

## October 27th Meeting –with Jim Doyle

Our October Meeting will take place on Wednesday evening, October 27th beginning at 6:30 pm on Zoom with a half-hour informal chat. The formal meeting will begin at 7:00 pm with Jim Doyle presenting “Literati Bonsai”. The presentation will take place over Zoom and has five parts:

7-minute intro video of Nature’s Way Nursery  
Interactive discussion  
Follow up slide presentation  
Kei do or art of display using Literati as the focal subject  
Question and answer on Literati and horticulture

About the presenter:

In 1973, with a B.S. degree in horticulture from Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture now Delaware Valley University, Jim started [Nature’s Way Nursery](#) and developed an early interest in Asian culture and plants. By 1980, through the influence of Chase Rosade, bonsai passed from being a hobby to a business/lifestyle. Jim attends many symposia, teaches year-round to both adults and children at his studio, and travels extensively.

After a brief visit to Japan, Jim started a quest for new information. He was involved in founding the Susquehanna Bonsai Club, boasting a membership of over 100, and co-chaired the 1992 ABS Convention in Hershey and many more that followed. He has written articles for national publications and consulted regionally in Japanese garden design.

Today, along with his teaching, Jim continues to import bonsai, pots, tools, and related garden items. Other interests include conifers, Japanese maples, writing haiku, fishing, bike riding, nature walks, and spending time with his dog, Adia, and children, Nell and Max (not to be confused with his other hobbies). Jim’s favorite tree is, of course, the one he is working on.

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## President’s Perspective

### Mark Hanner

Greetings- I would like to start by thanking the board for their time and efforts this past year, helping our bonsai society continue to provide our members with quality programs and events, including a return to a live annual show, and auction, under extenuating circumstances, to put it mildly. We have a great group of volunteers working behind the scenes to take care of the myriad of tasks involved to help a successful society function, and grow.

At our October meeting, we will be electing a new board (the slate of officers is listed below), which will mostly be current members re-upping for another term, and I thank them all profusely! Bob Bauer is stepping down from the Communications Secretary spot after a six-year stretch, so we need someone to step up to fill this spot. Bob, our thanks from the entire society for handling the posting of meeting and events notices in the emails we all receive on current activities! The position involves a moderate comfort or skill with a computer, to put out the monthly meeting notice to our email list, and to the group’s Facebook page. Please contact me ([mhanner@aol.com](mailto:mhanner@aol.com)) if you would like to help the club with this activity.

In addition, though Laura Andre is willing to continue in her roles as Membership Chair and Webmaster/Zoom Coordinator for the immediate future, she anticipates this

will end by or before June of next year, with the completion of her studies, and pursuit of a new career. So we will be in need of a couple of people to fill these positions in about six months or so. It would be helpful to have our new volunteers on board ahead of time, for a smooth transition.

So we are wrapping up our year with the pleasure that comes from maintaining our current friendships, the making of new friends, and the ongoing learning and joy involved with this most interesting of garden activities. My thanks to you all for being my friends in bonsai.

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## ***AABS Election Slate***

President. Mark Hanner  
Vice-president. Jay Sinclair  
Recording Secretary. Chris Kehrig  
Communications Secretary. TBD  
Newsletter Editor. Don Wenzel  
Treasurer. Katie Norder  
Show Chair. Kurt Smith  
Membership Chair. Laura Andre  
Director(s) at large. Bob Bauer

Please note- there is one director (Dana Hermann) currently serving a two-year term, and not up,for election this year. In addition, Laura Andre is currently filling the role of Webmaster/Zoom Coordinator, normally a director's position.

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## ***September Meeting Notes*** ***Christopher Cosenza***

We did not have someone take notes during the September meeting, however Chris generously provided us with some of the notes he uses in giving his talk. They are presented here.

Root Stand Carving

TOOLS

Angle grinder

Just like carving on trees, the more material you need to eliminate, the larger the tool. The angle grinder can

remove a ton of wood, but you must be very careful. The chainsaw disc is like \$20 and it is, without a doubt, the most dangerous thing I've ever used, but it's the most effective. There are other dangerous discs but I'm comfortable with this one.

The Die grinder

Again, safety must be practiced here as this is another dangerous machine. These tools like to run on you, meaning they will grab the wood and run across the piece in the direction they are spinning. You mostly need to move the tool right to left, which is opposite its spinning direction, otherwise the bit or burr will grab on and pull you with it. There are times when you want the tool to do this, but you need to be experienced. I prefer stainless steel burrs, like you see here, as they tend to stay sharper longer and not gum up or burn. Again, if you've never used one of these awesome pieces of machinery, you'll need to practice on a scrap piece of wood.

Dremel (Fordham, etc.) with flex shaft.

This is the tool I use the most for refinement, especially on smaller stands. The flex shaft is not required, but it takes a lot of time to make these and holding a full Dremel like a pen will get heavy and cause your hand to cramp or tire. This tool is just a smaller version of the die grinder but is essential to making these. All of the caveats I mentioned for the die grinder apply here as well. The sandpaper accessories are pretty important, depending on the look you're going for. It's an alternative to hand sanding and is a lot quicker, you just have to be careful of removing too much material and leaving marks such as gouges and burns.

Saws

I put these on here because you may find yourself in a situation where you will need them. I've used all three of these at some point for some task.

Drill (electric for bigger jobs and/or hammer drill)

If you have a bigger piece of material, you're going to want to use an electric drill for some of the methods I'll describe. A cordless drill will die on you pretty quickly with this amount of drilling. Auger bits, like the one here second from the left, are great because of the screw point on the tip, which provides accuracy and reduces stress on the wood and tools. Also, they help with starting a hole when dealing with curved or rounded surfaces. But they

have their drawbacks, too, such as grabbing and getting stuck in the wood. Paddle bits, on the left there, have the same type of piercing point but they tend to dull quickly and can be a violent experience. Then there are the standard wood drill bits and Forstner bits. The Forstner bits are good because they also have the point in the middle but they have a channel in them to allow the discarded material to escape.

Electric sander, sandpaper, aforementioned cones, discs, etc.

Sanders are important for obvious reasons but also sheets for hand sanding are needed, too. Be sure to start with smaller grit numbers (80 grit) to remove larger scratches, etc., and move up gradually (120, 220, etc.)

#### HAND-HELD ROUTER

This is the least used tool in my arsenal but I wanted to list it because it could prove useful. With the proper bit, you can remove lots of material if need be, and if you're willing, you can make a rig to level stumps or logs, which is one of the hardest parts to achieve. But I do NOT recommend this for beginners and even intermediate power tool users. If you want more info on making this rig I can give it at another time or chat about it at the end.

Carving knives, chisels, hammer, clamps

I mostly use these items for removing bark but they can be used to shape the stand and roots if you have the patience and experience. The clamps are essential when the material becomes lighter or if it's just a small piece. And that leads into the next topic ...

#### Safety

Be sure to get tough gloves, the kind that can withstand a blade cutting it or bit grazing it. I often use a turntable but you can use a stable bench or regular table. However, a turntable makes it easier to see all around the stand as you work it.

Safety tips (read them) then click (tell Jennifer-Walter story) then my basketball shorts story, then chop saw story

#### WHERE TO GET MATERIAL

Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace, Wood stores (online too), tree removal services, neighbors, sawyers, saw mills.

I tend to look on Craigslist under the free section to find people who just cut down trees. I recently got Norfolk Pine, Florida Pine, Cedar and Oak from there. I also have a WoodCraft store near me and it has a scrap bin for exotic wood that's like \$2-\$5 a pound, but they are almost always really small pieces. A popular wood for carving is called bass. It's hard enough to be strong but soft enough to make carving manageable.

My neighbor lets me take from his firewood pile. The problem with using raw natural wood instead of a piece bought from a store is the drying-out process. I've done some research and most woodworkers recommend letting wood dry for months even years or having it kiln dried to avoid cracking. Until I want to start selling them, I'll just dry the wood myself.

#### METHODS

Sean Smith

There are many ways to make a stand. In 2016, the famous Sean Smith came to Florida and taught a root stand workshop. He pre-made many small pieces for his students by drilling random holes into rectangle blanks and making zig-zag cuts. Adam Lavigne wrote about this workshop on his blog, which is where I got that photo of the predrilled blanks, and this is where one of my friends friend Phil Krieg learned to make his root stand. I used this method a couple of times and here is my first attempt. It makes it easier drilling the initial holes because the wood is square for stability and the cuts give the piece built-in movement. But, I did it on a small piece of material because I don't own a band saw and cutting these precise angles isn't easy with any type of handsaw.

#### Drawing

The Sean Smith method, however, doesn't work well when you have rounded natural material. So, another way to get the movement in your stand is to draw the desired shape and lines on your piece, and then remove the unwanted material.

#### Shaping and drilling

For smaller pieces, you can effectively shape the stand with a burr using a die grinder or dremel.

For larger pieces, I use my angle grinder and the chainsaw disc or other types of discs. Here is a piece of Norfolk Pine I got from a guy who cut down the tree at his house and was giving it away. Once I had the movement and shape sculpted, I drilled my holes. Since the piece was rounded, this was when I use the bits that have the screw tips so they wouldn't slip off the spot. You'll want to drill all the way through the piece. If you don't, you'll leave too much material inside the middle. Be mindful of where each hole enters and where it will exit. Sometimes your aim will be off and you'll overlap holes. That's OK, because later you'll be looking for different sizes and shapes as you massage these spots.

You can choose to leave lots of smaller holes, like with the last stand I showed, or you can connect these holes to make circuitous roots that snake around throughout the piece. If you keep the single holes, you can then work on the inside by penetrating the walls of these holes with round burrs or regular drill bits.

### Drilling

The easiest style was the first style I attempted. Here is a large oak stump I acquired from a tree cutting company for free. So I removed the bark. And this drilling method leaves the perimeter of the wood or its outer walls intact for the most part and you merely drill random holes or you can draw the desired design you want on the outside and carve it appropriately. Then you turn it upside down and remove the underneath material.. For this I used two methods. I drilled holes vertically into the waste material, careful not to penetrate through the top (the blue tape served as a marker to tell me when to stop drilling), and then I would cut out the excess with whatever power tool would work, most likely the chainsaw disc. I carved or grooved a large X or cross in the bottom and then removed one quarter at a time with groove cuts or scooping. Once you have the excess material removed, you need to carve the "roots" by chipping away at the sharp edges and making the remaining material look rounded and natural. I achieved this by opening up the holes into shapes that veered from perfect circles and gave the roots a path from top to bottom. Knowing what I do now, I would have made these roots much more rounded and uniform in size.

### Sculpting

This final method was the hardest. You know how some sculptors say the final version is already inside the marble or and they just have to let it out? That's basically what

this is. I tried to imagine what this stump had inside of it and designed a method to remove the material. For those of you who have seen 3D printing, this is sort of like that, but in reverse. I removed material basically from the bottom up, stopping at certain depths to redraw my design.

### TIPS

Avoid oak. In the beginning it may be the only live material that is readily available to you, but it is an extremely hard and dense wood and it will dull your tools and be very labor intensive. Woods such as pine, cedar, maple, juniper and even a podocarpus will be easier to manage than oak.

Also, when you have a tight fit where the hole isn't much larger than the head of the burr or bit, be careful. If you lose focus for just a second and let the tool kinda stay loose in your hand and not firmly pressed to one side of the hole, it can grab on and circulate inside violently. It will scare the hell out of you and you could get injured or ruin the piece.

Watch out for burn marks when using power tools. If you leave the burr on one spot too long, if you leave a disc on a spot too long, if the shaft of the tool is spinning and touching the material too long, it will leave burn marks. They can be removed, but if you burn a root that is already too thin, then you'll have to hand sand it and that's a pain.

Christopher Cosenza

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## **Revisiting Wikle Bonsai Writing By Jack Wikle**

### **About Watering**

(A short article I wrote on this subject appeared in the April, 1986 issue of Great Lakes Bonsai, a little magazine Bruce Baker was publishing at that time. This is what it said.)

We hear it from different people with different phrasings, but it's the same significant question again and again. How often do you water ... bonsai? Usually the plea is for a formula or timetable. Once a day? Twice a day? Every other day? Once a week? Etc.

I'm increasingly convinced that Mildred Dill – Texas plantswoman and bonsai enthusiast with whom I've had the pleasure of corresponding on matters of mutual interest – may say it best. "You're a parent. How often do you change a baby?" The implication is, of course, that a potted plant's need for water is not controlled by clock or calendar. Many factors influence drying rate and thus watering frequency. What kind of plant is it? How healthy is it? How big is the pot? Is the pot glazed or unglazed, wooden or plastic? What's the location, sun, partial shade, shady? Has the weather been sunny or cloudy, warm or cold, windy or calm? How completely do plant roots explore the available mix; i.e., how well established is the plant? And, very important, what is being used as a soil mix?

"Sure. Sure. But tell me how often do you water?" Well, I water most outdoor bonsai every day when they are actively growing during warm, windy weather. I have heard of people watering two or even three times a day when drying is extreme and my guess is that their trees are healthier as a result. But, as a practical matter, most of the bonsai enthusiasts that I know don't grow things that need more than once a day watering to survive.

At the other extreme, early and late in the year, when bonsai are relatively dormant, temperatures are low and the air is moist, my watering is less frequent than once a week.

"Well, why not water everything every day – as a precautionary measure?" Or, the same question in other terms, "Can you keep a bonsai too wet?" Actually, trees are amazingly tolerant – it's an inherited characteristic. Many will survive the constantly wet treatment particularly if a loose, well drained soil mix is used. However, I'm convinced that most kinds are definitely healthier if the soil is allowed to dry somewhat – letting air in – between waterings.

My explanation is that oxygen is essential for root activity including effective water uptake. And that oxygen availability is very limited when all the spaces in soil mix are full of water because oxygen diffuses some 10,000 times faster through air than it does through water.

Actually, an alternating cycle of wetting and drying seems to be most satisfactory. Water the plant well, let it stand until the soil surface begins to look dry – the soil around an established tree will be conspicuously dry before the tree begins to wilt – then water well again.

Deciding when to water the newly potted tree is not so easy. Because of the limited root system, it may not dry the soil evenly. Generally, it's best not to let the soil dry in this case but not keep it saturated either. This is very much a balancing act. As one class participant paraphrased by equivocating remarks last spring, "I see what you are saying, you let it dry then water the day before."

I realized immediately that he'd explained it better than I.

What's the pattern to all of this? Most successful bonsai growers check their trees regularly. They water trees that are dry or getting dry. They don't try to keep bonsai constantly wet.

Yes, change the baby when it's wet and water the bonsai when it's dry.

Rereading, much later, what I had written years before, I found myself realizing it was OK but missing several important ideas. When I recommended watering when the soil surface seems dry or is beginning to look dry, I should have added that if it is common for a tree to be skipped in watering one day, because the soil isn't really dry, and to find the soil and tree extremely dry (soil difficult to wet and tree somewhat wilted looking) the next day, water that tree daily – especially if this kind of dryness is more than an occasional occurrence.

Also missing was an explanation that, in my mind, to water "well" means to apply enough water that it flows freely from the pot's drain holes. Drainage equal to as much as one fourth to one third the pot's volume seems a reasonable goal. The flushing action that results from thorough watering helps prevent excessive accumulation of soluble salts in the soil. Meager watering producing little or no drainage gradually results in increasingly salty soil, burned leaf tips and eventual plant decline.

One more watering thought. Regular and rapid drying of a bonsai's soil is an indication of an active, healthy root system. Slow drying is a danger signal calling for careful attention to that tree and its needs.

In conclusion, one paragraph I felt especially good about from a long, watering article I pulled together at the request of the request of Arch Hawkins, editor of the American Bonsai Society's quarterly Journal in the early 1990's.



For most bonsai enthusiasts, watering is much more than a time consuming chore critical to the tree's survival. It is a time of heightened awareness, a time of communion with living things and other wonders of the natural world, a time when we grow with our trees.

(February 2009 update from September and October 2003 AABS Newsletter columns)

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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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## 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 and paypal for membership fees and other AABS activities. Please talk with the Treasurer at the next meeting.

Katie Norder – Treasurer AABS  
Attn: AABS Membership  
13143 Hadley Road  
Gregory, MI, 48137

[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>



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