

EXPOSED ROOT STYLE BONSAI

Chapter 16

NOTES

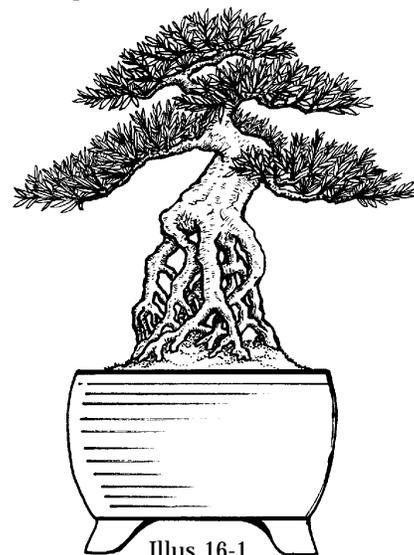
I. OBJECTIVES

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

1. Define the meaning of the term *exposed root* style of bonsai.
2. Using an appropriate stock plant, demonstrate the procedure for beginning the training of an *exposed root* style bonsai.

II. GENERAL

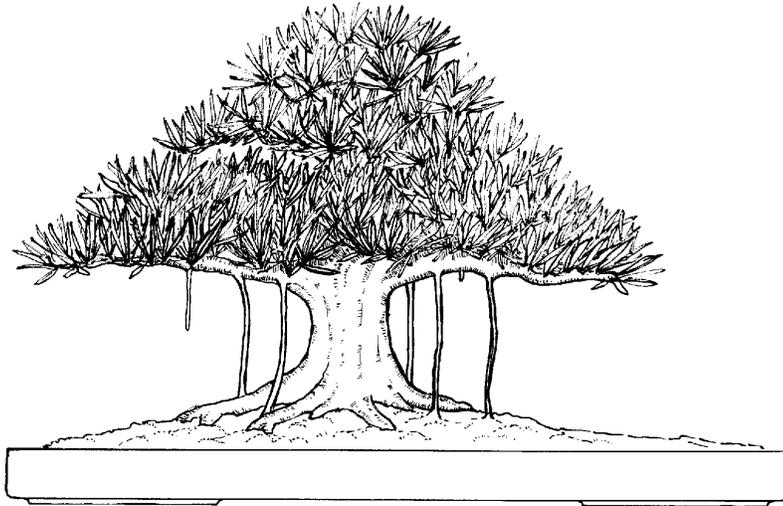
- A. A bonsai which in all other appearances is old, may have a portion of one or two roots exposed. This is a natural process of slow erosion occurring over a long period of time, enhancing the illusion of great age.
- B. However, the *exposed root* style bonsai exhibits a significant amount of roots which have been exposed above the soil, thus becoming a dominant feature.
- C. Bonsai created in the *exposed root* style may resemble trees growing on steep slopes or on river banks where the soil below the base of the trunk has been slowly eroded, the exposed roots develop bark, and become multiple extensions of the trunk.
- D. *Exposed root* style bonsai may also resemble trees growing on a rock whose roots grew in the soil down along the rock. A portion of the soil later eroded, exposing the roots clinging to the rock.



III. EXPOSED ROOT STYLE BONSAI DEFINED

- A. *Exposed root* style bonsai may be in most any of the primary styles, however slanting, windswept or cascade styles are the most believable configurations. Believable because it is in these configurations that natural erosion of soil from the roots would most likely have occurred.

Note: Bonsai, especially ficus, may have aerial roots which supplement the roots at the base of the trunk. Such trees are not normally classified as exposed root style bonsai.



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- B. The *exposed root* style bonsai is so named because a major portion of the roots, which are the natural extension of the trunk, are above ground and exposed and are supporting the trunk of the tree. They often comprise a third to a half of the height of the tree.
1. The roots may be several individual roots like so many legs upon which the tree stands.
 2. Several finer roots may be plaited or twisted and then grafted together to create a few larger roots. As they grow, expand and graft to each other, the evidence of the plaiting or twisting diminishes.

3. The trunk-roots should be a harmonious continuation of the trunk. There should be a pleasant blending of the trunk line and the root line.
4. Exposed roots which are clasping a rock on their way to the soil below should be growing tightly against the rock with no space between.

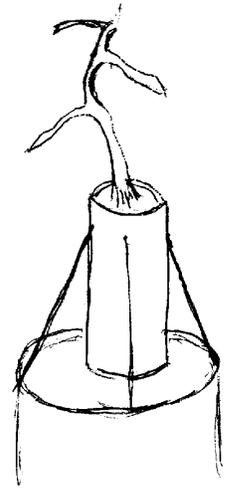
IV. STYLING AN EXPOSED ROOT STYLE BONSAI

- A. Style the trunk and the branches as an *informal upright, slanting, windswept* or *semi-cascade* style bonsai. However, allow one or more sacrifice branches to grow unchecked to enhance root growth.
- B. Remove all of the soil from the roots and untangle the roots. Examine the primary roots, those which are attached directly to the trunk. Keep the roots moist.
- C. Decide on the configuration desired in the planting. They may either be elongated and be vertical continuations of the trunk, or they can be spreading and provide multiple root support for the tree. Roots growing over a rock are in the latter category.
- D. If the roots are to be elongated and be vertical continuations of the trunk,
 1. Decide the distance which the roots will be exposed in the finished design and obtain a piece of 4" diameter PVC pipe or other material with which to make a cylinder. If PVC pipe is to be used, cut it lengthwise making two half-sections of pipe. If flat material is to be formed into a cylinder, make sure it will have the proper length and diameter when formed.
 2. Place a layer of potting soil in one of the halves.
 3. Lay the roots in the soil parallel to each other.

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4. Cover the roots with enough soil that when the second half-section of pipe is placed over them, the soil and roots are securely snug.
 5. Secure together the two vertical sections of pipe with wire. Add soil as necessary and gently tamp downward.
 6. Bury the lower end of the PVC pipe a couple of inches in a large nursery container and splay any roots protruding from the bottom. Stake or tie to secure it in the pot. Water well.
- E. If the roots are to be spreading and provide multiple root support,
1. Use cotton twine to tie the roots into the desired configuration. Cotton twine is used because it will rot before damaging the roots to which it is tied.
 2. Pot the tree into a relatively deep nursery container with the soil coming almost to the base of the trunk.
 3. As necessary, train the exposed roots using wire, wedges or string ties to further position the roots as desired.
 4. Add a stake and tie the trunk it to stabilize the tree.
 5. If the roots are to grow over a rock:
 - a. Select a rock in proper proportion to the anticipated final size of the tree.
 - b. Select a rather rough rock with an interesting shape and crevices.
 - c. Wet the rock before placing the roots.
 - d. Plant the tree and the rock as described earlier.

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- F. Depending on the species tree and growing conditions, periodically remove an inch or so of soil to force the roots to develop bark and to harden off. If possible, also remove the unnecessary upper portions of the cylinder. Expect that the process will take a year or more.
- G. When the training of the roots is completed, pot the tree in a container appropriate to the style of the upper portion of the tree (upright, slanting, windswept, etc.). Generally a shallow to medium depth container which is round, square or oval is best.

V. SUMMARY

- A. The lower trunk of *exposed root* style bonsai is composed of roots which have been exposed because of soil erosion.
- B. While the style is unusual and dramatic, it does develop naturally in nature.