



RMBS

September 2019

Volume 51 Issue 9

## September President's Message

by Andy Berry

**"Showtime!"**

***"Then what are we fighting for?" –Winston Churchill, in response to being asked to consider cutting funding for the arts to support the war effort.***

I have heard from many RMBS members how much the art and practice of bonsai brings value to your lives. Our annual exhibition is our chance to showcase that love for the public, our local community and the world at large. In the spirit of the above quote: the cultural value provided by artistic endeavor is one of the highest order when considering social value. **Thank you to all the members who are displaying their bonsai and putting themselves out there to further the mission of RMBS: to advance education and appreciation of the art of bonsai. Please join us for our 50<sup>th</sup>**

**anniversary exhibition September 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> at the Denver Botanic Gardens, as it is shaping up to be the most epic RMBS show to date.** For RMBS members who are not displaying bonsai, please consider volunteering to help with show operations and guided tours for the public. It has always been the heart and diligence of RMBS that has made our shows a great success!

**We are expanding our exhibition this year to celebrate the history of RMBS with a magnificent display that will highlight our heritage and the significant events over the last 75 years of bonsai in Colorado.**

Four heritage trees will be on display from storied RMBS members (Kai Kawahara, Jim Robinson, Bob Kataoka and Dick Meleney). My bet is that the world has not been graced with this combination of trees from these

significant artists in over 30 years (if ever).

**Among the events that weekend, we will enjoy a professional demonstration from Todd Schlafer Saturday morning.** For the first time, we have hired a professional photographer to catalogue the exhibition and photograph individual trees for members. Our Friday night gala promises to be an honorable evening with traditional Japanese food and entertainment (not to mention high-quality items in the silent auction), and a nod to where RMBS has been and where we are headed. I'm excited to see you all there.

**My focus lately, in addition to planning which bonsai I will display this year, is to prepare my compositions for exhibition to ensure they look their best.** This is no insignificant task to be done on a whim. Much like the practice of bonsai in an overarching sense, show preparation is methodic, attention to detail is key, and one should strive for harmony. Special attention must be paid to the foliage, trunk and primary branches. Soil surface must be prepared and top-dressed. Moss must be

established. Deadwood treated.

Appropriate stand and companion plant procured and deployed. **Our 2018 Bob Kataoka Artist of the Year Les Siroky has prepared an inclusive document to shepherd you along the way (included in this newsletter).** This document has been invaluable to my show-preparation practice. I hope it informs yours as well.

**Finally, please join us Tuesday September 3<sup>rd</sup> for our monthly program.** It should prove timely. Larry Jackel will be discussing preparing bonsai for formal display, and Will Kerns will mentor us on the use of the "Colorado native" Rocky Mountain Juniper as bonsai.

Break a leg!

Your brother in bonsai,

Andy Berry

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## 2018 - 2019 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Date and Location	Agenda or Program
<b><u>Monthly Meeting</u></b> <b>Sept</b> Tue, Sept 3 <sup>rd</sup> 6:30pm – 9:00pm DBG Plant Society Building	<b><u>SHORT PROGRAM: SHOW PREPARATION – LARRY JACKEL</u></b> <b><u>LONG PROGRAM: ROCKY MOUNTAIN JUNIPER AS BONSAI –</u></b> <b><u>WILL KERNS</u></b>
<b><u>Annual Show</u></b> <b>Sept</b> Fri Sept 6 <sup>th</sup> through Sun Sept 8 <sup>th</sup> Denver Botanic Gardens	<b><u>50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL SHOW</u></b>
<b><u>Monthly Meeting</u></b> <b>Oct</b> Tue, Oct 1 <sup>st</sup> 6:30pm – 9:00pm DBG Plant Society Building	<b><u>SHORT PROGRAM: SHOW RECAP / SURVEY / AND FEEDBACK –</u></b> <b><u>DAVID MCPETERS &amp; MIKE BRITTEN</u></b> <b><u>ARTIST OF THE YEAR PROGRAM</u></b>
<b><u>Monthly Meeting</u></b> <b>Nov</b> Tue, Nov 5 <sup>th</sup> 6:30pm – 9:00pm DBG Plant Society Building	<b><u>LONG PROGRAM: AEROBIC PLANTS SOILS &amp; MICROBES -</u></b> <b><u>PAUL KOENNING</u></b>
<b><u>Annual Holiday Party</u></b> <b>Dec</b> Sun, Dec 1 <sup>st</sup> 10am – 2pm Hillcrest Condos 9968 Appletree Place Thornton, CO	

The entire yearly calendar is online [here](#).



## DISTINGUISHED MEMBER PROFILES – by Pat Deutschman

### Heritage Trees- Roots. Bob Kataoka – Lessons beyond bonsai

Over the years much has been written about one of the RMBS earliest members, Bob Kataoka. But there is another side of Bob's story that many members may not know.

Following release from the WWII internment camps, many Japanese residents came to Colorado to live. Former Governor, Ralph Carr (1939-1943) was the only Governor in the United States at the time who welcomed the Japanese citizens who were ordered to internment camps and strongly believed in their equal rights in this country. For this reason, Bob and Mary Hanayo Kataoka, with their two young children, when they were released from the Arkansas internment camp, chose to settle down in Denver.

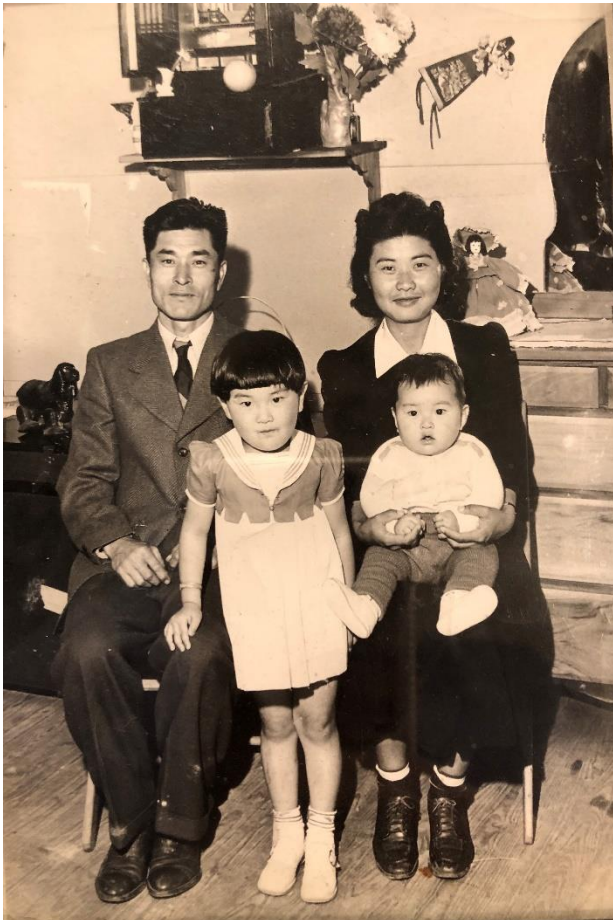
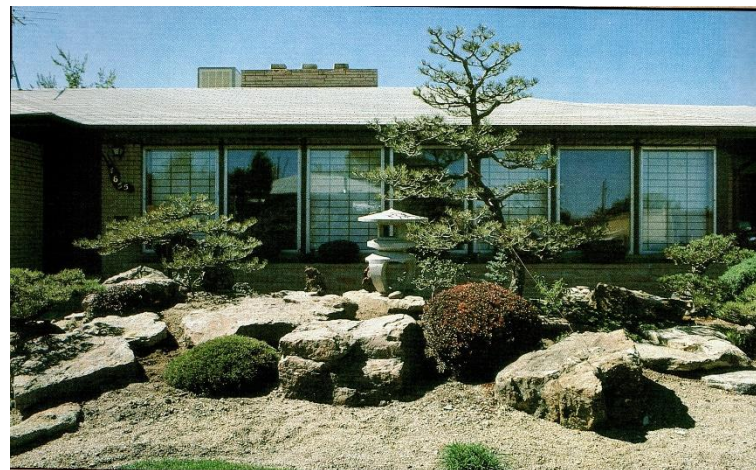


Photo: Kataoka family in the internment camp

Bob, an upholster by trade, also leased several hotels in the area where many Japanese people lived and rented out rooms. Post WWII there was significant discrimination against the Japanese, and they experienced difficulties in being accepted. Bob prospered despite these issues. He then spent the rest of his life recreating the spirit of the Japan he loved. Bob and his wife Mary built their home in west Denver in 1956, designed with traditional Japanese architecture including floor to ceiling windows with numerous shoji screens as window coverings and a formal Japanese garden. A Tokonoma, handmade by Bob using collected tree logs is the centerpiece of the living room area. Both the front and back yards are a Japanese themed garden landscaped with trees shaped as topiaries, a fishpond, perfectly positioned stones, lanterns, and his bonsai collection all which resembled oriental gardens from his memory as a child growing up in Hiroshima Japan. Over the past 60 plus years there has been some natural deterioration from its initial splendor that was captured in a 1983 Colorado Homes magazine, (photos included), but it is clear the essence and theme is present, intact, and remains quite impressive.







Photos: house and gardens

Bob and his wife spent every weekend collecting the trees that became part of this landscape for his new house and then for his bonsais. Never owning a truck, they brought them home in the back seat of his 1967 Pontiac! At one time he had over 300 trees in his collection. His bonsai pines were reputed to be the finest collection of pines in the United States at the time.

Bob was an early member of the "Senior" Denver Bonsai Club, which began in the 1940s and was made up of only Japanese speaking members, some who had learned bonsai skills in Japan. Interestingly, at the time most literature and reference materials such as books and magazines on bonsai were predominantly written in Japanese. (Bob's collection is carefully kept by his daughter, Lily Uyeda). Bob studied the literature about Japanese Black Pine and was able to interpret and

adapt the techniques to the native Ponderosa Pine, teaching this to the "Junior" club members made up of English-speaking members whom he also took on mountain collecting trips. Eventually the two bonsai clubs would merge into the Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society.

Studying bonsai from coast to coast, Bob earned many accolades for his skills and techniques. His bonsai reputation as an American bonsai master extended to not only the experts in this country such as John Naka, Ben Oki, and Frank Okamura but was acknowledged by Japanese bonsai master Kyuzo Murata who asserted that Bob Kataoka's bonsai were one of the greatest representations of American bonsai art he had seen!

Bob felt a strong kinship and bond with each of his bonsai. "Bonsai no kokoro" (spirit of bonsai) means that the true love of nature through bonsai brings love and respect for one's fellow man. Bob Kataoka was truly possessed of bonsai no kokoro.

Those who knew him describe him as a quiet, gentle, humble person. What his daughter Lily remembers most are the lessons in life Bob taught her. Although he struggled against prejudice, being looked down upon as a Japanese American after the war, he taught his children to always respect others and treat them equally. He said you are not better than anyone else, treat everyone the same.

Before his death in 1986, Bob told his wife and daughter he did not want to "burden" his family with the upkeep of his garden and bonsai, appreciating that this devotion to the trees was his enjoyment, happiness and peace of mind in his life and considering the amount of effort he put into his trees daily. But maintain it they did to the best of their ability. Bob's styling remains in his trees and garden at his home. Several of his bonsai are part of the permanent collection of the Pacific Bonsai Museum (See RMBS newsletter April 2019) and had been on display at the John Naka Pavilion at the U.S. Arboretum. Recently several trees are being cared for by the DBG and RMBS.

Bob is fondly remembered by his peers. As a true living testament to Bob Kataoka's contribution to



the Colorado bonsai community and in gratitude to him, in 1987 the members of the RMBS created the "Bob Kataoka Memorial Tokonoma" in which the outstanding bonsai for the year is displayed at the club's annual show as well as awarding the Artist of the Year in his honor.

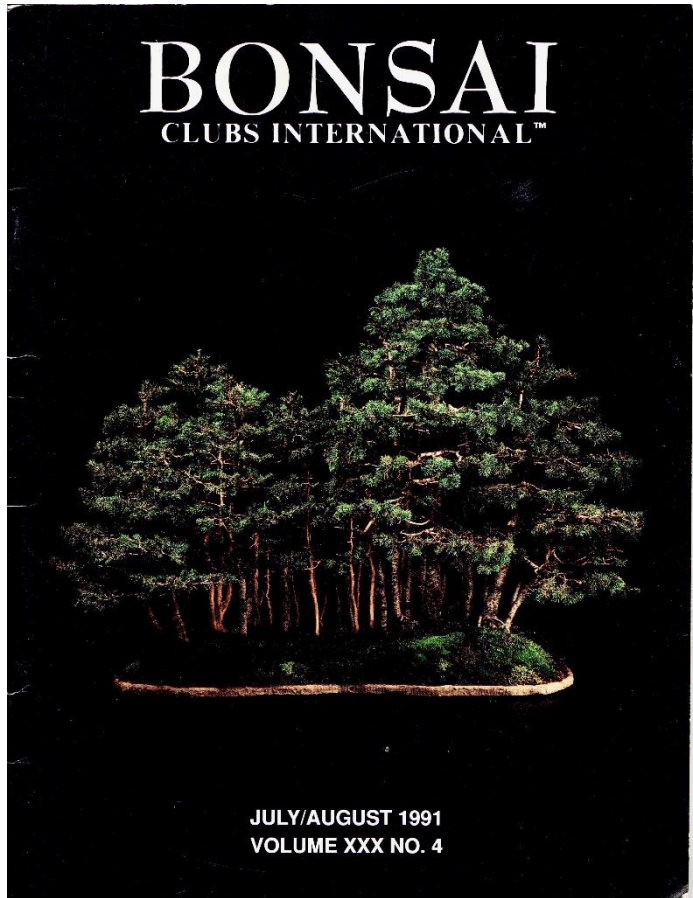
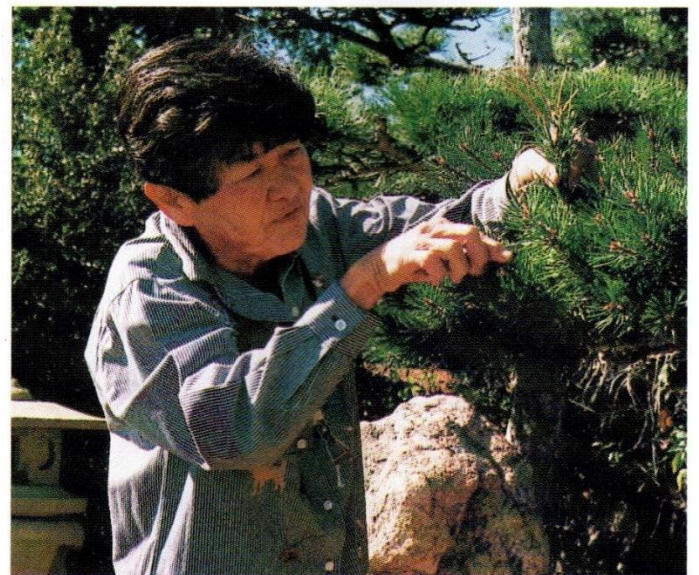


Photo: Cover of BCI magazine-47 Ronin,



Photo: Bon Kataoka



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ine.” **Lily Uyeda carefully prunes one of her** ting.  
**father’s prized pinesosa pines.** I

## RMBS Bob Kataoka Memorial Award Artist of the Year

2018	Les Siroky
2017	Mark Mills
2016	Tom Anglewicz
2015	Don Willis
2014	Mike Horine
2013	Will Kerns
2012	Larry Jackel
2011	Walter Buck
2010	Todd Schlafer
2009	Allan Hills
2008	Steve Goodwin
2007	Paul Gilbert
2006	Darell Whitley
2005	Les Siroky
2004	Charlie Sisk
2003	Don Osborn
2002	Darell Havener
2001	Bert Rhodes
2000	Larry Jackel
1999	Lou DeHerrera
1998	Dennis Zier
1997	Jim Robinson
1996	Mary Kataoka
1995	Kai Kawahara
1994	Bert Rhodes
1993	None
1992	Larry Jackel
1991	Allan Hills
1990	Harold Sasaki
1989	Jim Robinson
1988	Bob Krueger
1987	Kai Kawahara



## Heritage Tree “Roots”- Harold Sasaki, an inspirational teacher

Harold Sasaki, born and raised on a coffee farm in Kona Hawaii, came to the mainland as a college student and brought his fascination of bonsai with him. Denver was decades ahead of the bonsai trend in the U.S. and he quickly became one of the up and coming bonsai artists. He learned from the original members of the Japanese club relying on his language skills, while becoming one of the original members of the new club formed in 1969, referred to as the “Junior Denver Bonsai Club” led by Col Bob Kreuger.

In 1985, Harold started his own bonsai business, “Colorado Bonsai Limited. Over the past 40 plus years Hal has conducted countless classes and lectures, demos at national conventions, and become a nationally recognized expert teacher known for his “Photosynthesis Talk”. Harold teaches that “you must understand the horticulture before you can focus on the art”.

Harold has studied with such masters as Harry Hirao, John Naka, Ben Oki and Chase Rosade. and served on the Board of Directors for the American Bonsai Society for six years besides his many leadership contributions to RMBS over the past 50 years.



Photo: This picture was taken at Dan Robinson’s home during the 1984 bonsai convention held in Seattle.

1<sup>st</sup> row left to right; Kai Kawahara, Seinji Ogasawara (Bonsai Master from Japan), Bob Kataoka. 2<sup>nd</sup> row left to right Hal Sasaki, Larry Jackel, Dan Robinson



Photo: Limber Pine, from Outstanding American Bonsai, 1987

Harold taught many local RMBS members collecting skills as well as bonsai design. In particular Harold took several young bonsai enthusiasts under his wing and they have now become recognized bonsai professionals; Ryan Neil and Todd Schlafer.

Hal’s wife Marcia said of him “He would want to be recognized for what he gave to others rather than his bonsai collection”. Fittingly, the best way to honor Harold Sasaki’s contributions to the bonsai movement, the Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society and his personal accomplishments is to pay tribute to him through the voices of his “students” and peers.

**Larry Jackel.** The importance of a strong foundation for anything that we do is essential. One of my favorite activities has been collecting wild trees, what we know as yamadori, and the person who showed me how to do it first was Hal Sasaki. The little ponderosa pine that Hal helped me collect on my first collecting trip was the foundation of a friendship that has spanned five decades. That friendship continues as Hal and I team teach a beginning bonsai class at Denver Botanic Gardens four times a year. The most wonderful thing about our friendship is that I continue to learn from Hal.





Photo: Harold and Larry

**Charlie Sisk:** I met Harold Sasaki in 1995 for the first time. I had purchased a bonsai tree from a street vendor for my wife. Since she had no clue how to take care of it, she called Colorado Bonsai and Harold invited her over to give her instructions on how to care for the tree. The next day she insisted that I go see Harold and Colorado Bonsai. In that brief visit I became hooked and Harold became my mentor. I spent many of my free hours with Harold and he taught me so many tricks and secrets of Bonsai and because of Harold, Bonsai became my passion. I am so very grateful to Harold as he taught me how to care for many different types of trees. He turned me loose in his green houses and let me experiment with different trees. Eventually Will Kerns and Todd Schlafer joined Harold and he worked with them as well. Not long ago, Harold told me how pleased he is about the way the three of us have progressed with our own talents with Bonsai. Harold gave the three of us a strong foundation upon which to build our own collections. We cannot thank Harold enough for all he showed and taught us.

**Ryan Neil, Bonsai Mirai.** I think I speak for a lot of young bonsai practitioners when I say that Harold Sasaki is easily the most pivotal figure in my bonsai journey. He built the foundation of support, encouragement, and enthusiasm that made me believe bonsai was a lifestyle that I could pursue, and that the sky was the limit in terms of what I could achieve. I think Harold bridged that gap for a lot of young practitioners in a time in North American bonsai when there wasn't a system set up to help them learn, or even make them feel like they had a place in the bonsai community.

It was very difficult to begin bonsai. I know I would not be a bonsai professional today had I not serendipitously run across Harold Sasaki in 1993. I could very easily contribute everything that I am as a bonsai practitioner to Harold Sasaki and the mentorship that he provided me in the beginning and continues to provide over the course of my professional career. He's an incredibly pivotal figure.

I used to drive over to Harold's workshop once a month on a Wednesday. I would get out of high school at 3 o'clock and drive 3 hours over the Continental Divide from the western slope to the eastern slope. He would keep his shop open from 3 to 9 and we would sit and work on things—but more than work on things, we would talk about bonsai. Harold and I would discuss collecting, ways of styling, cultivation; Harold strongly believed that we hadn't totally explored all the opportunities available to us in bonsai. For a young practitioner to recognize that there is a vast amount of unexplored opportunity in bonsai—creatively, technically, horticulturally—makes bonsai a lot more open and capable of having a place for each individual and what they find inspirational, fascinating, and worthy of pursuit. Working with Harold was incredibly liberating. Harold paved the way for Mirai to be what it is today: an incubator for ideas and the pursuit of the unexplored.

It's very difficult to convey the gravity of what Harold Sasaki means to me and my bonsai practice. I want people to understand just how generous and giving of an individual he is. He is an incredibly passionate and dedicated bonsai practitioner, and he was and still is ahead of his time. He saw the beauty and potential of North American native yamadori and what it could do for the bonsai community. His desire to bring up the next generation and really open his doors with a tremendous amount of love, courage, and generosity, is inspiring to me. Harold has contributed immeasurably to the art of bonsai—he helped pioneer the creation of a vibrant, thriving bonsai culture in North America.

**Todd Schlafer:** Harold Sasaki was the first teacher, like many other people, I had in Bonsai. His vast knowledge, excitement and openness to share his

knowledge fueled my journey into the rabbit hole of bonsai. For several years I would go over once or twice a weekend to volunteer and help him with his garden along with introducing me to Jerry Morris and then partnering up to help sell trees online. Harold is one of the innovators and founders on Bonsai in the US and is always looking to learn more and is open to new ideas to improve his techniques and designs. I can't thank him enough and put into words the amount of respect and admiration I have for Harold.



Photo: Harold



## HERITAGE TREE PROJECT – by Pat Deutschman

### The Heritage Tree project

We started on this project to identify and document the “Heritage Trees” that were created by RMBS members. It led me from the Denver Botanic Gardens, the Pacific Bonsai Museum to people’s back yards. I have interviewed a number of you and have enjoyed every minute of discussing your bonsai journeys, seeing your collections, reading of past members contributions and seeing the living evidence of their passion and skills alive to this day in the remaining bonsai.

What was surprising is that I learned more about the people than the trees. There is a great legacy from the very first Denver Bonsai Club members, those Japanese men who joined together, many after having just been released from internment camps and facing difficulty in a post WWII culture, who found common purpose and camaraderie in their study of bonsai together. They were the ones who first ventured up into the mountains collecting from the abundance of natural materials unlike anywhere else in the world. They truly were part of the beginning of the “American Bonsai Movement” using pines, spruces and junipers, many hundreds of years old, dwarfed by the harsh conditions that they had been grown in. Both the men and the trees were “survivors”.

Over the years, as others became interested in bonsai a second, “English speaking” club was formed which eventually became the RMBS and something amazing started happening. Despite language and cultural differences, the older members from the “senior” club started teaching the new members from the “junior” club bonsai techniques and began taking them on collecting trips, sharing with them the treasures they had found.

The great legends of these stories are Kai Kawahara, George Fukuma, Bob Kataoka, Col Bob Kreuger, Jim Robinson, Malcolm Correll, also include Harold

Sasaki, Larry Jackel, Allen Hills... and the list goes on. These men were all about teaching and learning- from each other. The product was beautiful bonsai. But the lasting legacy of generosity and sharing of each other’s knowledge, wisdom and passion is the real heritage of RMBS.

Pat Deutschman (and Fred too!)



Photo: with a Dan Robinson tree at his Elandan Gardens



Photo: Fred with a Bob Kataoka tree on display at the Pacific Bonsai Museum

## NEWS FOR MEMBERS

### Membership Renewal:

RMBS has adopted a policy where all membership renewals occur on July 1, and cover the succeeding 12 months, ending on June 30<sup>th</sup>.

All memberships renew this summer on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. Individual memberships are \$35 per year and family memberships are \$50 per year.

You may pay via cash or check at any monthly meeting or mail your check to the address below. If you mail your check please be sure to include your email address and telephone number.

#### PAYMENT ADDRESS:

Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society  
c/o Membership Renewal  
PO Box 271043  
Louisville, CO 80027

### Discounts Available to Members:

We have an account established with Way to Grow Gardening Supply in Denver. You can receive discounts on some items up to 15%. You will need to tell them you are a member of RMBS.

### Resources for Members:

Other internet resources:

[New RMBS Web Site](#)

[Colorado Bonsai Ltd.](#)

[First Branch Bonsai](#)

[S&S Bonsai](#)

[RMBS Facebook Page](#)

[Mike Horine Website](#)