

MINIATURE BONSAI

Chapter 12

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 primary identifying feature which classifies a bonsai as a *miniature* style bonsai.
2. Explain why the scale of the various parts of the bonsai is especially important with *miniature* style bonsai.
3. Using an appropriate nursery stock plant, demonstrate the process of creating an informal upright trunk for a *miniature* style bonsai using the “Grow and Clip” method of training.
4. Using an appropriate nursery stock plant, describe and demonstrate the process of creating branch ramification using the “Grow and Clip” method of training.
5. Using an appropriate stock plant, describe and demonstrate the process of creating a *miniature* style bonsai by reduction in height.

II. GENERAL

- A. The term “bonsai” means tree in a tray and implies that the plant material is relatively small, certainly smaller than an actual tree one would see in nature. When the term “miniature” is applied to bonsai, it implies a still smaller representation of a tree which might be found in nature.

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B. There are various classification and names associated with smaller bonsai; poppy seed size, fingertip size, bean or pea size, mini, palm size, one hand size bonsai, etc., all of which apply. Some of the Japanese terms for various sizes of miniature bonsai are “Mamé”, “Komono” “Shito” and “Shohin”. In this *Syllabus* they will be referred to as simply “miniature” bonsai.

C. Such a tree may have only three or four leaves; a single leaf may have to suggest an entire foliage mass.

D. Miniature bonsai may be in any style in which larger bonsai are created. They appear, in most respects except size, as do any other bonsai. Containers may be slightly out of proportion to the trees by being a bit larger than normal to provide adequate root support.

E. Scale is important. Since these bonsai are very small, the size of fruit, flowers, leaves and needles must be small and in scale to the trunk and branches in order to create a harmonious composition. Genetic miniatures and naturally dwarfed species are often used in this style.



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III. DEVELOPING MINIATURE BONSAI

A. Grow and Clip

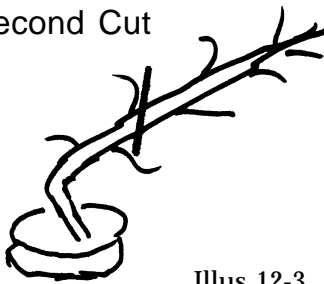
1. Many years ago a group of bonsai growers in southern China developed a method of training bonsai by alternately allowing them to grow and then clipping much of the new growth. Their technique, known as the Lingnan style, or just “grow and clip”, is effective in developing the trunk line for a miniature bonsai.
2. In 1972 bonsai artist and author Dorothy S. Young visited Mr. Yee-sun Wu, a distinguished Hong Kong banker and bonsai grower. According to Mrs. Young, as reported in an issue of the *American Bonsai Society Journal* (Vol 7, pages 15-17), Wu explained the “Grow

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and Clip” method as consisting of two parts: drastic pruning followed by a period of growth.

- a. The first cut is made after the trunk or branch has reached the desired diameter. The trunk is cut directly above a branch which will be developed as a continuation of the trunk line. The location and position of the replacement branch is important because it will change the line of the trunk as it develops.

Second Cut



Illus 12-3

- b. During the next period of growth the new trunk growth is not trimmed or cut back until it has reached the desired size proportionate to the rest of the trunk. Then it is cut back and the process is repeated.
- c. Temporarily, during each growth period, the new replacement is allowed to send out branchlets and elongate far beyond the periphery of the tree. Large top growth on the replacement promotes a thickening of the section that will become the new trunk or branch.
- d. Over a period of time a gently curving trunk with nicely placed branches can be developed.
- e. The Fall 1982 issue of Florida Bonsai magazine published four panels of sketches as part of an article by Charles Lloyd titled: “Ideas for Mame Bonsai”. Those sketches, appearing on pages 14-17, show how a relatively uninteresting material tree can be trained into a bonsai by wiring and pruning. Those sketches are reproduced in **APPENDIX E** of this Syllabus.

NOTES

First Cut



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Basic Shape

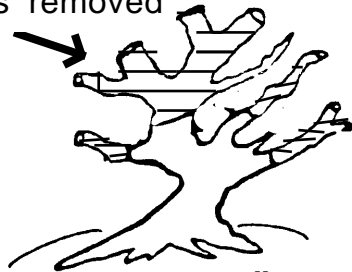


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B. Styling by Reduction

1. A technique which works well with evergreen species, especially junipers, is to cut back the trunk and major branches.
2. With many species, junipers and pines being examples, it is necessary to leave foliage on any branch which is to be retained alive.
3. If the reduction would leave an unsightly stub, it may be appropriate to carve the stub to make it an attractive piece of dead wood on the tree.

Top and selected
branches removed



Illus 12-5

IV. CONTAINERS and SOIL for MINIATURE BONSAI

A. Containers appropriate for miniature bonsai generally follow the rules for larger bonsai with two notable exceptions:

1. **Color.** Containers for miniature bonsai may be more colorful and have more elaborate designs than those used for larger trees.
2. **Size.** Containers for miniature bonsai may be larger in proportion to the tree than those used for larger trees. This is especially true for the container's depth necessary to sustain adequate root growth. Also, because of the thickness of the clay walls of the pot, a miniature bonsai may appear to be over potted.

- B. Soil drainage is important for all bonsai but especially so for miniature bonsai. Use components appropriate to the species but avoid ALL dust and very fine particles which would impede drainage.

V. CARE AND MAINTENANCE

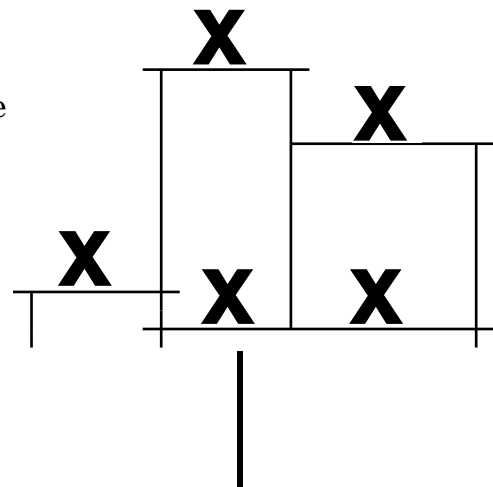
- A. Pest and disease control is especially important as they can spread quickly on such a small plant. Once detected, treatment is the same as for a larger specimen.
- B. Pruning for shape is more critical than on larger specimens because any amount of excess growth becomes readily apparent.
- C. Small trees can't stand drying out for over 24 hours. To avoid premature drying during the summer, trees do best if their pots are kept half buried in a tray of peat moss, or wet sand or calcinated clay that is kept wet when the tree is watered. Make sure there is not a standing water in the tray that would rot the roots.
- D. Heat and cold protection is important as the roots of the *miniature* style bonsai can more readily be affected because of the small containers. The tray of wet sand or calcinated clay described above can help protect the roots from heat.

VI. DISPLAY

- A. The display of *miniature* bonsai is done differently.

1. Larger bonsai are usually displayed on individual display stands or slabs and are usually all placed on the same level.
2. *Miniature* bonsai are usually displayed on a multi-level display stand having several shelves.

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3. The order in which the trees are displayed may replicate the order in which trees in nature would grow on a mountain. Smaller trees, especially conifers, might be displayed high, broad leafed larger ones in the middle and grasses, rocks, and smaller flowering specimens lower.
4. The individual bonsai may be placed on individual stands upon the shelves.

VII. SUMMARY

- A. *Miniature* style bonsai are so designated because of their small size.
- B. They may be designed in any of the trunk styles of larger bonsai.
- C. Scale of the various parts of the bonsai is especially important with *miniature* style bonsai.
- D. The informal upright style trunk for a *miniature* style bonsai may be created using the “Grow and Clip” method of training.
- E. *Miniature* style bonsai, as well as all other size and style bonsai, may develop branch ramification when the “Grow and Clip” method of training is used.
- F. *Miniature* style bonsai, as well as all other size and style bonsai, may be developed by reduction in height.
- G. Containers used for *miniature* style bonsai may be more colorful, have more surface designs and be deeper proportionally than those used for larger specimens.