



Saturday March 14, 2026. 1pm  
SUNY Erie Community College North Campus  
6205 Main St, Williamsville, NY 14221  
STEM Building Room 102

## President's Corner

Hello,

I hope everyone enjoyed our first meeting and got something out of it along with enjoying it. This month will be about refinement and we will work on a real tree and maybe draw a few diagrams.

Please see Paul or Christine to renew your membership. Start thinking about our show this June reserve the dates June 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. With set being Friday June 5<sup>th</sup> more information to follow.

As a beginner, you will tend to design trees from trees you have seen, attempting to mimic them. This is something most of us have done. Most likely the material you selected is not going to be conducive to becoming the tree you are attempting to mimic. Here is why I think many new comers have problems. You are trying to mimic an established tree with a juvenile tree. In doing so you compromise the basic structure by retaining to many branches to allow for a fuller canopy or pads. Focus on the structure and applying the basic principles, in time the tree will develop. If you study and not just look at established trees you will notice the structure and how few branches are coming from the trunk. Those branches will have many branches coming from them (secondary branches) From the secondary branches there will be even more branches (tertiary branches) This is how fullness of a bonsai tree is created. Not by having a lot of branches coming from the trunk. This takes time to develop but if you stay the course you will end up with a better tree than if you keep trying to create a finished looking tree.

Scott

Considering we have many new members who are not familiar with the terminology used in bonsai or how to start in making a bonsai here are some commonly used words along with some basics on design.

**ADVENTITIOUS BUD** A bud that occurs in an unusual place on a tree.

**AIR LAYERING** Is a method of propagating bonsai. Layering is more complicated than taking cuttings, but has the advantage that the propagated portion can continue to receive water and nutrients from the parent plant while it is forming roots. This is important for plants that form roots slowly, or for propagating large pieces.

**AKADAMA** Classic Japanese Bonsai soil meaning red clay balls. Imported for Japan, this volcanic soil has been used for thousands of years by bonsai artists on most types of deciduous bonsai trees.

**APEX** The highest point of the tree, this can be a single branch or can consist of a series of small branches.

**BACKBUDDING** Process by which apical growth is pruned to induce growth further back along the branch or trunk.

**BRANCHES** The **Primary** branches are those that grow directly from the trunk; the **Secondary** branches are those that grow directly from the primary branches, the **Tertiary** branches grow from the secondary branches.

**BUTRESS** Also known as root-flare, it's the area of a tree trunk where the roots meet the soil surface; usually styled to convey strength.

**BROAD-LEAVED/CONIFEROUS** Conifers belong to the group of naked-seeded plants known as *gymnosperms*, their seeds are not enclosed in an ovary. Conifers have leaves which are needle-shaped or scale-like. With a few notable exceptions, they are evergreen. Broad-leaved trees are a much larger group belonging to

the *angiosperms* or flowering plants which have seeds enclosed in an ovary. The majority are deciduous and go dormant in Autumn through to Spring.

**BUD** Organ or shoot that contains an embryonic branch, leaf or flower.

**CAMBIUM** Green growth tissue directly below the bark, its increase adds to the girth of roots and stems.

**CANDLE** Name given to the extending bud of a Pine before the new needles open.

**CULTIVAR** A cultivated variety of a species i.e., *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood' or *Acer palmatum* 'Deshojo' are both *Acer palmatum* cultivars or varieties.

**DECIDUOUS** A plant that sheds its leaves each year in Autumn- this can be a broad-leaved or a coniferous tree.

**DEFOLIATION** The process of partly or completely removing the leaves of a tree during its summer dormant period to induce a crop of finer, smaller leaves which can greatly increase ramification.

**DIEBACK** Death of growth beginning at tip from disease or injury.

**EVERGREEN** A plant that remains in leaf all year. It should be noted that evergreen trees slowly shed their oldest leaves at certain times of the year (depending on species) as they are replaced by new growth.

**FEEDER ROOT** Fine roots that absorb water and nutrients from the soil.

**INTERNODE** Section of growth between two nodes (leaves or leaf-joints).

**JIN** A deadwood effect on a bonsai- can be either an old branch or a protruding part of the trunk. Jins can be found naturally occurring on old collected trees though are more often than not, artificially created from unwanted branches.

**LITERATI** A bonsai form where the tree has a tall, slender trunk with no lower branches and only sparse foliage confined to the upper reaches of the tree.

**NEBARI** Commonly-used Japanese term to describe the surface roots of a bonsai (those that can be seen on or above the surface of the soil).

**NODE** Growth point on a branch or trunk from which leaves, leaf buds and shoots can arise.

**RAMIFICATION** The repeated division of branches into secondary branches.

**SHARI** Deadwood on the trunk of a bonsai (as opposed to Jin which is a deadwood branch or protrusion).

**SOIL** In the context of bonsai, soil does not refer to the soil found in the ground but specialist bonsai soils used for growing bonsai. **Organic** soils are those that contain ingredients derived from plants; peat, bark or leaf litter.

**Inorganic** soils contain inert materials, mineral, stone or hardened/fired clays such as grit, sand, akadama or turface.

**SPHAGNUM MOSS** Generic/general name given to

long-fibred moss, used as a soil component for bonsai and layering. **Sphagnum Moss Peat** is rotted and broken-down Sphagnum Moss and does not have the same positive properties for bonsai or layering.

**STYLE** The style of a tree has previously been used to describe the main direction the trunk of a tree takes; this should be correctly referred to as the form. The style of the tree describes the way a bonsai has been shaped to create an image of its fully grown counterpart; this can be in a contemporary or a classical style, an impressionistic or an expressionistic style.

**TOKONOMA** Traditional display area in a Japanese house where bonsai are brought inside for a short period and displayed with accent plantings and calligraphy.

**XYLEM** Area below cambium in the trunk.

**YAMADORI** Trees collected from the wild for the use as bonsai. Originally used to describe trees collected from outside.

### The following is from the Bonsai Learning Center

The first task required by the artist is to determine the preferred viewing angle of the tree and its approximate overall height. These determinations are subjective in nature and would be based on factors that the artist feels are most important such as: trunk shape and movement, surface root placement, trunk taper, branch placement, etc. A bonsai needs to look attractive and balanced from all angles, but usually there is one side of the tree that the artist intends for viewers when displayed at an exhibition. This position is known as the front and all bonsai must have one.

### Finding the Triangle

All bonsai have a triangular shape. Sometimes that triangle looks more like a semicircle, but the point is mute. Branches on you tree must be longer at the bottom and become gradually smaller as you approach the top of the tree. To do it any other way will create something which looks unnatural. Look at the old trees in the environment around you. They all follow this pattern. The triangle is a theme that runs through all bonsai designs. Since a good bonsai artist strives for asymmetry in their creations it is seldom an equilateral triangle. Nevertheless, a triangle is always present. A single tree presents a single triangle. A twin trunk tree presents two triangles which are arranged to create one overall triangle. Cascade bonsai present triangles which are turned upside down. Forest and group plantings are composed of a series of triangular groupings... usually a minimum of three... which are then arranged to complete an overall larger triangle for the entire composition. Newcomer to the art would be well advised

to master the triangulation of a single tree before attempting for complicated compositions such as cascades and forests.

### **Finding the Big Three**

Although a bonsai may have as many branches contained its composition as the artist deems appropriate, the ideal bonsai design will contain three main branches as a featured part of the total composition. These are:

**Primary or Number One Branch.** This is always the lowest, longest and thickest of all the branches on the tree. It occurs about one third of the way up the trunk and emerges from the trunk on either the right or the left side of the front (artist choice). It should come forward from the front plane of the tree.

**Secondary or Number Two Branch.** This branch is placed on the opposite side from the Primary branch and above it. It is slightly shorter and slightly thinner and located in the second third of the tree's total height.

**Back or Number Three Branch.** This branch is located between the number one and number two branches and in the back of the composition. It is somewhat shorter than the Secondary branch and also located in the second third of the tree's total height.

**Additional Branches.** All remaining branches on the tree are located in the upper third of the tree's total height and gradually become shorter and thinner as they approach the apex of the tree. These branches follow the same pattern as the three primary branches as they go up the trunk. ie – either left, back, right or right, back, left.

After all the elements above have been identified the following formula for the construction of a classical bonsai can be applied.

### **Base Formula for Construction of A Bonsai**

A good bonsai has a triangular shape. It has a front designed for primary viewing, but looks good from all angles. It is clear of branches for the first third of its height and contains the three primary branches (included in most bonsai designs) within the second third of the tree's height. The final third of the tree's height contains the remaining branch structures. The trunk is clear and visible for the first two thirds of the tree's height with the remaining branches beginning to cover the trunk line in the final third. The branch structures are clearly layered, well organized and asymmetrically placed on the outside of trunk line curves whenever possible. The top of the tree "bows" slightly toward the viewer and the apex of the tree (in the case of an informal upright style) is in a direct line over the base of the trunk.

What you will discover as you sit down to create your first bonsai is that your tree has never read the formula and pretty much grew branches where it saw fit. Indeed, if you have a piece of plant material that has all of the elements described above in exactly the positions described... you have performed something of a bonsai miracle. It is vital to your bonsai development that you understand...

There are no hard and fast rules in bonsai... only guidelines. And there are no perfect bonsai. The tree's initial creation as well as its gradual development over the years, is a cooperative venture between you and the tree. It is not a contest of wills. The formula is designed as a guideline to help you visualize what needs to be done. Understand it and how it works to your advantage by helping to create asymmetry and a feeling of age in your creation. It is not intended to be a hard fast set of rules and should never be used as a wooden club to force your tree into artistic submission.

If the classical design formula is not working then forget the formula for a moment and consider the subject itself. It may well be that your tree does not have a viable number one branch or that some other design element called for in the formula is missing. It happens more often than not and frankly is simply not that important. What IS important is that YOU have studied the formula enough to understand that a primary branch is needed. That understanding will allow you to modify the bonsai's design to compensate for such missing elements. The final product is the important part... not adherence to the formula. Trees must have balance and grace. But there is balance in unbalance and symmetry in asymmetry.

### ***2026 BBS Monthly Agenda:***

March 14<sup>th</sup> Styling and refining  
 April 11<sup>th</sup> Bring your own tree workshop  
 April 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> Cherry Blossom Festival  
 May 9<sup>th</sup> Terry Monroe spring trimming  
 June 6-7<sup>th</sup> Club Show  
 June 13<sup>th</sup> Intro to Bonsai  
 Art in the Park June 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>  
 July 11<sup>th</sup> John Wiessinger Bonsai tips and Tricks  
 August 8<sup>th</sup> Picnic/Auction  
 September 12<sup>th</sup> TBD  
 October 10<sup>th</sup> Sean Smith  
 November 14<sup>th</sup> Suiseki  
 December Christmas party

**Bonsai Society of Upstate New York**

February 24 Toby Ziegler on air layering

March 24 Bill Valavanis TBD

April 28 7 Andrew Robson

May 16 & 17 TBD times, Club Show

**2026 Board Members**

Scott Russo- President

Paul Pearson- Treasurer

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Sandy McDougal- Board

Jerry Rucker- Board

Christine Wilkolaski - Board

716-662-9429 membership