

DISPLAYING BONSAI

Chapter 19

NOTES

I. OBJECTIVES

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

1. Discuss the importance of the four factors which need to be kept in mind when displaying bonsai (the tree, the background, the stand and the container).
2. Describe several types of bonsai display stands which may be constructed for private collections.
3. Describe some of the considerations in preparing the tree itself for display in a public exhibit.
4. Discuss the type of background which should be used behind bonsai in a public exhibit.
5. Discuss the importance of the base or stand on which bonsai are placed in a public exhibit.
6. Describe some of the considerations in preparing a bonsai's container for display in a public exhibit.

II. GENERAL

A. Whether bonsai are being displayed for one's own personal pleasure or whether they are being shown in a public exhibit, the manner of display affects the overall impact which the bonsai has on the viewer.

- B. The bonsai artist who creates and maintains bonsai for his personal pleasure usually displays his bonsai in an informal manner. Nevertheless, there are some considerations which need to be understood to optimize both the health of the bonsai and the aesthetic appreciation by the viewer.
- C. The public exhibit of bonsai is a privilege. Bonsai are placed on display as things of beauty to be admired by the viewer. They also foster the dissemination of information about bonsai. Most bonsai growers will, at some time in their growing experience, submit one or more of their bonsai for exhibit; to be seen and appreciated by others. There are several factors which affect the value of that display and need to be considered when mounting an exhibit.
- D. First we will consider the informal display of bonsai in a private collection.

III. DISPLAYING BONSAI IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION

A. Growing Area

1. The first consideration when deciding on the location in which to keep a private collection is the horticultural needs of the plants. Sunlight, protection from wind and salt spray, pollution, reflection of light and heat, and the availability of water, all affect how well the horticultural needs of the plants will be met.
 - a. Whatever amount of sunlight the plant needed before it became a bonsai, is still needed. A full-sun plant such as a juniper or a pine, needs full sun as a bonsai. Plants which will live under reduced light conditions can be grown under reduced light, but generally speaking, the more light a plant gets the smaller its leaves will be; a decided advantage in bonsai.

- b. Wind dries the plant foliage and increases the evaporation of moisture from its container.
 - c. Some plants are not salt tolerant and will not tolerate the salt spray in the air near the seashore.
 - d. Plants grown on a concrete patio or near a concrete wall will be affected by the reflection of light, and therefore heat, from the concrete.
 - e. If there is a source of water readily available, watering will tend to be more regular and timely.
2. Human activity around the bonsai should be limited; a volley ball hitting a bonsai does not make for a happy bonsai.
 3. Animal activity can damage bonsai. Cats tend to eat foliage; squirrels bury nuts in pots and then come looking for them, birds look under moss for insects, and male dogs have difficulty differentiating a bonsai growing at ground level from a fire hydrant.
 4. If it is absolutely essential that bonsai be grown indoors, the area and its facilities should be carefully chosen.
 - a. The area should not be in the direct line of forced air cooling and heating vents. Nor should bonsai be in close proximity to radiant heating devices.
 - b. The level of light available, artificial as well as light from outside, must be sufficient to sustain photosynthesis in the plant. If the level of light varies from one part of the plant to another, the plant needs to be rotated frequently to provide even distribution of light.
 - c. The amount of light, and darkness, which the bonsai receives, should approximate that which it would have in its native environment.

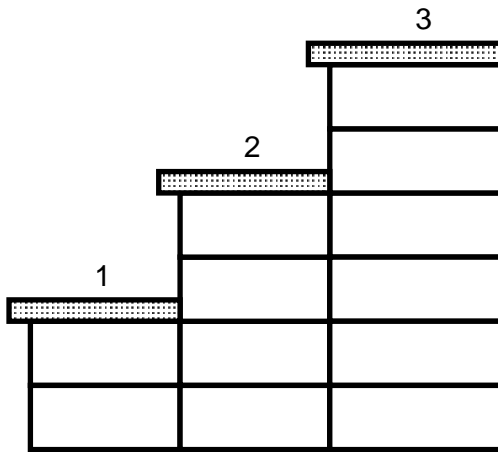
- d. Misting of plants should be avoided to reduce the opportunity for fungus to develop.
 - e. Insects can attack a plant indoors just as easily as when outdoors; insect checks need to be made periodically.
- B. Security, Theft Protection and Recovery
- 1. Bonsai should not be obvious from the street or other public access areas. The display and growing areas may be fenced with opaque material.
 - 2. A second floor balcony or sun deck may be appropriate to put the bonsai out of easy reach.
 - 3. Trees may be wired into their containers and the containers wired to the display bench.
 - 4. A security system to detect an intruder may be warranted. These are available in several forms which activate area lights or which set off a silent or audible alarm.
 - a. Perimeter sensors may be installed along the fence which detect body mass near the fence.
 - b. Magnetic make-break detectors on gates which send an alarm when the contact is broken.
 - c. Infrared motion detectors can be used to cover the area occupied by the bonsai.
 - d. Pressure sensitive detectors may be installed under the container; they signal an alarm when the container is lifted.
 - e. A barking dog.

5. Do not “advertise” to the general public that you have a bonsai collection. Avoid using automobile license plates declaring your love of bonsai. Be cautious about being mentioned in the local press. Do not identify owners of bonsai in public exhibits.
6. When transporting plants, do not leave them openly on display in your vehicle.
7. Still photographs or video tapes of plants in the collection will not prevent theft but will be invaluable in preparing “Wanted” posters and in identifying and proving that recovered plants are yours.
8. Indelibly marking the inside of a container with the owner’s social security number, driver’s license number and state, phone number, etc., can assist in recovery of stolen material.
9. Attach an identifying aluminum tag to a main root of the plant or, place a plastic plant label inscribed with waterproof ink in the pot when repotting.

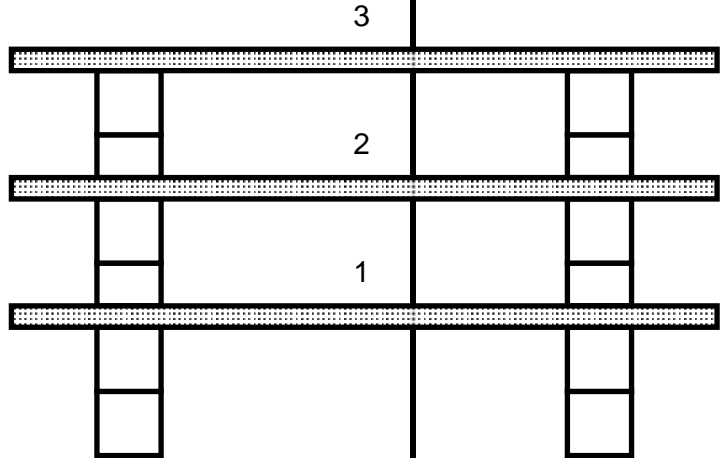


B. Shelf supports

1. Most bonsai will be grown and displayed on shelves holding several trees. A simple type of shelf support consists of concrete blocks set in a stair-step formation with shelving on top of the blocks.



Side View of
Concrete Block Stand



Front View of
Concrete Block Stand

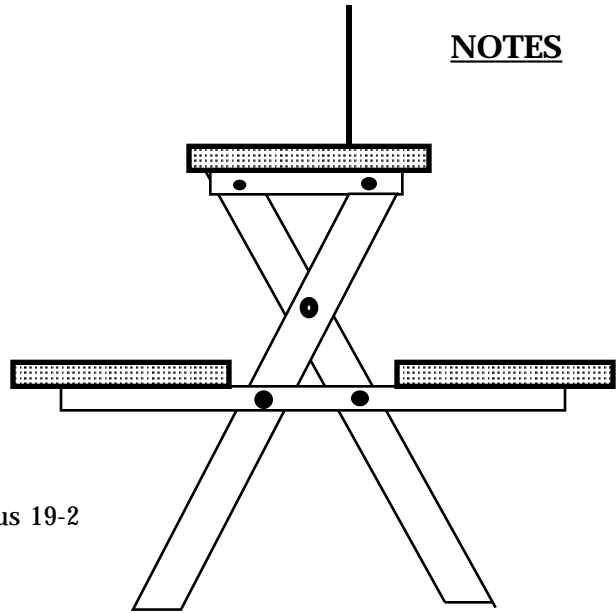
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2. An alternative to concrete block is to use different lengths and diameters of fire place chimney liners.

Displaying Bonsai, Continued

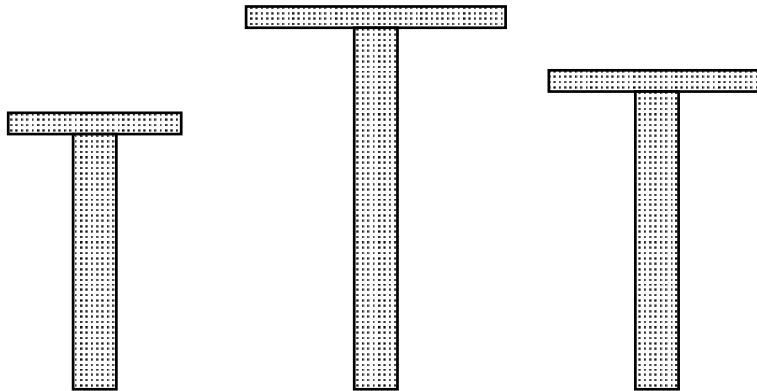
- Another type of support is a pair of wooden "A Frame" supports with three shelves. The two "A Frames" are attached together with a pair of 1" x 4" horizontal boards to prevent side sway.

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Side View Wooden Shelf Support

- Individual stands may be appropriate. The upright should be 4" x 4" pressure treated material securely set into the ground with a flat shelf firmly attached to the top.

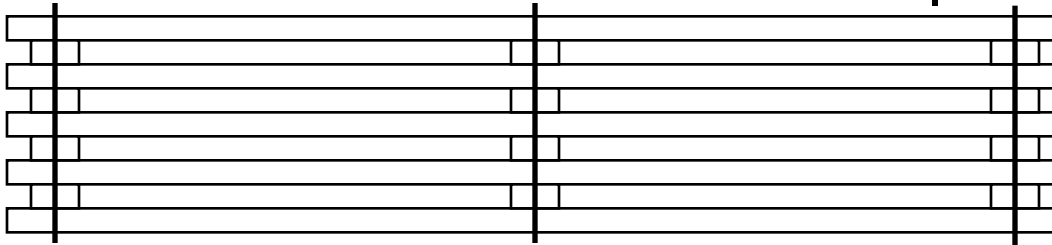


A Grouping of Individual Stands

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C. Shelving

1. Boards or planks may be used as shelving. However, an alternative which provides better drainage and air circulation is to construct a slatted shelf. Materials



Top View of a Slatted Bonsai Shelf

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include:

- a. 1" x 2" x 6' to 8' long strips of pressure treated wood. Commercially available furring strips provide a source of ready made slats. Alternatively, wider planks can be rip sawed to create the slats.
- b. 1" x 2" x 4" pieces of the slat material as spacers to separate the slats. They can be cut from scraps or from an extra slat.
- c. The slats and spacers can be attached together with threaded rods and nuts. In the example shown of the slatted bonsai shelf, a hole was drilled through the slats and spacers, and a washer and a nut were put on each end of the threaded rod.
- d. The hole through the pieces of the shelf may be drilled using a power drill and a long drill bit. The slats and spacers should be clamped together. Care must be taken to drill the hole level and through the centers of the pieces of wood.
- e. An alternative to drilling a hole would be to attach three spacers to a slat using galvanized screws.

Then attach a second slat to the three spacers.
Continue this process until the shelf is completed.

IV. DISPLAYING BONSAI IN A PUBLIC EXHIBIT

- A. Four factors need to be kept in mind when displaying bonsai: the tree itself, the background behind the tree, the base or stand on which the tree is placed, and the container in which the tree is planted.
- B. The tree. First and foremost consideration must be given to the tree because it is the whole purpose for the exhibit.
 - 1. The tree must be healthy and not show any evidence of dead or dying tips, pest infestation, sun or wind burn, or wire damage. Jin and shari (dead wood) should be bleached with a lime sulphur solution. The leaf color should be uniform and the same color as a specimen grown in the ground. Any oversize, damaged or off-color leaves should be removed.
 - 2. Surface roots should radiate outward, but not directly forward, and should not cross each other or be unnaturally exposed with space beneath. The soil surface should be free of debris. Moss, if any, should be healthy and clean.
 - 3. The trunk should be positioned appropriately in the container for the tree's style, usually off center. The lower third should be quite visible and have a nice taper. Branches which cross the trunk line should be at a minimum.
 - 4. The primary branches should be arranged to the left, right and rear, avoiding "T" or "bar" branches and crossing branches. Foliage growing on the underside of branches should be removed.
 - 5. Secondary branches should radiate sideways with no downward growth and with limited upward growth.

6. Any wiring should be neat and as unobtrusive as possible.
7. Provide both the correct botanical and common names to the viewer.

C. The Background

1. After the tree comes the background. If the background is inappropriate even the best prepared tree cannot be seen to full advantage.
2. The tree should be displayed in front of a wall, screen or other hanging of neutral color which will not conflict and compete with the tree. There should be little or no pattern in the background in order that the lines of the tree may be seen clearly.

D. The Display Base

Next, the base upon which the tree is placed should be considered. Some type of a base or stand should be used under the tree. It may be a mat, a slab, a low display stand, or a box which is in proportion to the tree/pot and which harmonizes with the style of the tree.

E. The Container

1. Finally, the container, which is to the bonsai as a picture frame is to a painting, is considered. It has to be in proper proportion to the tree and it should compliment the style, shape and color of the tree. As an example, if the tree is soft and rounded, the container, including its feet, should evoke a similar feeling.
2. The container must be clean and lightly oiled with baby oil.
3. Any secondary plantings, rocks, etc. within the container must be in scale with the tree and not detract

from the tree itself. Ceramic figurines are usually not displayed in the container with a bonsai.

F. When setting up a display of several bonsai:

1. The table cover should be neutral and without pattern like the background.
2. Avoid crowding the table with too many plants. Space is as important as are objects.
3. Try to arrange the trees in groups of three. Each group should be in the form of a scalene (uneven) triangle when viewed from the front and when viewed from directly overhead. The bonsai in the grouping should be of different heights and one should serve as the focal point for its grouping.
4. A singly displayed bonsai may have a decorative rock or a complimentary companion planting shown near it.
5. Care should be taken in placing plants so that texture and shape compliment each other rather than detract from each other.
6. Ideally bonsai should be viewed at eye level and this should be taken into consideration when setting up an exhibit.

G. Plants displayed indoors need to be watered daily, taking care to not allow water to drain onto and damage the stands. Consideration might be given to exchanging plants in the display to prevent damage due to lack of light and humidity.

H. Small name tags may be displayed unobtrusively near each plant. Information on the tags should identify the plant specie and common name and may include the number of years that it has been in training. The age or approximate age should NOT be given. Remember that

bonsai is an art of illusion, and one of the illusions is that of great age. It is also not a good policy to display the name of the plant's owner as this can subject that person to subsequent theft and burglary.

I. Judging

1. If the bonsai are to be judged, consideration should be given to arranging for a qualified judge from outside the organization to which the plant owners belong.
 2. An excellent and reasonably impartial guide for judging is a publication by the American Bonsai Society titled: Bonsai Manual for Appreciating, Judging and Buying Bonsai, 4th Edition.
- J. When it is time to remove the plants from the display, a representative of the bonsai organization must be present to insure that only authorized persons remove plants.

V. SUMMARY

- A. Four factors (the tree, the background, the stand and the container) need to be kept in mind when displaying bonsai.
- B. There are several types of bonsai display stands which may be constructed for the display of private collections.
- C. There are various considerations in preparing the tree itself for display in a public exhibit.
- D. There are several things to take into consideration when preparing a bonsai's container for display in a public exhibit.