

A Bonsai Close Up On Raft Style--Ikadabuki

By Pauline Muth copyright 1999, updated 2002

In this style of bonsai, the artist emulates the tree that has fallen in the woods and over time has rooted in the debris of the forest floor. The branches reach up to the light and each branch forms itself to resemble an individual tree. The all over appearance is of a string of trees or mini forest attached along a single connecting root or several roots from the same root mass. The root, of course, is the original trunk that the branches develop from. The trunk may have some bends creating a sinuous raft or may be straight. If the trunk is flexible, you can wire it and add dimension to the final product by bending the trunk to give it more shape. The branches that eventually look like trees arise from the front, back and top of the fallen trunk. The more varied the positioning of the new trunks, the better the forest design will show depth.

To create this style in a pot, we lay down a one sided tree keeping most of the tree's roots in the soil. Should the root mass be too large, a cuff made from a plastic pot can be fashioned around the bottom side of the root ball to hold in more soil for the first year. In later years the root mass will slowly be reduced from the top and the cuff will be removed. If there are any branches on the side we are laying down, they must be cut off. When the tree is laid down in a long pot, the upright branches are then trained as upright trees in a forest style. Be sure that the branches that are chosen are not in a direct straight line to assure some depth to the planting.

A scraping of the trunk where it will lie down and treating the wounds with wood rooting compound (Hormodin 3) will facilitate root development. The soil mix should be rich enough to stay

moist easily without being wet. You must secure the trunk to the soil in such a way that movement will not be possible for a couple of years. Set up multiple wires in the bottom of your tray to tie in the trunk well. The use of plastic tubing over the wire will prevent damaging the trunk when you wire it in place on the tray for species that damage easily. Remember that some trees have spiral vascular tissue that could lead to problems with keeping the branches alive when you bend the trunk to the soil. Pulling a bit of the bark where you scraped it on the bottom will show the path the vascular tubes.

Wiring the branches that will become trees can be done prior to bending the tree over. If you do the new trunk wirings before laying the tree down, it will be easier because the tree will still be firmly rooted in its pot. Develop the trees with distinct sizes and shapes. The largest, thickest branch should be the number one tree. Ideally it should not be an end tree but should be within the forest group. The tree heights should decrease as the diameters decrease. Each tree should become part of a forest grouping with as much depth as possible. (Refer to **Forest Planting** for arrangements of trees in a forest.)

Once the trunk is tied down, arrange the new branch trunks as the forest trees. Then wire and arrange the branches on each tree.

As time passes and the roots develop on the bottom of the trunk, you will slowly reduce the top of the original root ball. Be careful not to do this too soon. You could kill your new trees that are being fed by those original roots. The younger the original material, the less chance you have of branch damage. Be sure to protect the original root ball so that the tree will receive enough water and nutrients while new roots are developing. Also continue

to style and develop the forest as the roots are developing. A good system can take years to form. Watch the wires carefully and cut them away before damage occurs. If you used a wire to shape the trunk, it bears careful observation. The tie wires must need loosened to allow for growth but then must be refastened to prevent delicate new roots from being damaged.

A simply made training tray can help you develop a great raft planting. Using strips of lumber for sides and pegboard for the bottom, a training pot can be made that will allow you to easily fasten down the tree. Another method is to use a sheet of plastic needlepoint material no smaller than 8 squares to the inch as the base inside your pot. Many tie down wires may be used with this material. Secure the entire material into the pot.

Traditional pots for the raft style are long and rectangular although other styles of forest pots including store slabs may be used.