

# pfm bonsai studio ramblings



February 2013 Volume 1

## Winter in the Great Northeast USA

Winter has returned to the NE. After several years of mild winters with little snow, we are back to normal. Our hardy bonsai are tucked into winter storage: tucked into unheated garages and sheds, in ground cold frames, buried in gardens and protected from the winds. Piling some of this snow on the soil of those stored in unheated buildings is wise. If the building warms a bit, the snow melts and keeps the defrosted soil damp. Just be sure to replenish the soil as the snow may sublimate into the air.



## Winter Silhouettes

Last month I mentioned that winter is the best time to wire deciduous trees.

While watching friends wire their trees at the studio, I noted the varying types of skill in wiring. I hear the complaints about wiring and begin to wonder. To me wiring is an art and a restful part of bonsai. I love to watch the transformation that occurs in the tree. It truly pays to learn the art of skills of wiring and other bending techniques to the best of our ability to insure we can take our bonsai to the next step.

In reality, the one sure way to improve your wiring is mounds and mounds of practice. The more you wire, the easier it becomes. I must admit, I am a bit strict with my students when they are learning to wire. Wires should be put on neatly, non crossed, and structure to give the best leverage and shape to the tree.

If your wiring skills could use some help, there are some good ways to learn: watch a good friend, volunteer to un wire trees, check out some resources like: Bonsai Today Issue 1, ABS Features Booklet on Wiring by George Buehler ( see the book service at [www.absbonsai.org](http://www.absbonsai.org) ) or take lessons ( great sessions at ABS 2013 this September by John Thompson [www.loveofbonsai.com](http://www.loveofbonsai.com) )

To illustrate the value of winter wiring, take the case of the Korean Hornbeam land and water penjing in the title photograph. The crazy shaped trunks were developed in Korea in the late 80s. These two trees were left overs from a batch I purchased in the late 90s that were used for penjing and did not get any real training until a couple of years ago. As a result they lack good ramification. At this point my goal is to train the branches into better positions and then work on trimming to increase the twiginess.

The results of the wiring will be in the March newsletter.

# Bonsai Tips you may or may not have heard about Part I

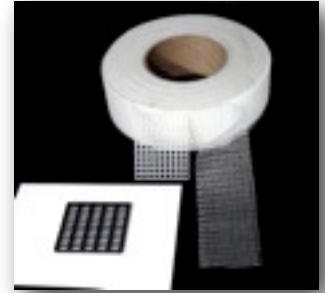
Pauline F Muth of pfm bonsai

Please send me other hints, we can share with bonsai people.

Consider using fiberglass dry wall tape to cover holes on smaller bonsai pots rather than the plastic or metal mesh we normally use.

When gluing wire to rock:

- if the rock is smooth and flat, use super glue with baking soda as a catalyst to attach the wires.
- if the rock is rough, use a plumber's 2 part epoxy to attach the wires



Keep small ( shohin bonsai or mame bonsai) bonsai and accents from overheating and drying out too quickly by keeping the pots sunk in a granite gravel tray.

During hot weather, lean a board on the southern side of larger pots to keep the pot from heating up too much.



Use a cloth or paper to block out sections of a tree you are thinking about cutting off to give you a clearer picture of your idea.

Photograph trees, before during and after work, to help you work. Using your computer, change the photo to black and white to get a clear idea.



Cover the surface of soil around a developing bonsai with mountain moss. It will keep the surface soil damp and thereby promote nebari. Be sure to wait until after bird nest building season before putting on the mountain moss!



When a branch is too stiff to bend, drill out the core hard wood before applying raffia and wire to bend. Use tie downs to bring branches down.

Cutting a root off a tree like an elm? Plant it and let it grow.

come see how it looks



today by visiting the greenhouse.



NEVER leave a tree in a hot car!!

Do not leave branch cuts ROUND....they do not heal well.  
Use a sharp knife to make an eye shaped cut parallel to the branch. This will insure that the wound heals neatly. Learn which trees need to have their branches cut in two steps so that the vascular tissue has time to die back naturally without injuring other branches you want to keep.



Wait until wood has dried out to use power tools.

Remove bark from branches while they are still green for easier removal.

Save and label all species of bark and wood to use  
Bark pieces can be glued over unhealed wounds to disguise them or other flaws

Pieces of wood can be carved to replace Jin that looks too small on a bonsai that has grown over the years. Be sure to match species of bark and or wood

in these uses.

MORE NEXT MONTH...hope some of yours will be included.

## FEATURED SPECIES: *Carpinus turczaninowii* Korean Hornbeam

By Pauline F Muth copyright 1997, updated 2002,2004,2013

The Korean Hornbeam is a relatively small tree in nature found in Zones 5 to 7. It prefers free draining soils and sunny areas. It shows some drought resistance. In the hills of Korea it can develop wonderful grey bumpy and massive trunks do the rigors of weather.



This hornbeam has shiny, smooth, small leaves placed alternately on fine branches. This fine ramification makes it an ideal specimen for bonsai in all styles. The bark is light in color with a wonderful bumpy texture. It is a rapid grower in the spring that needs frequent trimming to develop a well- branched masterpiece. The wood is extremely dense and hard.

When **trimming branches**, take care to select the cutting point so that the new branch will develop in the direction planned. Remove buds or young branches that point upwards or downwards early in the spring. Allow several leaves to develop, then cut back to one or two leaves on each new branch. This species develops short internodal spaces as long as they get enough light. If the tree develops its leaves in full sun, they will be tolerant of full sun but if the leaves develop in some shade or in a greenhouse before being placed outside, leaf burn may occur when placed in full sun due to a thin cuticle layer. In this case, defoliation ( if the tree is healthy) will allow the development of fresh healthy leaves. The newer leaves, having developed in full sun, will have the cuticle thickness needed to prevent burn.



It will take a **hard pruning** early in the spring before the buds swell. This tree can be cut back to trunk only if it was growing vigorously the season before the cut. Hard pruning done later in the season can result in dieback. If this late pruning is necessary, be sure to leave a stub that can be removed during the next spring. Fall produces a wonderful color change from apricot to yellow as the weather cools and the leaves drop. **Shaping of trunks** must be done on very young seedlings, as the wood of the hornbeam truly deserves its nickname of ironwood.

**Wiring** is best achieved during the winter months. Take care to protect the buds while wiring. If the tree is frozen, wait until spring before bending the wired branches.

Medium to large specimens are becoming rare since Korea has stopped collecting. If you see them for sale, do not think long before buying or you will miss the opportunity. Specimens grown from seed or cuttings often produce straight trunks well suited for group or forest plantings. **To develop good taper** for individual specimens, the tree must be kept cut back severely in stages as it grows. After each cut back, a new leader must be developed. Over time, using a series of cut backs, a tapered tree can be developed. Sacrifice branches grown low on the trunk can also be used to develop a good thick trunk. The scarring that will develop when these branches are eventually removed and can add to the character of the tree. The cambium and bark tends to pull back from large cuts so you will need to treat the fresh cut. Interestingly enough a hemorrhoid ointment with vitamins works well to heal cuts on this and other deciduous trees. Be careful with exposed wood. If it is left untreated, it may rot. If this occurs, carve out the affected areas and apply a good wood hardener to the area.

**Outdoors in the growing season** keep the bonsai well watered. Hornbeams quickly show heat and dryness stress in pots. This tree benefits from addition of gypsum to the soil to help prevent leaf burn. Stress damage will affect the tree for the remainder of the summer. It will recuperate the next spring. Take care to give developing trees adequate water during the summer months. Older specimens should be kept evenly moist but they will not require the extra water younger trees need. The twigs of the hornbeam are easily killed by harsh winter frost so winter protection is needed. In zone 4, a cool greenhouse is needed or a cold storage area that does not fall below zero F. Storage at about 30 degrees F is ideal.

**Fertilize** with a weak water-soluble solution throughout the growing season or use a product time released product such Nutricote. Add a dose of trace elements and iron in the early spring if your fertilizer lacks them. A dose of iron each month in the growing season will insure dark green foliage. A dose of full strength liquid fertilizer at the start of the growing season is a good idea regardless of the type of fertilizer you prefer. In the fall, fertilize with Potash to stabilize the roots for the winter. Fall is also a good time to apply phosphate but avoid nitrogen compounds, as they will provide weak growth that will die in winter and weaken your tree. Hornbeam grows best with a symbiotic fungus in the soil. Spores are available commercially or if you live near a stand of hornbeam you will find the fungus as white threads among the leaf litter under the trees. This can be transferred into your soil.

Watch for wire damage in the spring as the new growth come on very strong and tends to hide the wires.

Young trees need **repotting** every other year. Mature trees should be checked and repotted only when needed. All repotting must be done in early spring before the leaves bud out. Hornbeams appreciate an open soil that will provide strong root growth. Use an open soil mix that allows good drainage, a reserve of oxygen, and that can be kept evenly damp. When repotting after the leaves have opened take care to not disturb the roots.

Watch for borers, otherwise, I have not seen much in the way of insect damage on these trees.

Comments, questions and suggestions are always welcome. Note that my writing is based on my experience with the species in Zone 4 upstate New York. Always check with experienced local people for the best advice on care during the growing season and for winter storage if needed.

Below is my most recent Korean Hornbeam Project. I combined 3 tree that have been around for a while that had some faults making them poor individual specimens but I like them as this Land and Water Penjing with additional work on twig development in the future.





## What is happening in the bonsai world...

Last month we featured three great upcoming events:

MABS in April: <http://midatlanticbonsai.freeservers.com>

ABS in September [loveofbonsai.com](http://loveofbonsai.com)

BCI China in April <http://www.bonsai2013.org>

### Artisans Cup

October 4th - 6th, 2013  
Portland Art Museum  
Portland, Oregon



The Artisans Cup of Portland Bonsai Exhibition is the showcase of America's new movement to raise aesthetic appreciation and craftsmanship in the art of bonsai. Created and conceptualized by bonsai professionals Ryan Neil and Michael Hagedorn, the show's venue in the renowned Portland Art Museum catapults bonsai into the world of fine art. Bonsai artists and aficionados from around the country will be joining us in Portland October 4th-6th, 2013 to contribute to and celebrate bonsai at its finest. Come take part and help reforge, refine, and reinvent bonsai in a manner the West has yet to see. <http://www.artisanscupofportland.com>

### International Bonsai Colloquium

June 7-9 Rochester NY



Featuring Kathy Shaner, Ryan Neil, Peter Warren, Dennis Makishima, David DeGroot and Wm. N. Valavanis.

Unique teaching program, vendors and exhibition.

Special 50<sup>th</sup> year Valavanis Commemorative Bonsai Exhibit and book release.

<http://www.internationalbonsai.com/index.html>.

### MHSB meeting Sketching Bonsai with Dorothy Raymond February 24



At a loss for what to do with that newly purchased tree or the one that's been sitting on your bench for a year or more? Sketching your tree can help. Join Dorothy Raymond for a sketching workshop at our next meeting. Bring a sketch pad or any white paper, graph paper, a ruler if you have one, pencils (colored if you like) and of course trees to sketch.

# February Offerings at pfm bonsai

Are you ready to start the year off learning some more bonsai techniques?

Do you need a friendly place to work on your bonsai during our free open workshops?



## February 2, 3 and 23 Free Open Workshops

A time to work on your trees in the company of friends. These are subject to schedule changes...please call ahead to be sure the studio is open. 10-5 each day except Super Bowl Sunday...we will close at 3 PM.



## February 16-17 10 to 5 each day

[Martin Schmalenberg Study Group](#) Study once a month with Martin Schmalenberg. We started this group in January. The bonsai worked on during that session were incredible. We are looking for a few more students to round out the group. People who came last month were able to dramatic improvements in the design of their trees. One thing for certain: [Your trees will dramatically improve due to your work with Marty.](#) The fee will be \$100 per person for a two day experience or \$55 for a single day. [There are a few openings left. Call the studio to reserve a place. Bring a good number of trees, tools, wire and your lunch.](#)



## Monday evenings 6:30 PM Study Group

Come and play and learn with our Monday study group. There is no charge for this group. We come together and work on a project. Or we simply bring some of our trees to work on. Some join in a pizza before beginning .we chip in for the food. In December we made small scrolls to use in shohin sized tokonoma. Who knows what the next project will be? We are open to ideas.

**FEBRUARY 9 AND 10TH THE STUDIO WILL BE CLOSED. PAULINE WILL BE PRESENTING AT FADDEGONS NURSERY**



## **pfm bonsai studio supports**

Mohawk Hudson Bonsai Society <http://mohawkhudsonbonsai.org>

MidAtlantic Bonsai Societies - [www.midatlanticbonsai.freesevers.com](http://www.midatlanticbonsai.freesevers.com)

American Bonsai Society - [www.absbonsai.org](http://www.absbonsai.org)

Bonsai Clubs International - [www.bonsai-bci.com](http://www.bonsai-bci.com)

National Bonsai Foundation - [www.bonsai-nbf.org](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org)

Artisans Cup in Portland <http://www.artisanscupofportland.com>.

**please visit [www.pfmbonsai.com](http://www.pfmbonsai.com) for current happenings at the studio**

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