



Our October meeting featuring Mauro Stemberger



Before work has begun

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### **PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE:** *Ron Milostan*

So how do you put a price tag on a bonsai? What are they worth, what price makes sense for an individual tree?

Prices of Bonsai trees tend to vary widely from shop to shop and from country to country. Inexpensive trees (around \$20) are available at garden centers around the world, but availability of trees of higher quality is much more limited. With strict import restrictions the flow of these quality trees to the US and Europe is limited. Most tree species need to be bare-rooted and quarantined for months (even years) before they can be sold.

The price of a Bonsai tree depends a lot on how much time is invested in that specific tree. My experience with talking to growers and seeing the trees they are growing in their fields has given me a better understanding of why a pre-bonsai tree, still in a nursery pot, should cost so much. I am mostly focusing on trees in the \$200 to \$400 price range.

A bonsai grower in Georgia, who has been field growing bonsai for 30 years, explained to me what has to be done throughout the growing seasons. First, 200 – 400 seedling trees are planted in a prepared field. The first couple years are easy just watch them grow and of course water and look for insects. At about 3 years the grower starts selecting branches for future bonsai designs and removes unwanted branches. Also, spading around each planted tree is now done on a yearly basis to keep the roots from spreading. Each of the 400 trees needs to be managed in

this way each year. Over 10 years branches are arranged by using sticks tied to the branches to direct the growth. The result is a pre-bonsai tree with branching in good design positions and a small root ball with few large roots.

If the tree is grown in a container, as most nursery trees are, then in 10 years there are large roots growing around and around. Getting from a container grown tree to a bonsai pot with only small feeding roots takes much more time and lots of work removing the large roots without killing the tree.

Let's say it costs the grower \$10 a year to manage a tree in the field. In 10 years there should be a 1" trunk which equals \$100. 15 years and the trunk is 1.5" = \$150; 20 years and a 2" trunk + \$200.....

Think of it as hiring someone to grow your tree for you. You could buy seedlings and start your own collection. In 20 years you will have several large trunked bonsai trees. Now if you are not interested in large trunked trees you have a monetary advantage. You can grow a very nice tree in a short time, under five years. Or purchase one for under \$100.

Collected trees (Yamadori) are even pricier. You only need to collect one large tree in the wild for yourself to understand why. 1<sup>st</sup> find a place to collect one legally. Then dig for two hours, remove 35 to 50 lb root ball. Bag, water, carry home, plant in very large container and wait one year. If it is still alive, cut back to useable branches, feed and water another year. The 3<sup>rd</sup> year uncover what you collected, look and hope for good roots and repot into training pot. Let it grow one year working on growing and choosing branches. Fourth year move to bonsai pot if you have enough fine roots. Begin designing and working on ramification. So easy. After collecting one large Yamadori I am quite sure you will understand the work involved and why you need to pay a higher price for this Yamadori.

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## **October Meeting minutes and notes**

### **Chris Kehrig**

The main event of the evening was a wiring demo by Mauro Stemberger.

#### Announcements:

Chris Kehrig has volunteered to take notes at our monthly meetings and post them in our newsletter

There are 95 members in the club

#### Demo notes:

\*\*The specimen tree is a collected spruce likely from Colorado, 30 years old (relatively young for a spruce), and looks to have grown in a rock pocket since the bottom of the tree near the ground had died off.

(Mauro mentioned not to do major work on a stressed or just collected tree.)

\*\*The 'attitude' of the tree had him thinking it was a good windswept candidate.

\*\*He decided to create some deadwood to "age" the tree

\*\*Using scissors he first rids the tree of the small unusable branches and cleans out the inner growth close to the trunk.

\*\* He also removes lower branches of a spruce since in nature they tend to die off due to lack of light.

\*\*His second step after trimming is working the deadwood to create some jin. The jin should be stripped of all the bark as it would be naturally on a mature tree. He jinned the entire top of the tree.

\*\*He didn't create any Shari – not trying to make it look like a Juniper.

\*\*Next, he was ready to wire the lower / larger branches.

\*\*When wiring he showed us how orientation of the wire plays a role: Clockwise = left bend / Counter Clockwise = right bend

\*Use longer lengths of wire with each end going to a branch and trunk as the anchor.

\*Good wiring = less stress on the tree + Spruces are very flexible.

\*\*Mauro likes to use plastic electrical tape over the raffia to retain moisture.

\*\*While still wiring, he mentioned that Spruce do not require as much wiring as Pines.

\*\*Next secondary branches get smaller wire from inside to out.

\*\*He mentioned that he wires with cheap scissors in one hand to speed him up by trimming as he goes.

\*\*Mauro does most of the wiring first and then styles the tree.

\*\*Spruces will fight the wiring due to apex dominance.

\*\*The first part of the branch towards the trunk will have the most tension.

\*\*After working on a Spruce, it's a good idea to water the foliage to wash the oils from your fingers off.

\*\*The wire will stay on the tree until June/July timeframe with minor bite-in acceptable on a conifer.

\*\*Mauro has a background in architecture which he feels helps him to visualize the weight of empty vs full spaces of the tree.

\*\*\*Mauro mentioned two more things that he felt were important for the audience to know. He told our members that it's best to work on native species and not force a tree to survive.

\*\*\*And he reminded onlookers that they should always be working for "tomorrow's" bonsai.



Almost done



Finished



Deep in the design process

## UP FOR DEBATE:

By Aaron J. Binns

### Initial Results

Last year I wrote an article that was a bit off topic. (See last November's Up for Debate article "Leaves of Gold") The article was a discussion of what is the best way to handle a large amount of fallen leaves. I suppose that since trees grow leaves and bonsai enthusiasts are interested in trees it was really an article that aimed to explore the very depths of bonsai. (Nah, I was just running out of stuff to write about and had just spent the weekend raking leaves. Ya gotta look for inspiration wherever you can find it.)

Last year I decided to try something a bit different. I chose to shred all of the leaves that I had raked up and put them in a compost bin. I admitted that what I was doing was an experiment and promised to report in one year later. So, here are my preliminary results. Below you will find two photos. The first photo was taken last year right after I created the compost bins. The second photo was taken this year at about the same time. First you will note that I still have leaves, not compost. Right after I wrote the article last year Bill Struhar sent me an E-mail in which he told me that had I added an equal part garden soil then I would have been much more successful at getting to a final compost state. He suggested that just piling the leaves up would take a long time to generate any real results. He had additional tips, pointers, and references so he seems to be a fantastic source of info for all of us would be composters.

The pile did not change much for most of the summer. Every time I would walk by I would think to myself, "Bill was right those leaves aren't doing anything." I also failed to turn the pile until late summer and only added water once. Those are major issues if I really wanted to encourage fast composting. However, by late summer I started seeing noticeable changes, specifically a reduction in overall volume. You can see from this year's photo that I can now combine the two piles. (Full disclosure, I did take a shovel full and add it to a compost pile for other vegetative waste. However, the vast majority of volume reduction is due to the natural process of rot.) It is also important to point out that when I did turn the pile the center was becoming a nice rich black "something like compost". While I am very convinced that I am not achieving optimal compost times I'm ok with that. First,

for whatever reason all of the leaves in the surrounding forest decided to cut me a break and not all fall in my yard. This means I only need one compost bin for leaves this year. Second, I'm kind of lazy. If I can just shred and pile leaves and that results in decent compost in two or even three seasons I will generally choose this method as opposed to one that requires more work and results in good compost in a season. I will combine the piles and look to turn them and keep them wet throughout next year's growing season. I will report back one more time. If the experiment finally ends well then I may choose not to be lazy to speed the process up.

Just in case anyone is wondering why this year's picture looks like it was taken at night with my car's head lights on bright illuminating the bins, it is because this year's picture was taken at night with my car's head lights on bright illuminating the bins... As it turns out I haven't gotten home in time to take the picture all week long and even bonsai club columnists have deadlines to submit their work.



Figure 1: The shredded leaf pile as it looked last year.



Figure 2: The shredded leaf pile as it looks now.

## FOR SALE OR WANTED:

**Ads in the Newsletter:** All members can offer for sale any bonsai and bonsai related materials in the newsletter or at the monthly meeting with no sales fee. AABS Society Members' ads are free to publish in the Newsletter. Deadline for submissions to the Newsletter is the 5th of the month.

**Prizes for the Raffle:** We are soliciting donations suitable for prizes to be raffled during each general meeting, and, for the Annual Bonsai Show Raffle. If you have a tree, bonsai pot, tool or anything else bonsai related, that you do not use anymore and is still in good condition, consider donating it to the Society. Please see Bill Struhar at any meeting, email Bill at [wm.struhar@mail.com](mailto:wm.struhar@mail.com) or call (586) 468-7169.

**Club Logo Now Available:** we will embroider the club logo on your garment for \$12 (plus modest additional charge for lined garments).

The logo comes in two forms; light green tree on dark green background, or dark green tree on light green background, with a border on both combinations and AABS lettering and Chinese characters with appropriate contrasting color depending upon the garment color.

Bring your garment in a clear plastic bag to a meeting, select your colors, pre-pay Bill Struhar, and your garment will be ready one or two meetings later. (The vendor may require a minimum of five garments per order)

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## AABS AD-HOC COMMITTEES

The AABS President is an ex-officio member of all committees with the exception of the Nomination Committee.

**Fund Raising:** William Struhar

**Web Administration:** Bob Bauer

**Nomination Committee:**

**Show Committee:** Ron Milostan and Paul Kulesa

**Annual Auction:** Paul Kulesa

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Membership dues are \$25. Please pay by check, written to Ann Arbor Bonsai Society or bring your credit card to the meeting and pay! AABS now accepts credit cards for membership fees and other AABS activities. Please talk with the Treasurer at the next meeting.

Tamara Milostan – Treasurer AABS  
4228 Highcrest Dr.  
Brighton, Michigan 48116

[AABonsaiSociety@gmail.com](mailto:AABonsaiSociety@gmail.com)

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The Ann Arbor Bonsai Society is affiliated with the American Bonsai Society: <http://absbonsai.org> and the Mid-American Bonsai Alliance: <http://mababonsai.org>

## Support Local Bonsai Vendors

Hours: Wed., Thurs. & Fri.; 11:00 am to 6:00 pm Sat., 1:30pm to 5:00pm  
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