

FOREST STYLE BONSAI

Chapter 10

NOTES

I. OBJECTIVES

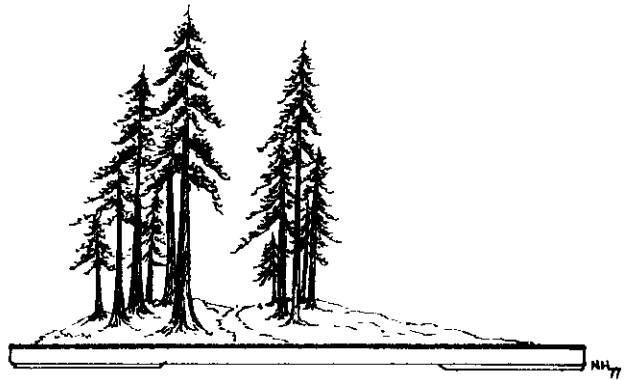
As a result of studying this section of the *Intermediate Bonsai Syllabus* and viewing audio visual presentations, or participating in other activities provided by an instructor, you will be able to:

1. Describe the significant features of the *forest* style bonsai, to include:
 - a. The significance of the *height/girth ratio*.
 - b. The type of container which is most appropriate.
 - c. The importance of soil elevation.
2. Using appropriate stock plants, create a *forest* style bonsai in training.

II. GENERAL

A. A *forest* or *group* style bonsai is one in which **three or more trees** are planted in a single container.

1. The forest planting may have any number of trees, however, the **number 4** should be avoided. In the Japanese culture the characters for the number 4 are the same as those for death. From a practical point of view, four trees present a symmetrical composition, and symmetry is to be avoided.



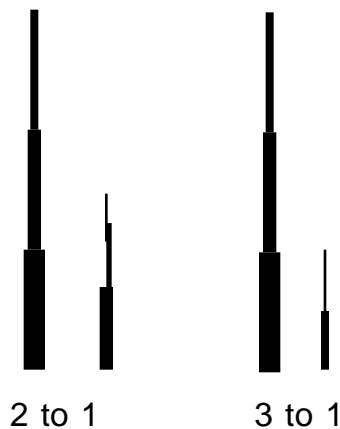
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2. Forest bonsai plantings usually contain a **single species** of plant material.
 3. There should be a **single rhythm or style**; formal upright, informal upright, windswept, etc.
 4. Multiple tree plantings are a good use for thinner, younger material.
 5. One or more **rocks** may be used in the composition.
- B. Various artistic and aesthetic principals apply when creating a successful bonsai forest planting; type and size of container, the ratio of one tree to another, and the placement of the trees and rocks in relation to each other and to the container.

III. FOREST STYLE BONSAI DEFINED

A. Trunk Height/Girth Ratio

The tallest tree should have the thickest trunk. Every other tree in the group should be shorter and have a proportionately smaller girth. An example of the height/girth ratio may be clearly seen in a two tree planting in which the minimal ratio is 2 to 1 and the ideal ratio is 3 to 1 (the taller tree is 3 times taller and has a girth 3 times greater than that of the smaller one).



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B. Number of trees

The **number** of trees should be an odd number, but other than having four, it is not a hard and fast rule.

C. Species of Plant Material

In most group plantings a **single species** of plant material should be used.

1. If **multiple species** are used, the viewer's attention tends to be diverted from consideration on the composition as a whole to concentration on segments. This is especially true if one element is stronger or more prominent than the rest.
2. Multiple species, while acceptable, may introduce unwanted variations in texture which would detract from the harmony of the composition.

D. Rock Selection

1. Traditional Japanese group plantings do not have **rocks**. *Saikei* is the term generally used when rocks are combined with plant material to create the visual illusion of a natural setting. However there is nothing to prevent you from using rocks in your forest planting if you feel they will enhance the composition.
2. Many of the principles of **selecting rocks** for use in a composition are the same as those used for the selection of the trees. The rocks should:
 - a. Be of the same style (flat, upright, rounded, sharp edges, etc.)
 - b. Be of the same color and texture.
 - c. Vary in size.

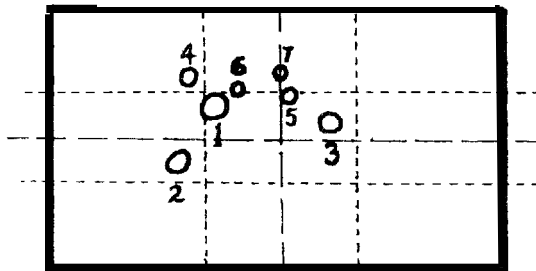
V. STYLING THE FOREST STYLE BONSAI

A. **Pre-planning** and attention to design requirements is probably more important in the construction of a group planting than any other type bonsai.

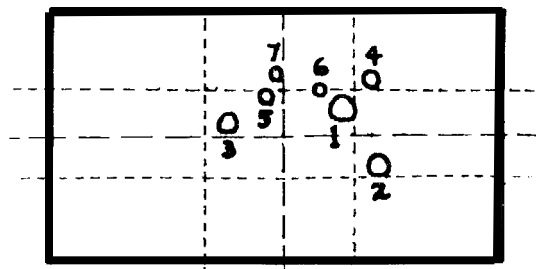
B. Focal point

Trees may be placed in either a right hand or in a left hand arrangement depending on the location of the **focal point**, the main point of interest. The tallest tree should be about one-third the way in from the side of the container.

Left hand arrangement



1 indicates largest tree
7 indicates smallest tree



Right hand arrangement

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C. Arrangement Priority

The priority for arranging trees in a group planting is to first consider the trunks, next the roots and finally branching.

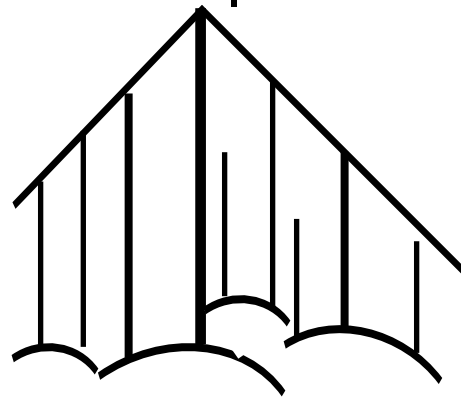
D. Elevation

The arrangement may be vertical as on a rock, or horizontal as in a pot or on a slab.

E. Outline or Silhouette

1. Single Group

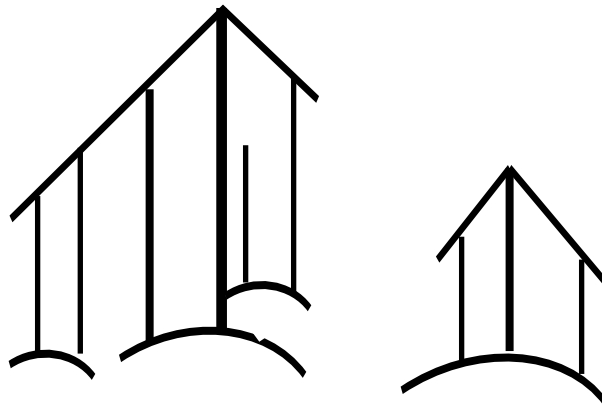
Trees may be grouped in a **single group** design which, when viewed from the front, presents a single outline in the form of a scalene triangle.



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2. Double Group

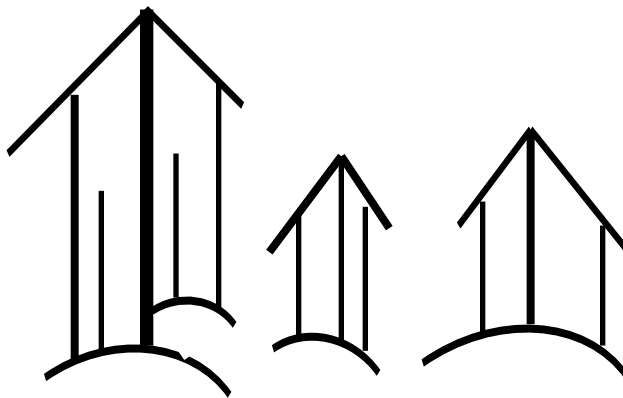
Trees may be grouped into **two separate groups**. The tallest tree is in the major group. Each group presents its own outline in the form of a scalene triangle.



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3. Triple Group

- a. Trees may be grouped into three relatively separate groups; the major group, the secondary group and the minor group.
- b. In the opinion of most bonsai growers, harmony usually is achieved best if the minor group is between and to the rear of the two larger groups.



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F. Perspective

1. **Perspective** in art is the showing of objects as they would appear to the eye with reference to distance and depth.
 - a. An example is creating an illusion of distance in a road, path, trail or stream by having it wider in the foreground than in the background to create the illusion of distance.
 - b. Another example is having smaller objects in the background, behind items in the foreground, to create the illusion of both distance and depth.
2. An individual close to the edge of a forest has a “near view” of that forest. In bonsai, the **near view** is created by planting:

- a. The tallest and heaviest trees near the foreground for emphasis.
 - b. The medium size trees in the central area.
 - c. The smallest trees in the background to complete the perspective of depth and distance.
3. An individual far away from the edge of a forest has a “distant view” of that forest. In bonsai, the **distant view** may be created by planting:
- a. The taller and heavier trees in the central area.
 - b. The smallest trees in both the foreground and in the background.
 - c. The medium size trees between the shortest and the tallest trees.

4. **Alignment of Objects**

Trees, and rocks if present, should be placed so that no three of them align on a straight line when viewed from the front and from the side.

5. **Brightness**

Objects which are brighter in color appear to be closer than those which are darker. To enhance the illusion of distance, plant the brighter plant material, including moss, toward the front of the composition.

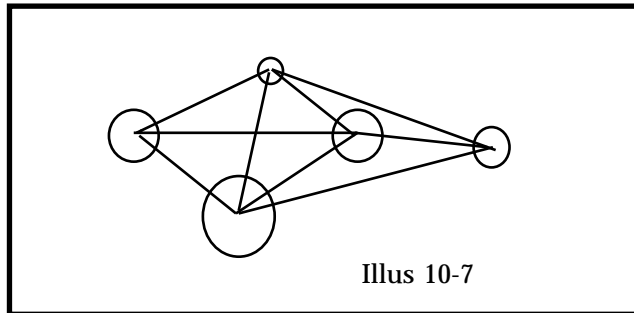
6. **Texture**

Coarser texture gives the appearance of nearness while finer texture conveys distance. To enhance the illusion of distance, use coarser material toward the front.

G. Scalene Triangle

1. Trunk Placement

Arrange the trunks of the trees to form a series of scalene triangles.



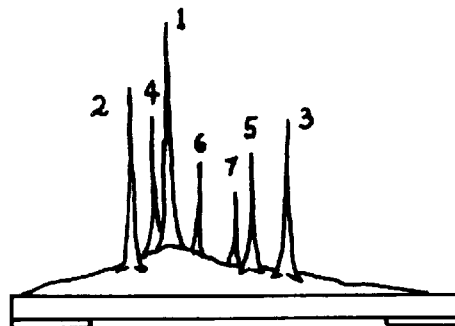
2. Branches

The **lowest branch** should normally be on the shortest tree with the smallest trunk. This will often form the long side of the scalene triangle which defines the overall shape of the planting.

H. Soil

1. Contour

The soil should be contoured so that the largest tree is planted highest.



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2. Composition

The soil should be made of **materials** which are appropriate for the species tree being planted.

3. Slab Plantings

A **slab** has no sides. A dike made of **muck** or clay needs to be placed around the outer edge to prevent erosion of soil.

4. Rocks

- a. **Rocks** should not be placed on the soil surface. This creates a feeling of instability. Rocks in nature usually are partly underground. In a bonsai composition, a third to a half of most rocks should be under the soil to provide a degree of visual as well as physical stability.
- b. If a **path or stream** is to be part of the composition, rocks and gravel used should be of the same color and texture as others used.
- c. A path or stream should be wider toward the front and narrower toward the back of the composition. This provides an illusion of distance.
- d. The far end of a path or stream should not be visible from the front. It should disappear behind a rock, tree or mound. This also provides an illusion of distance but adds a bit of mystery to where it goes.

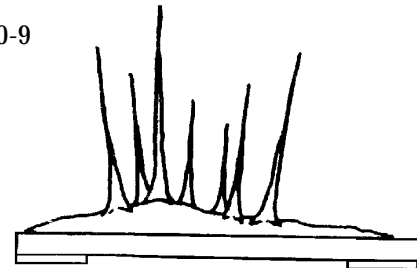
Forest Style Bonsai, Continued

NOTES

I. Attitude

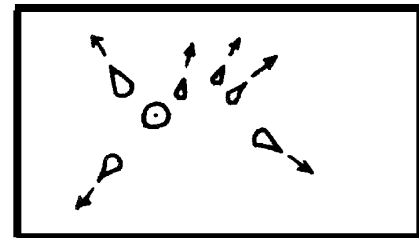
1. The **attitude** of a tree refers to its degree of verticality; upright, slanting, cascading, etc.
2. In a group planting, the largest and tallest tree usually is **vertical** while the others lean away from it.

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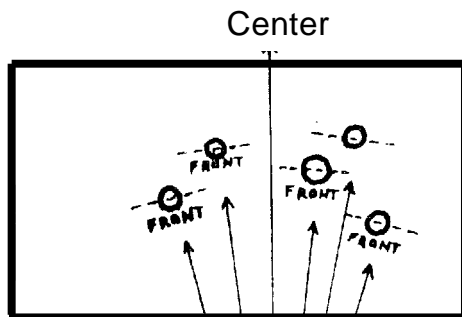
Front View

Top View



Trunks lean in the direction of the arrows

J. Front of each tree



Trees face the viewer

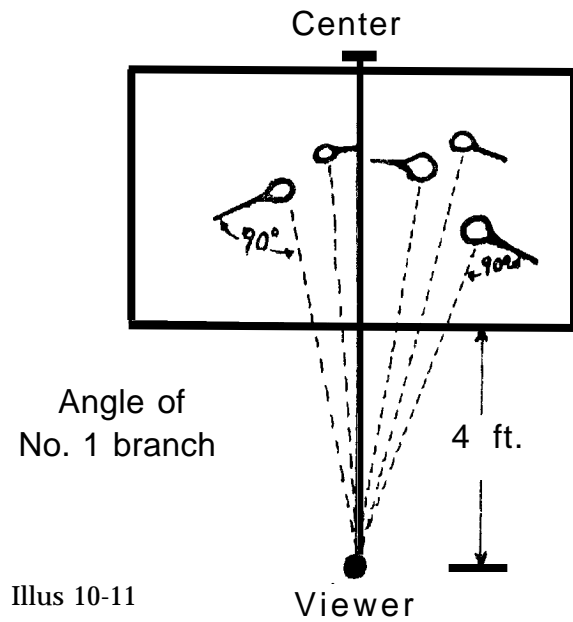
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Viewer

1. The **front** of each tree is based on the trunk line and on the placement of the branches.
2. The **front faces** the viewer which is not necessarily the front of the container.
3. The line of the front trees should form a shallow **concave arc** which visually invites the viewer into the scene.

K. Branches

1. The **lowest branch** on each tree should emerge at a right angle to the front of the tree.
2. The branches of one tree should not run into the branches on another tree. Branches which grow into the group are often eliminated.
3. Occasionally small trees with low branches may be planted in the background to give an illusion of depth and distance.



V. POTTING THE FOREST STYLE BONSAI

A. Pot

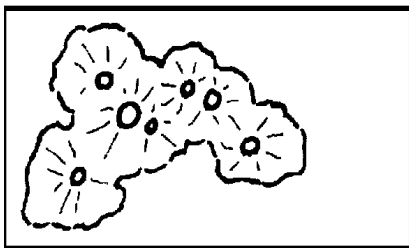
1. Regardless of shape, the container should be **shallow**.
2. Use a straight line **rectangular** shaped container for a group planting of formal upright trees.
3. An **oval** container may be used for informal, curved trunk trees in a group planting.
4. Containers for pines, junipers and other conifers should be unglazed terra cotta.
5. Flowering, fruiting and leaf color changing trees may be in glazed containers of subdued colors.

B. Slab

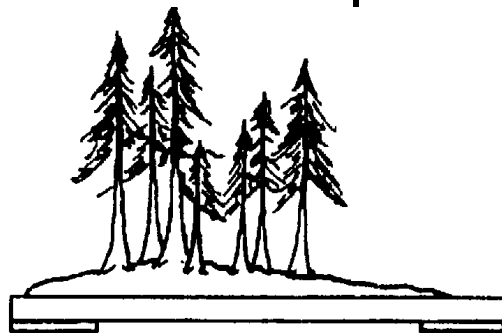
Plantings for which a natural appearance is emphasized may be on a slab.

C. Size

The container should be large enough so that the grove occupies no more than one-half of the area of the container.



Top View



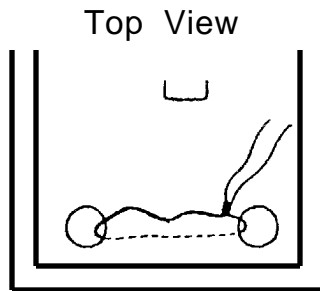
Front View

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Forest Style Bonsai, Continued

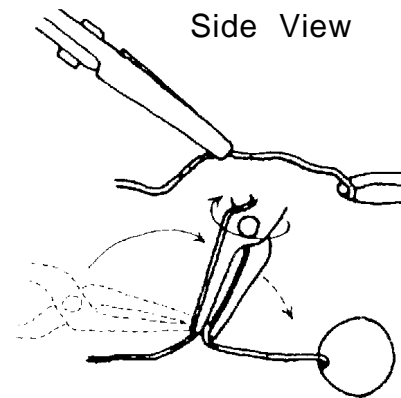
NOTES

- B. Most group planting containers have several **drain holes**, none of which may be exactly where the artist needs them for the proper alignment of tie down wires with the secured trees. Alternate anchor locations have to be created.



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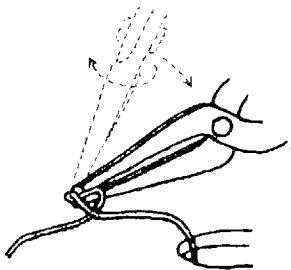
- C. Pass a length of 20 gauge wire through two drainage holes and twist its ends together, leaving some slack. This wire will be used to **anchor** other wires which will secure the trees into the pot.



Top View

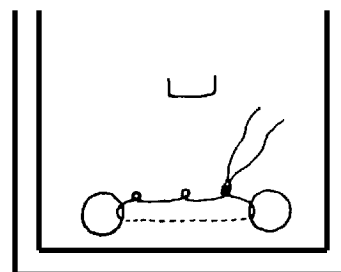
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- C. With pliers, twist one or two **loops** into the wire.



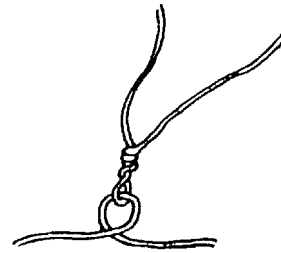
Side View

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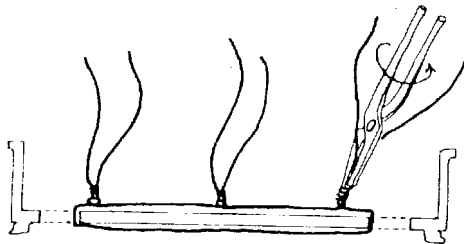
Top View

- D. Cut at least 12" lengths of wire which will be used to secure the trees into the container. Secure one wire to each loop made on the anchoring wire.



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- E. Lightly **tighten** the anchor wire to the pot in order to make the tree tie down wires snug in the bottom of the pot.



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- F. Repeat this process until there are tie down wires for each tree.

G. Replanting

When it is time to **repot** the arrangement, remove the grove planting as a single unit, trim its roots, add new soil and replace it in the same container.

VI. SUMMARY

- A. In order for a forest planting be artistic and have aesthetic value, all elements must be in proper scale, textures must complement each other, focal point(s) placed properly and the soil contour interesting an not static.
- B. Pre-planning and attention to design requirements is probably more important in the construction of a group planting than any other type bonsai.