



Satsuki Azalea Notes, April:

Spring time activity is now in full swing for those of you that are into Azalea Bonsai. Trees in the first year cycle are to be potted this month, just prior to activity beginning in the plant. If you haven't already, remove all flower buds as flowers place a high demand on the plant, and additional stress after just pruning the roots. Remove 1/3 to 1/2 of the lower portion of the root ball and remove 1/3 of the outer edge. Hollow out a portion of the root ball directly under the trunk. This will allow new roots to not only grow around the outside of the root ball but also in the center, increasing the amount of new feeder roots. Remove the top 1/2 to 1 inch of soil and cut the roots flat. This will encourage new surface roots. Wire the tree securely into the pot. Using a chopstick or similar probe, settle the soil among the roots and eliminate any air pockets. Do not do any work on the top portion of the tree in the year that you repot it. Cover the soil with long fiber sphagnum moss to maintain moisture and encourage rooting.

Trees in the second year of the cycle will be trimmed and wired this year. If you haven't already done so, remove all the flower buds. The tree should be allowed to regain its vigor this year and not spend its energy on flowering. Trim branches in keeping with the intended style. Wire the main portion of the branch first. Then apply wire to the secondary branches and finally the tips. Wire should remain in place for about three months. At this time the branches should be set. Monitor the wires constantly to make sure they are not cutting into the wood. Trimming may be carried out until June. Plants should be fed from now on. It is important to feed plants well this year to build up their strength.

Trees that are in the third year of the cycle will be allowed to flower this year. As a satsuki approaches flowering, its flower buds should be thinned out. For established trees it is normal to remove about 1/3 of the developing buds. The buds are very easy to remove just before they show color. Thin out to leave one bud at each terminal and remove any buds growing down in the foliage mass, as they will not contribute anything to the display. Fertilize until the buds begin to show color then stop until after flowering.