



# Great Swamp Bonsai Society

Next meeting: **TUESDAY, November 13th**

**Topic: Bonsai First Steps**

**November 2018 Newsletter**

## This month's meeting (Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>): Bonsai First Steps

From alert club member **Fred Aufschläger**:

Hi John,

What I think might be an interesting topic would be a discussion/demo of **the very first step in the creation of a bonsai after its initial acquisition**. This is something that every bonsai artist/enthusiast must confront with every newly acquired bonsai, whether novice, intermediate or experienced. It is something which must be done if there is to be progress. This is putting paint to canvas after determining the subject of the painting to be.

Yes, we will examine the tree to see if it has any future as a bonsai, but after we decide "yes," then what? We have to do initial preparation. This entails "cleaning" the tree, the removal of dead, unhealthy, unproductive, heavily shaded foliage, and extraneous branches and trunks which we determine will never be part of the tree's future. It would entail making a *jin* (deadwood accent) of every branch that is removed, not putting this off until "later" when we have more time. This is also a good time to start or enhance a *shari* (deadwood area of the trunk) by connecting existing dead branches on conifers. These are all beginning procedures.

We think this is an excellent topic, and encourage you all to bring along a "raw" tree on which you have not yet begun to work, for discussion, ideas, and even getting to work right at the meeting. We will also bring some trees as well.

Fred will be leading the lecture/demo/workshop, and he asks that you please **bring your tools, especially concave cutters or pruning shears**.

See you there!

## Looking Back: October 2<sup>nd</sup>— Guest Artist Koji Hiramatsu

Our October meeting featured guest artist **Koji Hiramatsu**, visiting the United States from Japan. We hosted a paid afternoon workshop (\$50.00 per participant) from noon to 4:00 pm, went to dinner at Arthur's Tavern, and returned for our regular (free and open to the public) meeting with Koji at 6:30 pm.

The paid workshop (in which participants brought their own trees) was well-attended, with twelve active participants and a number of silent observers. Joining GSBS for the event were several members of the **Deep Cut Bonsai Society** of Middletown, NJ—Brian Cairns, Bill Guthrie, Steve Koebeke, Margo Reynolds, and Lynn Crue, along with **Bergen Bonsai** member Peter Sobel. The GSBS members included Juan Calderon, Mark Sanders, Robert Lin, Bill Muldowney, John Michalski, Rick Myers, and a long-time-no-see appearance by Doug Siedenbug! Though this was frankly a lot of people for such a workshop, Koji devoted plenty of time to each participant, and everyone left with a good workout, some individual tutoring, and a beautiful tree (or two). Some photos of the workshop appear below, and on the following pages.



(right) Koji ponders design options on a mugo pine with Rick Myers, as Bill Muldowney looks on.



(left) Peter Sobel of Bergen Bonsai (on right) offers assistance to Doug Siedenburg with winding raffia on a pitch pine, prior to bending a thick branch.

(right) Koji offers guidance on a Japanese black pine to Deep Cut member Brian Cairns. Deep Cut member Margot Reynolds works in the background.







(left) Koji offers wiring and design advice on a five needle pine to Juan Calderon.

We broke for dinner around 4:15 and returned to the classroom around 6:15, putting the workshop trees around the perimeter of the room and setting up rows of chairs for the evening demonstration.

(right) Dinner!  
Clockwise from left:  
Rick Myers, Diego Pablos, Peter Michienzi, Koji (nearly invisible, making 'peace' sign), Margot Reynolds, Bill Cairns, Lynn Crue, **special guests** Bill Valvanis and Marc Artag, Juan Calderon.





(left) Koji with Margot Reynolds, as Peter Michienzi and Brian O'Byrne share a few words.

For the evening demonstration, Koji was presented with a wild-collected **Pitch Pine**, with which to demonstrate basic design techniques—selection of the front, branch selection, major pruning, needle trimming and plucking, and initial branch wiring and placement.





The tree, as can be seen on the previous page, started out as a furry pompom, however Koji saw straight to the tree's best features and designed an elegant twin-trunk arrangement within the space of an hour and fifteen minutes.







While Koji's command of English certainly exceeds this editor's command of Japanese (actually he was quite effective in English, though hesitant to use it), he preferred to work silently, addressing the class only intermittently, resulting in what has to be one of the **quietest** presentations we have ever witnessed. Nonetheless, his mastery of technique was abundantly evident, and he held his audience's attention throughout the entire evening.

It was a great event all round, and we certainly look forward to seeing Koji again for future workshops—and to join forces with **Deep Cut Bonsai Society** and **Bergen Bonsai Society** for future outings. Such combined events are mutually beneficial, and allow us “smaller” bonsai groups access to artists and events that would be difficult to manage economically otherwise.

If you missed this one, plan to join us next time—for a relatively small fee you have one-on-one access to the talent and experience of internationally-renown artists and educators. It is a worthy investment of time and money.



## Bonsai Tip from your Editor: Make Hay While the Sun Shines (or, Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May, or whatever metaphor you prefer)

At several meetings, over the past two or three years, I have shown trees-in-progress that I have collected along a stretch of industrial railroad track in Morris County. These are Eastern Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) that have been repeatedly cut back by maintenance crews, and stunted by the gravelly substrate and exposed environment (facing due south throughout the hot months, and exposed to prevailing winds throughout the cold months).

They make for promising bonsai material, as shown below:



Eastern Redcedar collected in April 2016  
Height: 18", trunk diameter: 2"



ERC collected in April 2017  
Height 12", trunk diameter: 1"

Over the years, several club members have hinted that they'd like to know the locality, so that they might find a tree for themselves, and I haven't been overly coy about sharing this information. However, the following page provides a lesson in putting off for tomorrow (or next year) what you might have done today.





The railroad bed as it appeared in April 2018.  
All those gray-green puffballs are lovely, compact little Junipers.



The railroad bed as it appeared in September 2018.

As you can see, the Railroad has, over the summer, sprayed all the plants with an herbicide, killing most of them outright and permanently altering the others beyond recognition—not, however, beyond possible salvage (note bits of green on the nearest tree, on the far right). We will wait and see what's still green and sprouting next spring. Fingers crossed!

-- John Michalski



## Plant Care Tips for November

During November deciduous and evergreen trees can remain out until about the last week of the month. Prepare trees for their winter setting, whether it be a cold frame or whatever type of winter protection you may have (see below). Prior to setting them in their winter quarters, check for insects and spray and remove all dead leaves and branches. Thinking ahead, write down and plan what you need to do for spring and choose which trees you will work on first.

Tropical bonsai should already be indoors and you can continue to water, feed, repot and prune them all through the winter. If they are in a heated dry atmosphere, mist frequently. [DY]

## Winter Care Basics for Beginners

Whether you have one bonsai or several—even dozens—the things you need to protect them from are (a) **repeated freezing and thawing**, (b) allowing the soil, and therefore the plant, to **dry out too much**, and (c) **sustained temperatures above 40° Fahrenheit (5° Celsius)** between December and mid-March.

In a nutshell, your temperate bonsai require a sustained cold spell at or below 40° Fahrenheit (5° Celsius) for a period of about 6-8 weeks. Once the local temperatures fall consistently below this number, your trees will go into full dormancy, and exposing them to higher temperatures for more than a few hours may cause them to break dormancy and begin growing which, in January-March, is likely to result in the death of the tree, or at least a serious weakening of the tree. (Trees may be brought indoors to be worked on, but only for a few hours, and the colder the workspace, the better. Put on a coat and work on them outdoors if possible.)

Check out: [http://bonsai4me.com/Basics/Basics\\_WinterCare.html](http://bonsai4me.com/Basics/Basics_WinterCare.html) for a nice discussion of winter dormancy and winter care.

The cold is not the problem. What you want is a place where you can safely (safe from rodents, large animals, heavy snow/ice, and falling branches) stow your trees, where they are still exposed to winter temperatures, but not winter wind or sun, and will not dry out. Snow is good as an insulator, and whenever temperatures rise above freezing, the melting snow will water your bonsai for you—whenever it snows I make sure to scatter some on top of the soil of my bonsai pots, if it hasn't reached them naturally. But beware of heavy snowfall and ice, which can break branches or damage buds.

So, how to achieve this? There are several methods, depending on the size of your collection, the size of the trees, and the availability of storage options.

**Your temperate bonsai do not require sunlight during dormancy, so keep them out of the sun.** No need to worry about photosynthesis between November and early March, even for evergreen bonsai. **Garden sheds and unheated garages are fine, but watch the temperature**—enclosed spaces can get much warmer on a sunny winter day than you might expect. If they don't get much warmer than 40° you're all right.

**A small collection can be “planted”—sunk, pot and all, into the ground**, with the trunk and branches exposed, and a little mulch covering the soil. (**Trees in glazed pots should be carefully removed from their pots** and planted directly without disturbing the roots. Such pots will chip and flake if frozen.) Take care to locate your trees where rain or snow won't pour on them from a slanted roof (you want precipitation but not a constant flood or a crushing avalanche), and shady spots are best—northern exposures where the sun will not hit them at all during the winter months. If the trees are small enough, a wicker basket or Styrofoam cooler can be placed upside-down over each tree, and a brick or heavy stone placed on top to keep it from blowing over. Just be sure that the trees are receiving moisture throughout the season—snow when it's cold, and a little water when it's above freezing.

If you have a large collection and some property, **you might consider building a ‘cold frame’ or a hoop-house**. These somewhat more elaborate devices can be very effective and not unnecessarily expensive if you do the work yourself. Detailed descriptions and building instructions can be easily found online.

For the past several years, **I have placed my entire collection along the shady side of a privacy fence**, otherwise unprotected from the weather, but packed closely together to minimize wind-damage and maximize moisture retention. They get no direct sun and I see to it that they are watered in mild weather and the pots snow-covered whenever the weather provides. (I also have to occasionally remove excess snow during blizzards.)

**★★★ Spray your entire collection with deer repellent before the first freeze, and repeat the procedure on a warmish day in January.** Deer are very hungry and not very choosy during the winter months, so be vigilant. They will step on and crush some bonsai as they nibble on other bonsai. (My preferred brand is ‘Deer Stopper’—I've never had a nibble when using it.)

-- John Michalski



## Save and Bring In Your Discarded Bonsai Wire

Please remember to save and bring in those wire clippings. **It helps if you cut your wire into short (3-6 inch) lengths, as it packs more easily for transport and sale.** About once a year we bring them to a scrap metal dealer and swap them for cash. It's usually about enough to equal one or two paid memberships, so it really does help keep the GSBS afloat.

## Dues are Due

Dues are normally collected at the September meeting. If you have not yet paid up, please bring cash or check to **club treasurer Rick Myers**, 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.

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

***Novices and non-members always welcome!***

***Come and plan to get your hands dirty!***



Michalski's workshop tree, before and after.

# Calendar of Events for 2018-2019

**November 13th: Bonsai First Steps, led by club member Fred Aufschläger** – (w/brief discussion of winter care if desired).

**December: NO MEETING**

**January 8<sup>th</sup>: Holiday Party and Bonsai Auction.**

***Please begin scouring your collections for trees, pots, tools, etc. to put up for auction—the more the merrier!***

**February: NO MEETING**

**March 12<sup>th</sup>: Wood-carving Workshop.** Bring your own material and tools, if you have them. We will have some dead material on hand to practice with, as well as living.

**April: Mid-Atlantic Bonsai Societies' (MABS) Spring Festival.** Stay tuned for details.

**Also April: Guest artist Marc Noelanders,** fresh from MABS. **Date to be determined.**

**May 14<sup>th</sup>: Phoenix/Approach Graft Workshop/Repotting Workshop.** Learn how to graft live “whips” onto dramatic deadwood, to create stunning bonsai material. (Repotting Workshop may be moved to April depending on room availability.)

**June 2<sup>nd</sup> (first Sunday): Annual GSBS Bonsai Open House.** Stay tuned for details.



## GSBS Contact Information:

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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 John Michalski  
223 Mount Kemble Ave., Morristown, NJ 07960

### Great Swamp Bonsai Society Membership Registration:

#### Send to:

**GSBS c/o Rick Myers**       **New**       **Renewal**  
**80 Kenvil Avenue**  
**Succasunna, NJ 07876.**       **Individual (\$40.00)**       **Family (\$50.00)**

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_

**If Family Membership, please list other members:**

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