



## Bonsai Enthusiast Says: Think Small

**EDITORS NOTE:** In Jack Wikle's 30 Year History, he writes that: "...a number of other Michigan bonsai societies sprang up--peaking in the late 70's or early 80's at eight or nine groups in the southeastern part of the state plus several others outside this area. Many of these clubs were the direct result of the efforts of super-organizer and bonsai activist Ray Boardman of Detroit. Highly energetic, Ray also worked to promote bonsai interest at the national level as an officer of the Bonsai Clubs International organization. Today only our Ann Arbor Bonsai Society and the Four Seasons Bonsai Club survive." The follow story is an effort by Ray Boardman to keep bonsai clubs in the public eye.

**From the Ann Arbor News, June 13, 1980**

"Don't go out and buy an expensive bonsai, if you've never grown one before," warns Detroit's Ray Boardman. "In a few months it will probably be dead." He has been enjoying the challenge of these miniature trees and shrubs in containers as a hobby now for about 10 years. Boardman feels it's much smarter to join a local bonsai group and learn how to create your own from scratch. "It's cheaper and you'll learn how to care for it at the same time."



NEWS PHOTOS/STEVE THORPE

Ray Boardman removes brown needles from his Robusta green juniper bonsai.

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By JUNE HICKS  
News Staff Writer

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The art of growing such miniature trees and shrubs has been brought to its high level by the Japanese. For some time Americans have been jumping on the bandwagon and trying their hand at it. Boardman now has all his bonsai back out of the cold frame where they spent the winter and keeps busy every day grooming them one by one. He hopes to have some in the big show that will take place in East Lansing when the American Bonsai Society holds its 13th annual symposium in Kellogg Center Aug.27-31, 1980 "But one never knows," he explains. "Only the best specimens from all over Michigan will be chosen by show chairman Dean Atkinson and I'll have to abide by his decision." Back to work he goes on a tiny workbench he has set up in front of his garage. Working with evergreens, he gradually removes any needles that have turned brown during the winter. Next he will rewire many of the branches to return them to their previous shape. With deciduous trees (trees that lose their leaves during the winter months) the procedure is a little different. Boardman explains what he's doing to a lovely crabapple that has just finished blooming and is now bearing tiny fruits. Some of the leaves at the outer edges have grown too large. Every week or so he nips a few of the larger ones off. New smaller leaves come back to match the size of those in the center. Then Boardman proceeds to another branch.

That's basically the idea behind bonsai: growing trees and shrubs in containers while miniaturizing the trunk, branches needles or leaves and making the whole tree looked aged.

During the course of the summer Boardman also checks into the condition of the roots in the tiny containers. He will remove the pots and take a close look at soil balls to see if roots are winding around the outside of the root ball. If so he will then remove some of the root but also prune the top growth to compensate for the root loss.

What other advice would Boardman give to someone who wants to start growing bonsai? First purchase a tiny booklet put out by the U.S. Department of Agriculture entitled, "Growing Bonsai." This is available for 40 cents at any government bookstore. Also buy and read the latest Sunset book on bonsai. Then join a local bonsai group and learn how to create your own. Most bonsai clubs have regular workshops. This way you, too can learn how to take interesting nursery specimens and by root and top pruning fit them into tiny Japanese bonsai pots.

Knowing what soil mixture to grow these beauties in is extremely important, points out Boardman, for roots must have good drainage. Again this is something that can be learned at workshops. New enthusiasts will have to decide whether they want to grow outdoor bonsai, indoor bonsai or both. Hardy outdoor evergreens, etc., trained to grow in pots really can't be grown indoors. They can sometimes be moved in for a brief time for use as a center piece on the dining room table but then must be moved back outdoors again right afterward, and stored in cold frames for the winter. Boardman waters his outdoor collection about once a day during the summer months. Because pots are extremely shallow, the soil dries out rapidly. But in the United States there is now a wonderful collection of tropical indoor bonsai becoming available. These can be kept indoors all year just like other house plants.

*If you have missed any of the previous issues of this publication they are located in the [History section of the AABS website](#).*

**NEXT WEEK: *Jack Wikle, Cultivating Trees and Artists for Over 50 Years (Part 1)***

#### **HOW YOU CAN HELP WITH OUR 50TH CELEBRATION**

1. To help us in this celebration effort, all Ann Arbor Bonsai Society members present and past, and all others wishing to contribute are invited to submit personal statements (60 words or less) to be published in our Yearbook. Each text contributor is also strongly encouraged to submit a favorite photo (with caption) of a bonsai tree or a bonsai activity to accompany his or her personal statement. (We can scan old prints or digitize color slides for anyone needing this help with old pictures.) [Upload Form is here](#)
2. Let's all Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the AABS in style with shirts that have our commemorative logo printed on the front. Shirts will be available for purchase for \$20 each at our monthly meetings, at the Annual Club Show August 29-30, and at The Flower Market in Dundee, Michigan.



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