch in the surrounding park, and wander over to the GSBF Bonsai Collection before the group tour.

At 12:45 a 30-45 minute tour of the bonsai garden will commence. This includes the unique opportunity to tour the "behind the scenes" area of off-exhibit trees! Afterwards we will board the bus and head to Elk Grove for our remaining two stops. Big Oak Nursery is a wholesaler with public retail hours until 5pm. They have a diverse selection of plants in many different sized pots. In this case, wholesale does not necessarily mean a ten gallon rootball you will have to wrangle next winter. As always, we will have pruning saws and "the loppers" on-hand to do any on-the-spot "pre-bonsai" work needed to fit trees under the bus. Our final stop of the day will be Ki No Toshi, a pottery collector who specializes in selling small Japanese pots. If you follow his Instagram you will know he was at Kokofu-ten this February acquiring more inventory.

As always, lunch is bring-your-own but we will have donuts, snacks, coffee, beer, wine, and flavored sparkling waters for various stages of the ride. There will be a raffle before we reach the Park and Ride. Expect to return by 7pm. Additional details and reminders will be shared with trip attendees by email.

To sign-up, please email [abasbonsaiclub@gmail.com](mailto:abasbonsaiclub@gmail.com) and pay \$50 per person at the April 28 meeting or send a check to ABAS at PO Box 161767 Sacramento, CA 95816-9998. The price of attendance simply offsets the cost for renting the bus; this is not a fundraiser for the club.

## 2025 Events Calendar

Tuesday, April 28, Kaya Mooney  
[In-person & Zoom](#)

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

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 Merritt 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](#)



Scenes from the 2025 Bus Trip





## 2026 ABAS Spring Show

The 66th Annual ABAS Spring Show has come and gone! It was an eventful and busy weekend, and still a resounding success with high turnout despite uncooperative spring weather. Months of preparation by the show organizers lead up to a carefully orchestrated setup blitz on Friday. The crew was ready to descend on the garden center as soon as the door was unlocked on Friday afternoon. Because of careful planning and past experience, setting up the show is mostly a smooth operation, with many parallel tasks.

While table coverings and backdrops were installed, show trees were checked in and delivered to the photo table. After photos were taken of each entry, they were moved to their designated weekend homes. Some members select their own accent plants, but many are selected by the organizers as the last step of polishing each display. Much effort goes into creating refined displays, from the back drops and lighting, to the placement of accents, jita, and stands. An equal amount of care was given to the suiseki displays entered by club members who are given to the stone persuasion.

At the same time, the vendor and consignment area was abuzz with sale plants being checked in, vendors unloading, and rain canopies being set up. During this entire process and despite all of the planning, flexibility and on-the-ground decision making are always required.

Jennifer Price came immediately to the garden center from the airport to mingle and scope the show before turning in Friday night. Jennifer held a show critique Saturday morning before opening to the public, providing her input on each display composition for members. The event kicked off strong on Saturday with people out buying plants before the afternoon rain. Both Saturday and Sunday featured the popular beginners workshop hosted by Roger and the Dig In posse in the morning. The consignment tables went from unusually packed to thoroughly combed through by Sunday afternoon.

Each afternoon at 1:30, Jennifer held an engaging demonstration in the main room. Saturday featured a wonderful olive and Sunday an unusually tall and elegant lodgepole pine, sourced from club members. Jennifer is excellent at discussing her process with the audience while taking questions and keeping up with tree work. She collaborated with Travis Hendrix, an ABAS member and Peter Tea's apprentice, for each demo. Each finished tree was taken home by a lucky individual as the key raffle prize.

Please extend gratitude to the committed show runners and volunteers who made this whole thing possible.



Scenes from the 2026 Spring Show



## 2026 Home Tour

Ellen Evans

After a wet and windy weekend for the club's annual show, club members were grateful for perfect weather for our annual home garden tour on Saturday April 18. This year's tour featured three homes east of Sacramento.

First, Bill Burns and his border terrier, Liam, welcomed us to his garden in Orangevale. Club member Ed Slomovic, who often collaborates with Bill, assisted in showing off the yard. Several of Bill's trees were impressive results of air layering projects. He also had a side yard with neatly laid out raised beds for ground growing small bonsai. One of the special trees Bill had on display was a small coast live oak obtained from beloved club member Jason Butler's estate sale, which was potted into a unique concrete pot believed to have been created in a Japanese internment camp during WWII.

The next stop was the Cameron Park home of Pat Flynn, located on a hill with a spectacular view of the still-snowy mountains. In addition to an enviable collection of beautiful trees, Pat possibly had more accent plants than have ever been seen on any home tour. He showed a large ume that he and Peter Tea made some so-far-successful grafts on this spring. Pat also talked about the challenges of caring for an Austrian Pine and some of his junipers. We recognized multiple trees from last weekend's show!

The final stop was Paul Holtzen's home in Rescue, where Paul, his wife Karen, and a few volunteers were already hard at work readying a delicious BBQ lunch. The sunnier side of the property had many benches of oaks, pines, and redwoods, as well as some very active hummingbird feeders. We spotted and admired a couple pots repaired with kintsugi technique, which Paul had shared on his Instagram. Smaller and more shade loving trees were in a protective enclosure surrounded by deer-fencing. Paul's stone-collecting hobby was also evident and those in the know got a glimpse of his daiza-making workshop and suiseki collection. A homemade motorized soil-sifting set-up stood next to the shop.

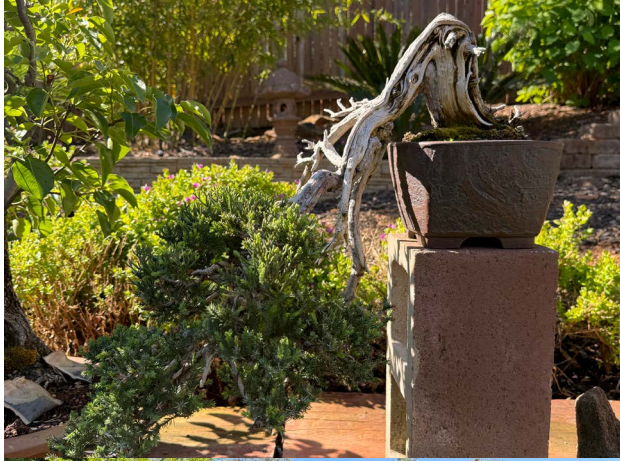
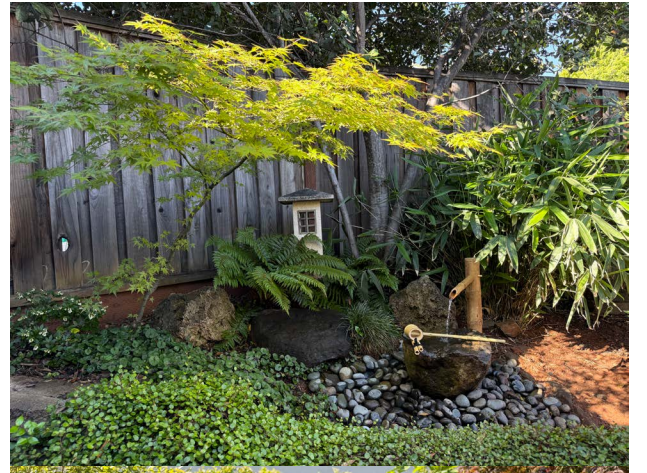
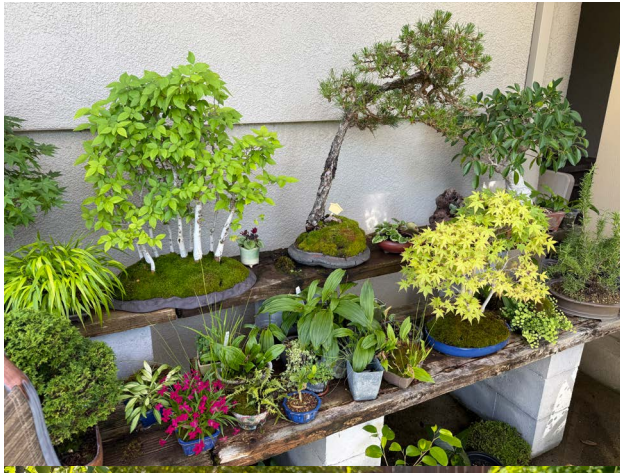
Two commonalities struck me as I compared each of these gardens to my own. In our region it is important to protect many species from the peak summer sun and heat, so often the most open, exposed parts of yards are reserved for lawns and/or water features. Bonsai are often on the edges of patios or side yards shaded by trees, buildings, or shade cloth for their protection. The second commonality I appreciated was that all the collections on the tour featured trees in all stages of development. There is an optimism to the art of bonsai that enables us to see potential in so many trees. No matter how many "finished" trees one is maintaining in the "refinement" stage, most of us are inspired to use our ever-improving skills and eye to start another project.

Many thanks to Carol Greenfield for organizing this year's tour, and also to the volunteers who helped set up a beautiful lunch. And most of all to the hosts and their families who spent countless hours preparing and beautifying their yards and trees. We appreciate your generosity in opening your private space to members. We all improve our own practice by observing how others are doing it and applying new ideas to our own set-ups.

The club is always looking for new gardens to showcase in our members-only home tour. If you are interested in having your garden on NEXT year's tour, please contact Carol Greenfield at [cngmft@gmail.com](mailto:cngmft@gmail.com). Often the date is set after selecting candidate gardens and finding a Saturday that works best for everyone.



Scenes from the 2026 Garden Tour



More scenes from the 2026 Garden Tour and BBQ