



Great Swamp Bonsai Society

*Next meeting: **Club PICNIC***

*Topic: **Relax and Hang Out!***

August 2017 Newsletter

August meeting: Club Picnic!

The Annual Great Swamp Bonsai Society Picnic is **Saturday, August 19th**, with a rain date of Saturday August 26th. The picnic will be held at **289 Mount Hope Ave., Dover NJ 07801**. We will have access to a picnic area and swimming pool, but **please send your RSVP** (to neyamadoribonsai@gmail.com) ASAP, so we can get a headcount for the facilities, including day passes for the pool (\$5 per person—please specify if you want to make use of it). Please also indicate what you wish to bring in the way of food, beverages, dessert, etc.

Please bring chairs if you have them, since there are only a few picnic tables available; we will bring some chairs and folding tables also. If anyone has bonsai-related material they would like to auction off, please let Diego know so that we can place a table for such items.

Diego will send directions with map to location in the coming weeks, so keep an eye peeled for that information.

July meeting: Show and Tell

As promised, this was an informal (that is, very loosely-structured) meeting, where a dozen or so members turned up to show what they've been up to. **Bill Muldowney** brought a selection of his rather spectacular micro-junipers, which he worked on as the meeting went along. **Mark Schmuck** brought a Japanese Black Pine, to demonstrate the effect of growing a tree in the ground for a few years before potting and training it as a bonsai. The bark patterns, rooting, and back-budding were impressive. **Bob Klein** brought in a Cypress-style juniper to show how, having used wiring to "open up" the canopy and expose the trunk and main branches to sunlight, a great deal of useful back-budding was encouraged, allowing for better design in future.



What Are Your “Bulletproof” Bonsai?

By John Michalski, editor, GSBS newsletter

Several times over the past few years I’ve described, in meetings, various “catastrophes” that have befallen my bonsai collection—droughts when I was away from home for extended periods, rodents in my cold frame, warm winters followed by late freezes, unrelenting heat waves—and experience has shown that some of my trees have somehow survived all of this with little obvious long-term effect on their health and vigor.

Moreover, it has not escaped my notice that my survivors all fall into a “short list” of particular species. Here then is a short summary of my collection, the tragedies that have befallen it, and the species that came through it all and continue to thrive.

Rodent Problems and Winter Storage

The first real disaster to hit my bonsai collection in a big way was a local population explosion of voles—a species of native rodent similar to a mouse but with short ears and tail, looking a bit like a dark gray cigar with legs. Voles eat all manner of things, when they can get them, mostly seeds and leaves, shoots, and grass. One way to know you have voles is the presence of what look like exposed tunnels running across your lawn once the snow melts in spring. Another way to spot voles is that they enjoy nibbling the bark on small trees, usually until they completely girdle the trunk, killing the plant—in this case, often a bonsai in winter storage.

Voles, to give them their due, are kind of cute if you’re not frightened of rodents, but the damage they do to your bonsai collection is not cute at all. And so it was, in February of 2010, that I peered into my cold frame—I had put all of my smaller and medium-sized trees into it around Christmastime—and found that at least a dozen of my trees had been either girdled and killed, or had so many primary branches chewed off them that they would have to be regrown almost from scratch. A few of them had their roots eaten out from under them, leaving me with a main trunk that lifted out of the pot, completely rootless, like a popsicle stick.



Which species fared the worst? The voles nibbled all the primary branches of my **Trident maple**, leaving only the trunk unmolested. I had two **Japanese black pines**—a rather large (3 foot high) one, which the voles stripped some of the surface roots, but leaving enough below ground so that the tree did not show any ill effects—and a smaller one, with flaky bark, that had the bark stripped from the main trunk in a band 3 inches wide, but leaving a narrow lifeline that sustained the tree for another season or two, before it finally died from causes unknown.



I also had a small Japanese 5-needle pine, grafted onto Japanese black pine rootstock—and as you can see in the photo (on left), the voles completely stripped the rootstock, leaving the scion untouched but doomed. They also sampled the exposed roots of my **Yews, Black Spruce, and Atlantic White Cedars**, but the damage was minimal and the

voles seemed not to prefer them. An **American Bald Cypress** I had grown from seed for 10 years (photo, right) had its roots entirely eaten out from under it, so that the main stem lifted out of the soil like a motor-oil dipstick. A large **apple** had tunnels dug throughout its 18-inch pot, the soil kicked out and scattered, but the tree evidently had enough roots left to sustain it and the tree is still alive today.



Which species were unaffected? Ironically it was the larger bonsai, for which I did not have space in the cold frame, that came through the winter unscathed. I had put all my **Amur “bush” honeysuckles** and **Amur maples** (of which I had quite a few at the time, as I was preparing a sale of collected bonsai at an upcoming MABS festival) up against a privacy fence, where the winter sun rarely penetrates, and where the trees were frozen solid for the months of February through late March. The voles did not bother with those at all. The plants in the cold frame, by contrast, had been spared most of the deep freezes, so that the soil was still loose and the internal climate protected from the wind. The voles apparently just loved it. All of the damage had been done between Christmas of 2009 and mid-February of 2010.

The upshot of this event is that **I stopped storing my bonsai in the cold frame**, taking my chances with our New Jersey winter climate from then on. My entire bonsai

collection, apart from two Japanese Black Pines that I keep on isolated tables inside an unheated garden shed (only during sustained temperature spells below freezing), is now wintered in a densely-packed cluster alongside the privacy fence on the southwest side of my property without any cover.

Which species survive this treatment? Since 2010 my bonsai collection has been slowly and inexorably restricted to **Amur “bush” honeysuckles, Apple, native (or Black) Plum, Amur and Japanese maples, Northern White Cedars (arborvitae), Eastern Hemlock, Yew, Dwarf Alberta Spruce, Eastern Red Cedar, and Larch.** All of these have withstood the vagaries of our millennial New Jersey winters and continue to do well without anything more than protection against drying out, and positioning in the yard so as to minimize daily temperature fluctuations in the pot (that is, daily freezing and thawing due to exposure to direct sunlight). In short, I put them on the ground, where the sun won't hit them, and I make sure they are well hydrated before the deep freeze, and try to keep the soil snow-covered as much as possible. No vole damage has occurred to the trees I have treated this way.

Lack of Water

Many of you know that I often travel abroad for several weeks each summer, leaving my trees in the hands of an automatic watering system that gives my collection 10 minutes of watering a few times a day. It's not perfect (some trees want more water and some want less) but it seems to keep everything alive until I get back. Some of my bonsai absolutely love it.

A few years ago I was away for almost the entire month of August, and I enlisted the help of a friend who was instructed to water my patio plants (orchids, philodendrons, and such) at least once a week, which they did faithfully. My one big mistake was in neglecting to demonstrate, first-hand, where and how to turn the water supply on and off (I provided verbal instructions but these apparently did not hit home). There was the main supply line, at the house, and a splitter further out that divided the water between a garden hose (for the patio) and my automated system (for the bonsai collection).

For the entire month of August my friend came over as scheduled, watered the patio plants, and turned the water off at its source, at the main spigot coming out of the house. This effectively cut off the supply to my bonsai garden for the duration of my

absence, and this turned out to be the driest August in living memory—not an inch of measurable rain in four weeks.

Which species did the worst? All the deciduous bonsai—at the time I had a lovely collection of **American and European Beech, Red Maples, Black Birch, Apples, Plums, Azaleas**—you name it. I also had several **American Larch**, which is a deciduous conifer, and a few **Atlantic White Cedars** that I had been grooming for many years. The larches, beeches and maples were goners, unmistakably done for. The leaves on the maples and apples were black and crinkled, those of the beeches were bleached paper-white, stiff and proud, looking almost as if they were alive but sprayed with white stuff. They crumbled at the touch. The black birches were leafless but showed signs of pushing a second round of buds. Most of these dried up and never opened. The apples and azaleas attempted a second burst of growth, and one or two succeeded, but were so weakened that they did not leaf out again the following spring. The Atlantic White Cedars looked okay at the time, but faded over the winter and did not green up again in the spring. The beeches were gone. All told I lost about a third of a rather extensive bonsai collection—20 or 30 trees lost. I even lost a couple of pines, which normally don't want too much water.

What survived? My large (3 foot tall with massive trunks) **Amur honeysuckles** were covered in crisp, blackened leaves, but they all pushed new growth and survived to see another year, and are still going strong today. As for the rest, I had, just on a hunch, packed a number of my less sun-loving bonsai (including some individuals of the species listed above) into a shadier part of the yard, along the privacy fence along the southwestern side, and most of these pulled through. Among other species already named, I have two **Hemlocks** that survived in this way. The **Black Plums** burst a new set of buds and many of them are still alive today, though an equal number perished.

Most remarkably, the Yews, Black Pines, Northern White Cedars (arborvitae) and Eastern Red Cedars didn't seem to notice a thing. I was particularly struck by the unflappable survival of the Yews and the Arborvitae, since the former is such a succulent conifer and the latter was collected by myself in the same sphagnum bogs in which I found my Larches, which did not survive at all. Apparently the Yews and Arborvitae are adapted for moist forests that endure seasonal dry spells, because they have continued to flourish in the years since the accident.

Heatwaves

I'll keep this one short. Some of you know that I've spent a lot of time collecting wild trees in Maine and Maritime Canada, and over the years I've found that some of these species just can't handle a New Jersey heatwave that lasts more than a day or two (I guess it's not a heatwave when it lasts only one day). My hunch is that, once the soil reaches a certain temperature, the roots die and no amount of water or special treatment will save the tree. I have come home at the end of a hot day to find all the needles have dropped from my **larches**, still green and soft. This has never resulted in a tree that I somehow rescued afterwards, although they sometimes attempt to push a second set of needles. The other species that have ultimately succumbed to New Jersey heat are, in my collection, native northeastern spruces—the **Black, Red, and Alberta**. My dwarf Alberta spruces, which were bought as potted "live Christmas trees," manage just fine, though I maintain these all season long in partial sun.

Conclusion

From a one-time maximum of around 100 trees, my bonsai collection has finally settled down to about 40 trees, comprising a handful of species that have withstood every insult my handling has thrown at them. The following species, when maintained in a sheltered outdoor location for the winter months, have survived heat, drought, freezing, and rodents:

Amur maple (*Acer ginnala*)

Yew (*Taxus cuspidate*)

Amur honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowii*)

Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*)

Common apple (*Malus pumila*)

Hemlock (*Tsuga Canadensis*)

WHAT ARE YOUR "BULLETPROOF" BONSAI?

Please drop me an email at huonia@aol.com, and we'll include your responses in next month's newsletter!



In-house business: Are you paid up?

Dues are normally collected at the September meeting. If you have not yet paid up, please bring cash or check to **club treasurer Rick Meyers**, or mail it to his address on the last page of this newsletter. Annual membership remains at \$40 for individual, \$50 family membership, and helps support club activities such as hosting touring experts. See last page for details.

Plant Care Tips for August

Since August can be a very hot and dry month, it is imperative that trees be watered every day, maybe twice daily. Not much else can be done except to feed regularly. From August on, trees will need less nitrogen and more potassium and phosphorus to harden the wood and induce budding. Continue to pot up air-layerings that put out roots. Branches start to thicken during August, and wire which begins to bite into the branches should be loosened or cut free. [DY]

August is pretty much about keeping your trees sufficiently watered against the heat, and beginning to harden them up for the coming fall. This is about the time that most people start backing off their feeding, pinching, and pruning schedules. Don't fertilize too aggressively, or else you risk the trees pushing too much new growth that will not harden-off sufficiently before the cold weather comes in. [JM]

Meeting Dates for 2016–2017

NOTE: We still have spaces to fill – suggestions welcome!

Saturday, August 19th: GSBS Club Picnic

September 12, 2017: ***Topic To Be Determined***

October 24, 2017: **Guest Artist David Easterbrook!** Afternoon Workshop 1pm-4:30pm. Evening Meeting 6:30-9:30

November 14, 2017: ***Topic To Be Determined***

Visit our webpage at <http://www.arboretumfriends.org/gsbonsai/>

Novices and non-members always welcome!

Come and plan to get your hands dirty!

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Club Information

Location:

The Frelinghuysen Arboretum
353 East Hanover Ave,
Morristown, NJ 07962

Date:

Usually the second Tuesday of each
Month, (check our website for
special dates and locations)

Time: 6:30 – 9:30 pm

Remember to check our website
(<http://www.arboretumfriends.org/gsbonsai/index.htm>) for
special events, dates, updates
and latest information.

Great Swamp Bonsai Society

c/o Diego E Pablos
289 Mount Hope Ave.
K-12, Rockaway twp.
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Great Swamp Bonsai Society Membership Registration:

Send to:

GSBS c/o Diego Pablos **New** **Renewal**
289 Mount Hope Ave.
K-12, Rockaway Twp. **Individual (\$40.00)** **Family (\$50.00)**
Dover, NJ 07801

Name(s): _____ **Email:** _____

Address: _____ **Phone:** (_____) _____

If Family Membership, please list other members:
