

**Next Club Meeting - June 24th, 2020**  
**Blooming Azaleas – Azaleas in Springtime**

The meeting will be presented via Zoom, and will begin at 6:30 pm. The program will begin at 7:00 pm. Zoom information will be emailed to members prior to the meeting.



Join Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretums Collection Specialist, Carmen Leskoviansky, for a tutorial on Satsuki azalea. Satsuki azalea bonsai are prized for their spring flowers and year-round beauty. Carmen will cover spring care including watering, fertilizing, flower removal, pruning, and wiring. Come with your questions!

Carmen earned her Bachelor of Science in Horticulture from Michigan State University. She began working at Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum in 2009. She is a Collections and Natural Areas Specialist, and oversees the care of the bonsai collection.

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**PRESIDENT’S PERSPECTIVE:**  
**Ron Milostan**

Recently AABS hosted a Zoom Meeting with Andrew Robson. His presentation was about Deciduous trees and how to best handle them as Bonsai subjects. He referred to them as being single flush or multi-flush. So, we chose to look up this subject. Peggy Kubitz spent 2 hours searching the internet and I did the same. Well, we found very little material about single vs. multi flush except in relation to pines.

I posted my question about single and multi-flush in deciduous trees to Jack Wilke and below is his response...

“My perception is that to apply the pine growth understanding of single and multi-flush shoot production to deciduous trees is not a particularly good fit. Like taking the suit tailored to be perfectly fitting for one person and trying it on a person different in shape and size. Well, it sort of works but not really. So that may be why you haven’t been hearing more about single and multi-flush deciduous trees from the bonsai world. Actually, there are very few truly single flush deciduous trees; beech, green ash and “some maples” are recognized

examples (according to the book I've just been studying to confirm my impression), the rest, to one degree or another, will produce secondary shoots (new breaks that elongate into new shoots) if the first flush shoots are shortened or removed completely before day lengths start getting shorter. If you don't have a beech or a sugar maple, don't sweat it; experiment on a healthy tree and if you don't get more shoot growth this year, you will next year (all you have lost is a year of opportunity)."

Jack Wikle

My own experience has been with Hackberry and Linden trees. My Hackberry would grow lots of leaves early but when defoliated was very slow to recover with loss of small green growth the following winter. This was also the same with my Linden trees. In the past, with both, I cut every leaf in half. This gave me good results and developed my ramification. Not as fast or successfully as defoliation of other trees but good results overall.

Jay Sinclair mentioned to me a method of removing all the buds of the linden tree in the spring before they open. Wow, now I have a whole other approach to try out. I would like to hear more about these single and multi-flush deciduous trees. Who are they and what other methods have been tried? My point is that there is so much to learn and experiment with in the Bonsai field of study. I have been at this for a long time, it seems, but there is always something new to try and learn and get excited about that is way beyond just growing a tree in a pot. And that's my thoughts for June.

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## May Meeting Review

Chris Kehrig

First AABS meeting of the year on Zoom with guest Andrew Robson presenting on deciduous trees.

Andrew mentioned how many masters are into conifers and not as many into deciduous. The majority of masters of deciduous have jobs other than bonsai.

He started off with the famous wave picture by Hokusai and how it is an artistic interpretation of waves. Bonsai are similar in that they are artistic views of trees. Andrew then shown two very different examples of trident maples with the first appearing as in nature and second that looks like a bonsai interpretation. He called this natural vs abstract with the natural having a thinner straighter trunk and random branches and the abstract has a fat twisted trunk with padded branches. The artistic is more likely the

conifer artist approach. Lots of trunk taper in the artistic and little in the natural.

Andrew prefers a more natural look but does enjoy the variety. Some of the artistic can look computer generated and far from natural. Field grown trees can have fatter trunks, but majority of the show winners have always been grown in some type of pot.

Species and Genetics were discussed next. There is a need for native experimentation and not to forget the usual suspects. The Japanese do not just use native plants IE Korean Hornbeam, Trident Maple, Ume, Chinese Elm, and Gingko. The genetic portion is the leaf shape, size, stem length, internode length, direction of buds, color change, and bark types.

Single vs multi flush are treated differently. Trees such as Trident Maple, Amur Maple, and Chinese Elm are multi flush and can be heavily fertilized in spring and then completely defoliated. Single flush trees such as Beech and Japanese Maples can't be defoliated.

Leaf patterns can be varied with opposite and alternating patterns. Maples are an example of opposite and Beech, Zelkova, and Hornbeam of alternating pattern.

Trees vs Shrubs where shrubs have different energy dominance and approach to maintenance. They have different natural style where they are more horizontal and have bottom dominance where new suckers are cut and the top wants to die off.

Wiring is very different with deciduous vs conifer. The branches on a deciduous are quick to set and the wire can only be on for 2-6 weeks. Clip and grow approach lends to a more natural appearance. The best time to wire is in the spring as opposed to winter. Since deciduous have thin skin, wiring in the winter is not advised. Wire has to support the bend.

Growing deciduous trees in Japan is often done in boxes where the trees spend 90-95% of their time. They only go into a pot for shows. A box provides a better gas exchange, are cheap, and have a better wet to dry exchange. They are generally 20% larger than the pot and help with nebari when they are shallower. Shrubby plants need deeper boxes. 50/50 Akadama – Pumice mix is recommended and Andrew mentioned that deciduous do not like lava in his experience. Smaller particles = finer roots.

Early summer is busy with leaf cutting, defoliation, fertilizing, watering, air layering, wiring, wound healing, heavy and light pruning. This is the best time for cutting.

Deciduous trees are not field collected as opposed to conifers. They take time and patience in a pot for perfection. Andrew compared a deciduous tree to a 401K in that it takes time to mature.

He mentioned that he uses liquid fertilizer of fish emulsion twice a week during the heavy growing period. Trident maples are apically dominant meaning the crown has the majority of the energy.

Deciduous trees can't have a lot of deadwood like a conifer. Wrapping up the presentation, it was apparent that Andrew prefers the natural look for deciduous trees and had shown some of his own trees with this appearance.

Andrew Robson is available for questions at [rakuyobonsai.com](http://rakuyobonsai.com)

He also recommends the book *Bonsai Heresy* by his mentor Michael Hagedorn

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## ***Up for Debate*** ***Aaron J. Binns***

It's Just Dirt

I have been successfully growing bonsai for more than a decade and I still don't have the right soil mix. Up until now I have never tried the golden standard bonsai soils, akadama and kanuma. Why... because I'm stubborn and cheap. Those soils cost more than I really wanted to spend but the real reason is that I just can't believe that there is not an equivalent soil constituent that I can find locally. Sigh.

If you are an avid reader (thanks to all 3 of you) then you know my go to mix is 1 part lava, 1 part haydite, and 1 part grit. Grit really does nothing but add weight and drainage. Lava is great and I will continue using it. Haydite is just as hard to get as akadama and kanuma. So, this year I'm going to experiment with a tried and true combination, lava, akadama, and pumice.

Why Aaron, why are you doing this? Because I'm caving to pressure and because I want to know if there is

something better out there. I have jumped head first into the world of azalea bonsai. I did something that normally I don't do. I bought a nice tree. Two of them. If you have ever tried growing these flowering beauties you will know that almost all serious growers use pure unadulterated kanuma soil. I try not to experiment too much when learning to grow another variety. So, I ordered some kanuma and then it was only two additional clicks to purchase akadama and pumice.

In the next article I will publish some soil characteristics; moisture retention and pH. I will also provide the occasional observation throughout this growing season and maybe even into the next. When I write the next articles on this topic I will try to remember to name the articles; It's Just Dirt Part2, Part 3, etc. Also, I would like to inspire some club participation in this little adventure I'm starting. If there are questions you have about any of the soils, I have mentioned in this article then let's talk at the next meeting. If there is something I can do to experiment and answer the questions I will try. Also, if you have observations that may help then any advice you give me could just end up in the next article, wink, wink.

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## ***Enjoying This Hobby while Being "Safe at Home" by Gene Deci***

(This article first appeared in Sakura Bonsai Society Gnarly News and is reprinted with permission)

If, as you read this article, it seems motivated by random browsing on the web, what else are you going to do when you are asked to just stay home for months at a time. But if you will stick with it, there is a point that I think is worthwhile.

So, I was on the web the other day and I came across this picture showing part of the grandest Japanese garden of all, the Imperial Garden in Tokyo.



It seems the goal is to make the trees look like bonsai no matter how big they are. It occurred to me that the highly manicured look of the modern Japanese garden may be the reflection of an inner desire to control nature. Control that assures tranquility and serenity. No surprises while I meditate please. That fits the widespread concept of a garden in much of the world. A harmony of plantings with little left to chance. Domestication if you will. But few treat the trees like the Japanese do, either full-sized or miniature.

There is a different philosophy guiding the development of bonsai gaining favor these days. It is called the "naturalistic" style. Walter Pall of Germany is the originator, or at least the leading advocate, of this concept in bonsai. He famously said, "A bonsai should look like it was never touched by human hands." Some time ago I came across a couple of pictures on the web which illustrate wonderfully the difference between the naturalistic approach and the highly refined approach. So, I got back on the browser and I was able to find them again although I don't think these are the ones I saw originally. They had no attribution but I think they came originally from the Toronto Club. Both pictures are of an outstanding Ezo spruce bonsai from Japan. The picture to the left below was taken decades ago and represents the naturalistic style which was more common at the time. The picture to the right is recent and shows the highly refined style.



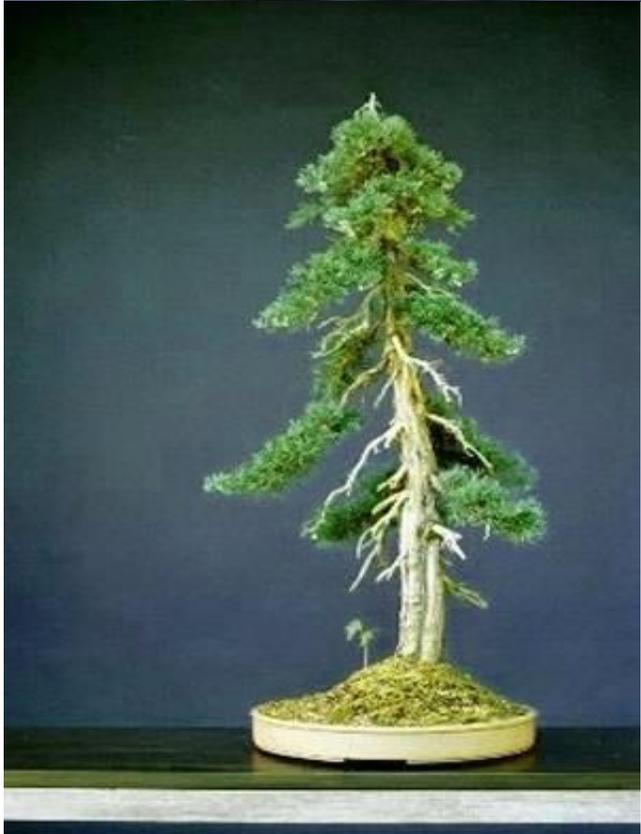
The adherents of the highly refined style point out the time, the effort, and the skill that is required to produce a high quality, highly refined bonsai. You can't look at such a tree without being fully aware and appreciative of that. Most professional bonsai masters in this country believe the refined look is the pinnacle of bonsai expression. Folks who prefer this style tend to see the naturalistic style as lazy at best. They accuse the naturalistic folks of taking any old stick in a pot, calling it naturalistic and saying, however it looks, that is what was intended. Those condemnations are often deserved.

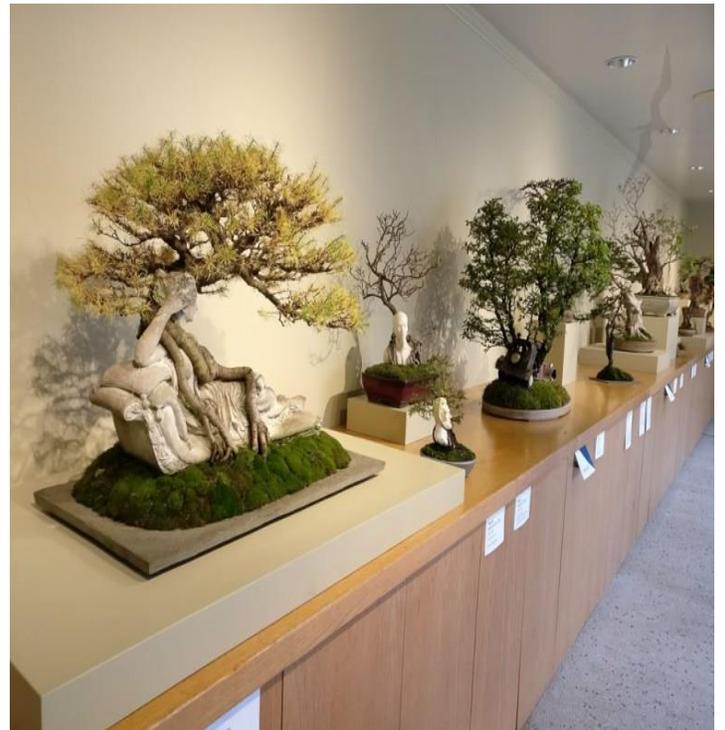
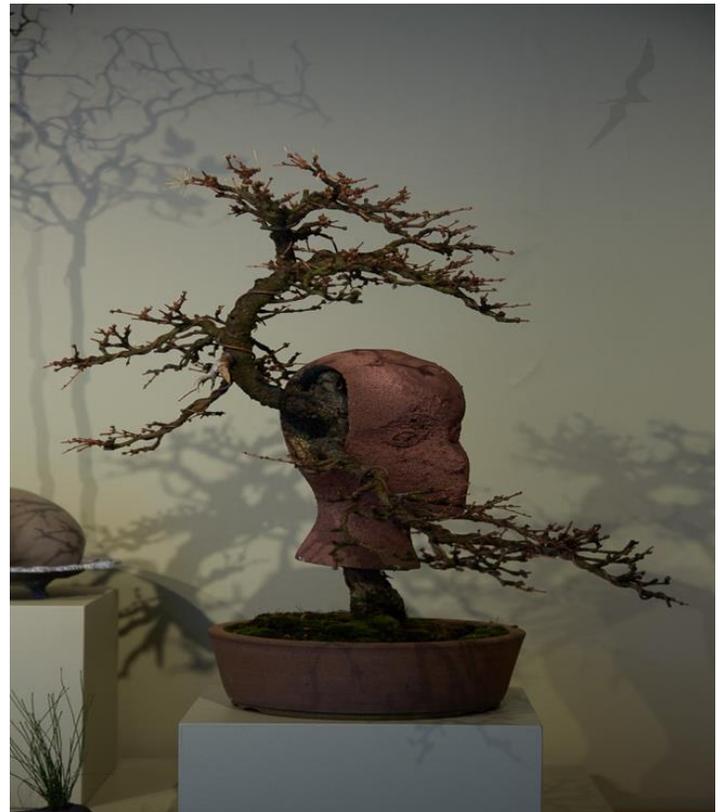
On the other hand, those of the naturalistic persuasion say that the purpose of a bonsai is to capture nature in miniature, not to improve on nature. They call the highly refined style cartoon trees or helmet trees which border on topiary. The measure of a bonsai, they say, is not the work that went into it but the feelings it invokes in the viewer.

One of my early bonsai idols was Nick Lenz. He created some spectacular trees which I believe would be called naturalistic bonsai today. He is also famous for some bizarre creations. The naturalistic style may be more amenable to artistic creativity but that may, in fact, make it harder to do well. It also opens the door to weirdness. This past fall the National Bonsai Museum had a special exhibit honoring Nick. It was well deserved recognition of his influence on American bonsai. Due to circumstances beyond my control I missed that exhibit and I have never seen a Lenz tree in person, but below are pictures of a few of his creations. The fifth picture is a closeup of the face imbedded in the tree in the third picture just above it. You have to look closely to see it in that third picture but it



is shocking when you first notice it there. The picture below that is another example of the kind of thing that he did occasionally. The last picture was from the Lenz Retrospective last fall.





This brings me to the point of this article and it is not to argue for any particular style. As much fun as it can be to examine the nuances of our hobby, when people are first getting started in bonsai, they encounter fundamental issues that the more experienced people often overlook. Some time ago I was reading a thread on the web about

the educational styles of different bonsai masters. One post in particular got my attention. That post said, rather bitterly, that the bonsai community is a fraud. "They say they will show you how to do it but they never tell you it will take years." The result, he said, was a wasted year of his life along with considerable wasted money and all he had to show for it was a dead tree that never was a bonsai anyway. That happens too often.

I have pictured trees in this article that make my heart sing. I'm sure such pictures lift the spirits and the expectations of those just starting out in bonsai too. When I first started doing bonsai, I knew in my heart that there was more to it than the finished product. I first heard that articulated by Dean Bull soon after I joined Sakura. The core of what he said was this; "I do bonsai because I enjoy the process. If a decent tree is the result so much the better, but there is little sense trying to create a bonsai if you don't enjoy the process." Blunt but probably necessary to repeat every so often. If you relish the process the time will fly by. Eventually excellent trees of some style or other will result. If you don't like the process, little good will come of your efforts.

It isn't unusual, especially this time of year, for me to go to bed at night eager for the start of a new day so I can work on my trees more. A necessary part of that work is envisioning a tree's future. The intended style is an essential component of that process but, paradoxically, it is irrelevant in the larger scheme of things. Simply put, it is beneficial to my well-being to be excited to get up in the morning. Not everyone feels that way about bonsai. If you dread tomorrow because your trees need so much work, it would be detrimental to your well-being to continue. Only you can make that decision.

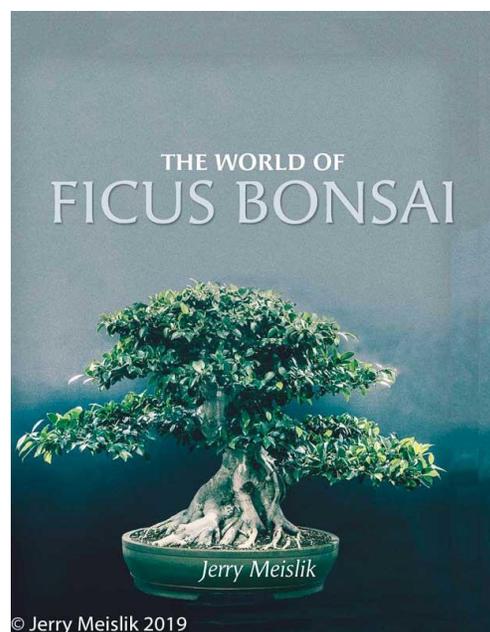
Even if you don't like working on trees, that doesn't mean you can't enjoy bonsai. You can still go to bonsai shows. The thrill of that seldom fades. The woman who is in charge of the Leelanau Senior Expo said to me once, "I enjoy it so when you join us." You can knowledgeably discuss one style or another. There are people who love to go collecting, and are good at it, but don't like working on trees. Those people can be the most appreciated people in a club! You can purchase a tree that someone else created, although that can be risky. It is not uncommon to start that way and become more "hands on" as time passes. Years ago I knew a widow who lived on a farm down-state. She didn't do bonsai herself but let the local club collect from her place. They made her an honorary member of the club and she would come to meetings to see what people had done with trees they

had collected with her blessing. There are many other ways to enjoy bonsai. You could google 'bonsai' just to see where it takes you. What else are you going to do if you are stuck at home for such a long time.

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Club members may be interested in this new book now available by Jerry Meislik. Here is Jerry's intro.

At long last it is here. **The World of Ficus Bonsai by Jerry Meislik**. I have been learning more and more about Ficus and how incredible they are for bonsai and for growing in your home. I have expanded and added new material to create an enlarged and updated book on using Ficus for bonsai. The book is 324 pages full of great information and full of pictures. It is available as a e-book or as a soft or hard cover book.



You can purchase it on:

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

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



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