

AMERICAN BEECH ALLAN HILLS

RMBS

November 2020

Volume 52 Issue 11

November President's Message

by Andy Berry

Maple Bonsai

"All of the trees are losing their leaves, and not one of them is worried."—Daniel Miller

Looking back on 2020, we have had very few president's messages that were dedicated to the technical / horticultural aspects of bonsai (excepting our nursery stock primer). Early to mid-fall is an exceedingly busy time for the bonsai practitioner. In addition to making winter preparations and final applications of fertilizer; close attention must be paid to the changing watering needs this time of year. This is THE time of year to do major work on pine bonsai. **We too often forget that fall is an ideal time in many respects to conduct heavy work on deciduous species.**

This month I want to focus on maple as bonsai. A few awe-inspiring species can "set-the-hook" and coax people into a life of bonsai. The top 3 are Japanese black pine, shimpaku juniper and the Japanese Maple. **Of these, the Japanese maple is perhaps the most beguiling with its perfect proportions, understated graceful lines, and seasonal flash of color.**

Maples in the Rocky Mountains

As with many in RMBS, I feel a pull toward maple bonsai, but have relatively little experience with them when compared to the time I have spent with our native conifers. Although several RMBS members cultivate maple bonsai (from native mountain maple to dwarf cultivars such as Sharp's Pygmy to trident maples) very few members have been able to take them past the developmental stage into a truly refined bonsai. Charlie Sisk's trident maple displayed at the 50th anniversary RMBS show in 2019 is a recent notable exception.



Trident maple in training 25 years. Artist Charlie Sisk.

Several factors work against us in the Rocky Mountain region regarding cultivation of fine maple bonsai: harsh winters with frequent freeze-thaw cycles, arid windy summers which desiccate delicate leaves and lack of good stock to source from. Practitioners who have been successful at cultivating maple bonsai have devised solutions to these common problems. **Most importantly, they have winter protection that is beyond what most of us have in the rocky mountain region, namely a greenhouse.** This allows the highest level of protection from freezing, windy conditions and optimal temperature modulation (preventing damaging swings in temperature during dormancy). I have been successful overwintering maple bonsai in my unheated garage for several years (rarely freezes) but do not have the level of control a greenhouse would afford in terms of temperature and humidity regulation. One can be successful without a greenhouse, but deliberate wintering plans for these bonsai are paramount.

One interesting story is an anecdotal solution to a common problem in the region: **how do you provide maples with ample light during bud push in the spring and enough protection from direct sun and wind during the summer months?** Larry Jackel relayed this tale to me a couple years ago: He had visited Kai Kawahara's garden a number of years back and noted that Kai had a number of refined Japanese maples which never seemed to suffer the summer blight of scorched leaves so common in the area. He found that these maple bonsai were grown under an arbor that was covered in grape vines. Kai added that in the spring the maples were able to grow freely with ample sun, but by the heat of the summer, the grape vines had leafed up sufficiently to provide

protection from both wind and heat damage. Indeed, an elegant solution. I find that simply moving the trees to a protected, shady location as the heat of summer takes hold has the same effect. A good practice for many deciduous trees in our region.

Lastly, sourcing good maple bonsai material remains an issue. Many of the nice maple bonsai RMBS currently cultivates were imported from Asia or areas like California and had been grown specifically as specimen bonsai. Garden center nursery stock remains a stable but often poor source of material with simple, uninspired stock that has been designed for landscapes. I have found this is put to good use learning about horticulture and care for these trees, experimenting with winter and heat protection, as they usually do not represent a significant investment of capital. We are fortunate these days to have several online bonsai nursery resources that have field-grown maples specifically for bonsai stock that will ship to the Rocky Mountain region. A few that come to mind (many more exist) are Brussel's Bonsai, Driftwood Bonsai, Greenthumb Nursery and Evergreen Gardenworks. Talperion Farms was a source of high-end field grown maple material for bonsai but was unfortunately lost to the wildfires in Oregon this year.

Typical field-grown trident maple stock on greenthumbbonsai.com

Buying trees via this route is often based on online photos and measurements, rather than in-person evaluation of the plant material. Plan to invest \$200-\$500 for good pre-bonsai stock, and at least \$1000 for maple specimen bonsai in a ceramic container. Remember that although this is a hefty price tag, investing in good material pays exponential dividends in the future. Your \$50 box-store maple is just never going to get to the same level. **Remember that \$50 maple in a small grow container from the box-store requires about the same day-to-day care and annual maintenance as a nice \$300 field-grown stock tree, but with drastically different end results. Why not invest your time in good stock?** This is something I have been thinking about a good deal lately: the balance of number versus quality of bonsai under my care.



Trident Maple 19190.
2 1/4" trunk 21" tall. 8 years old.
\$180.00
SOLD



Trident Maple 19162.
1 1/2" trunk 19" tall. 12 years old.
\$110.00
SOLD



Trident Maple 19191.
3 1/4" trunk 24" tall. 12 years old.
\$250.00
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Trident Maple 19160.
3 1/2" trunk 26" tall. 12 years old.
\$250.00
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Trident Maple 19180.
2 1/4" trunk 22" tall. 8 years old.
\$180.00
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Trident Maple 19169.
2 1/4" trunk 24" tall. 8 years old.
\$180.00
SOLD



Trident Maple 19183. 2 1/4" trunk. 21" tall. 9 years Old.
\$150.00
SOLD



Trident Maple 19192.
3 1/2" trunk 22" tall. 12 years old.
\$265.00
SOLD



Trident Maple 19120.
1 3/4" trunk 20" tall. 10 years old.
\$125.00
SOLD

Autumn indicators and deciduous physiology

The physiology behind the beautiful color change that occurs on our maple leaves is an indicator that we can work with the plant's natural processes to advance our bonsai. This color change involves the resorption of the

chlorophyll pigment from the leaf petioles in the plant's final effort to mobilize nutrients and store them for the winter. This traffic principally involves movement of water. Maple bonsai are perhaps one of the highest "movers" of water when compared to other bonsai species. Anyone who has pruned a maple in the springtime can attest to this fact, they bleed copious amounts of sap.

During the late summer / fall, the tree is in an anabolic phase, building large amounts of vascular tissue (we see expanding trunk and branch girth, and tight bonsai wire). In addition to the root system, this vascular tissue becomes a repository for carbohydrates and starches that lower the freezing temperature inside the tissue to build winter hardiness and to be available for the first bud push in the spring. **Once mid-fall arrives, the leaf edges will start to crinkle and desiccate indicating that most of the nutrient traffic and storage is complete. This is the ideal time to prune maple bonsai (especially major structural pruning).** Ryan Neil recently published a live-stream about this very topic on Bonsai Mirai (thanks, as always are due). He adds that once this change has occurred, a critical 2-3 week period exists where nutrient traffic and compartmentalization has mostly finished, but enough activity remains to promote healing of large wounds (the perfect time for structural work). Ryan also notes that this principal holds true for almost all true deciduous species.

Maple leaves display brown wrinkled edges: this identifies a critical time for structural pruning on maple bonsai. Photo credit USDA Forest Service.



Mid-autumn maple work

Although many people have had success pruning their maple bonsai during the spring, high water and nutrient traffic at that time will remove energy from the bonsai and over time this practice weakens the tree. **In addition to working with the natural energy balance of the tree by not removing energy from the system, pruning in mid-fall has the added benefit of bare branches that allow for intimate evaluation of branch structure.**

When pruning your maple bonsai this time of year (and other deciduous species) here are concepts to focus on to improve your trees:

- 1) **Impeccable technique** with sharp scissors, clean cuts and application of cut paste where needed.
- 2) **Focus on bifurcation of secondary and tertiary branching.** Cut back from areas of 3 or more pieces of growth to only two lateral pieces of growth.
- 3) Cut back to growth areas that have **ideal transition of taper** from trunk to branch to branchlet to tip. This is perhaps more important characteristic to identify and showcase.
- 4) **Remove areas of coarse growth**, long leggy internodes. These should be resolved.
- 5) **Identify and remedy structural flaws** such as bar-branches and thick overgrown branches in the canopy that need to be removed to promote fine growth.
- 6) **Respect areas that need to be left unpruned.** Weak branches or branches that need additional length or girth (sacrifice branches) should be allowed to grow unchecked. Also small branches at cut/wound margins should be left throughout next growing season to promote healing and callous formation.

In contrast with coniferous bonsai such as junipers which can be “created” in one extreme styling session, remember that exquisite deciduous bonsai are built over time. The application of careful (restrained), thoughtful and systematic pruning technique over a period of decades is perhaps the epitome of bonsai practice on a higher-level.



RMBS visiting artist November 2020: Jan Culek of the Czech Republic

Finally, join me for our November meeting where we will be joined by visiting artist Jan Culek from the Czech Republic. Jan is an avid hiker and rock-climber. He has a passion for both forest plantings and vertical rock planting for bonsai. In addition to being well-known for creating bonsai in these images, Jan creates and manufactures his own vertical rock slabs / containers which are miraculously natural appearing. Jan will be styling a native pine bonsai in one of these containers for RMBS which isn't something to be missed.

Stay safe out there.

Your brother in bonsai,

Andy Berry

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2021 Slate of Officers for Approval at the December RMBS meeting

Board of Directors:

President:	David McPeters
Vice President:	Paul Koenning
Secretary:	Pat Deutschman
Treasurer:	Normando Rodriguez
Immediate Past President:	Andy Berry
Program Chair:	Tom Anglewicz
Show Chair:	Darrell Whitley

Committee Chairs and Members-at-Large:

Membership:	Connie Garrett
Education:	Bob Randall
Members-At Large:	Dan Wiederrect
	Evan Thomas
	Nicholas Box
	Wayne Berve

2020 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Date and Location	Agenda or Program
<u>November Monthly Meeting</u> Tuesday, November 3 On-Line via Zoom	<u>SHORT PROGRAM:</u> <u>LONG PROGRAM: JAN CULEK</u>
<u>December Monthly Meeting</u> Tuesday, December 1 On-line via Zoom	<u>MEMBERSHIP DISCUSSIONS AND INPUT</u>

Programing note: Due to the November meeting scheduled for Nov 3 is also Election Day, the meeting may be rescheduled for November 10 depending on the ability of the presenter to change the presentation date. More information will be sent along with the Zoom link once we have final confirmation of the change.

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 30th.

All memberships renew this summer on July 1st, 2020. 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

Dues are also payable on the RMBonsai.org website via PayPal or Venmo.

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](#)

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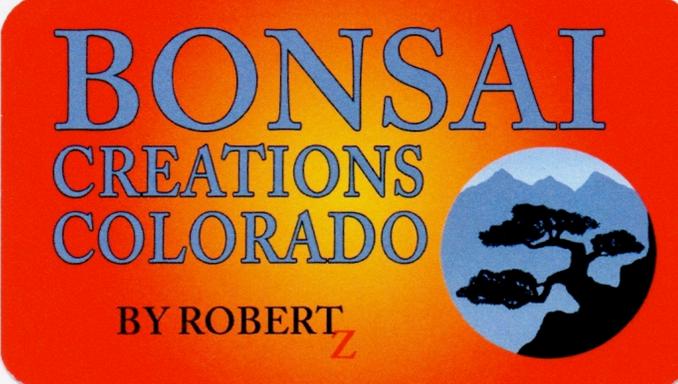
Specializing in Character and Colorado Native Collected Trees, Finished Bonsai, Starter Plants, Pots, Soil, Books, Tools, Wire, Private Lessons and Online Native Spruce sales.

Do you need a gift for a hard-to-shop for bonsai enthusiast? We offer Individual Bonsai Instruction Sessions and we have **Gift Certificates!!** Use them for *anything* (supplies, classes, etc.) and at *any time*.

We're located on the west side of the Denver Metro area, near I-70 and Youngfield.

Email us at: co.bonsai.ltd@gmail.com

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