



Founded January 1964

JOURNAL



January 2017

www.torontobonsai.org

Schedule of events

Meetings are held at the **TBG** ([Toronto Botanical Garden](#)), located at **777 Lawrence Avenue East** (at Leslie St.), Toronto, in the studio rooms upstairs. The first meeting is free for non-members.

Bonsai 101: 7:00-7:30

Bonsai 101 is held in Studio #2 upstairs at the TBG. Beginners should read '[INTRODUCTION TO BONSAI](#)' (click on link), posted on the [TBS web site](#) prior to attending. This class was created for beginners to bonsai.

Jan 9: John Biel will lead an informal session for beginners, answering your questions on bonsai. For members not attending the 101 meeting, please be respectful of this session and keep the noise to a minimum.

General meetings: 7:45-10:00, upstairs studios 1, 2, 3

Jan 9: Chris Hendry (The Bonsai Guy) will give a presentation on tropical bonsai, followed by a question and answer period. Chris will bring in a supply of black lava rock, sifted and in the size range between 1/8" and 1/4", at a cost of \$20 (cash only) for 1 bag, and \$35 for 2 bags. He is willing to try to fill any special requests if you contact him in advance at: chris.hendry@hotmail.com.

After the break, 6 tropical trees will be styled by 6 senior members. Participate in the styling of each tree by traveling from table to table. Raffle tickets (1 for \$2, 3 for \$5) will be sold for the trees and there will be 6 winners at the end of the night.

Feb 13: silent auction & social

Mar 13: bonsai soil mixes, fertilizers; Japanese maple demo.

Apr 10: Angelo Dumitru - slide show of collected trees

Spring show: Saturday, May 27– Sunday, May 28

TBG Floral hall 8 am: bring in your bonsai, bonsai stands, shitekusa, suiseki, and scrolls for display. Volunteers are needed for set up, take down. Open to public 11 am - 5 pm.

Social/Critique: Saturday evening.

Sales area: also be in the floral hall. Trees, bonsai soil, tools, wire, books, and other materials are available for purchase. If you are selling items, you must volunteer to help, and fill out some [forms](#) (click on link).

Outside our club:

April 28-30: 8th World Bonsai Convention (WBC)

The convention will be held in Omiya, Saitama City (north of Tokyo), Japan. Visit the [WBFF website](#) for more details.

Nov 3–11: 14th Asia-Pacific Bonsai & Suiseki Convention and Exhibition

Held in Changhua, Taiwan. See the [BCI website](#) for details.

On the cover: Mike McCallion's twin tree style blue rug juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*, 'Blue Rug') bonsai. Purchased by Mike from Nick Lenz several years ago – see story inside. Photo by Mike Pochwat, from the 2016 fall show.

Presidents message: practice makes you better, not perfect

by Carlos Bras

I have been asked many times by newcomers to the TBS how to go about improving their bonsai skills, and the usual answer I give is: practice, practice, practice! That may seem like an overly simplistic approach, but there is some science that backs it up. Malcolm Gladwell (journalist for 'The New Yorker', author of '[Outliers: the story of success](#)', a book that examines the factors that contribute to high levels of success) gave us the 10,000-hour rule. This rule is a bit extreme, because it cites that all greatness comes from practicing 90 minutes every day for 20 years. If you're like me, you don't have that kind of time on your hands! But everyone has some free time every day, even if it's only a few minutes.

The best thing I did to increase my knowledge of bonsai was joining our society back in 2001. Participating in as many workshops as I could, listening in on discussions, taking out books from our TBS library, going to backyard socials, seeing members' bonsai in different stages of development, were all crucial to my development as a bonsai artist. There is a lot to learn at our meetings but, unfortunately the club only meets ten times a year, and our meetings generally go for only 3 hours. If you apply the 10,000 hour rule, it would take about 333.33 years of meetings to become a bonsai expert - challenging to say the least, and most likely impossible, even with modern science.

Attending the meetings of the TBS is great start, but we, as bonsai artists, must be more engaged in our own growth to improve in bonsai, or even become a bonsai expert.

Here is what has worked for me, and I am by no means a bonsai expert:

- Spend time with your trees; don't just water them, but study them and think about their development
- Constantly read and look at bonsai-related materials
- Keep a digital library of trees from online sources or books
- Create or join online bonsai study groups with fellow bonsai artists
- Use the internet: it has wealth of bonsai information and many of the experts have their own websites, blogs, and vlogs or YouTube channels. Some of my favourites are:
 - <http://www.bonsaiempire.com/>
 - <https://valavanisbonsaiblog.com/>
 - <http://www.bjorvalabonsaistudio.com/>
 - <http://www.bonsainut.com/>
 - <http://ibonsaiclub.forumotion.com/f1-members-trees>

I hope these sources may help you in your goal to improve in bonsai. There's a lot more to practicing bonsai than picking up some scissors and wire, so don't expect to become a bonsai expert immediately. But if you dedicate a little more of your time to developing your bonsai imagination, it will stop being a hobby and become an artistic expression that you will be proud of, and bring pleasure to others.

On the cover: blue rug juniper bonsai

by Mike McCallion

If you see a mature blue rug juniper bonsai, there is a very good chance it started out as a project by Nick Lenz. 40 or so years ago, Nick started training a number of blue rug junipers from nursery stock, and those which became successful bonsai are now scattered through collections across North America.

I acquired these two trunks a number of years ago from Nick; at the time they were in deep training baskets, and quite full and healthy.



These trees show the result of many years of advance planning. Most of the jins were already there; Nick had planned them early on and trained many branches down on the same angle, to grow for a couple of decades in order to have appropriately thick jin. I created a few more to open up some space.

A fair portion of these trees' lives have been spent growing in the ground, surrounded by wire mesh to keep rapacious deer away. I don't know if these two were at one point in a forest planting, or if they didn't make the cut and have always led individual lives. I planted them together, in as shallow a pot as I dared for the initial transition from deep training basket to this bonsai pot. A considerable amount of root was removed from the bottom of the trees and also where needed to get them close together.

Having lived with them planted this way for several years now, I can see that there are some needed changes to the planting. The larger trunk on the left looks better if viewed more from the right - it gives the branches more separation, and the smaller trunk looks better from a bit to the left. It could also be pushed a little to the back of the larger trunk, and they could be brought closer together.

I am also on the hunt for a shallower and wider pot for this pair, which will add to the natural landscape feel they already create. There is often debate about the lower branches on the smaller trunk - to me they add a sense of depth to the setting, and so for now, they stay.

This bonsai takes quite a bit of time to maintain each season, and I'm certainly not running out to add another blue rug to my collection anytime soon! It's an unusual species and an uncommon design, but it held its own when it made an appearance last summer at the US National Bonsai Show in Rochester.

Overwintering bonsai artists

by David Johnson (*reprinted from TBS website*)

During the winter period, our temperate trees get their beauty sleep, when they become dormant, but bonsai enthusiasts don't have to. Sure it is convenient and even necessary to take a break or go on a vacation. However, while our trees are hibernating, we should be plotting. The winter break can be used to make plans for our trees by doing a little research.

Books and Magazines

We should try to learn all we can about our particular trees. A good source is the Toronto Bonsai Society (TBS) library. There is a wealth of information in the magazines and books. Some specialize on certain trees, others are more general. For example, one issue of the British Bonsai Magazine has had articles on Scots pine and English hawthorn, both trees that are owned by our members. International Bonsai, in publication for twenty-two years, must have covered most everyone's tree at least once and probably twice.

The Japanese bonsai exhibition books provide a wealth of design ideas. Sometimes we get stuck on what to do with our trees. Thinking about the design helps, but books can provide new ideas. The more books you look through, the greater the likelihood of finding something to inspire you.

For those who have already read those books and magazines and have seen the videos a while ago, it is amazing how much more you will get out of them the second or third time around. This may reflect the point Walter Pall made about the "generations" bonsai artists go through, as they learn more about bonsai. The books and magazines which we have already read become clearer - sometimes surprisingly so, as we leap from one generation to the next.

Plans and Sketches

Like any good student, books are not just read and then put back on the shelf. We could take notes, jot down references, formulate plans and make sketches of those plans. A bonsai record sheet is invaluable because it includes basic information about the tree in addition to an annual and monthly breakdown of everything you have done, or plan do to your tree. This file can also include photos of your tree as it progresses and notes of any brilliant ideas you may have for your trees.

Drawing your tree (if they have been put away for the winter you could use photos) gives you a better feel for your tree. The drawing doesn't have to be a Rembrandt. A stick drawing is better than nothing. After drawing the tree as it is, draw the tree as you want to re-design it and possibly its future look. These drawings also have a practical application. Place them in front of you as you work on your tree next spring and use them like blueprints. One has less chance of going off the beaten track if you have a road map in your hands. I can vouch for that from personal good and bad experiences.

Concrete ideas and questions that emerge from your research can also be the basis for discussions with other members who can draw on the decades of bonsai experience in the TBS. Plans can also be made for spring wiring and repotting or matching a specific tree with a number of container options.

Clean-up

Winter allows for a general clean-up and preparation of your tools, wire, hardware, pots, soil and other accessories, chores that we neglect during a busy growing season. Tools get special attention although their maintenance should really be on a daily or weekly basis.

Plan your Work, Work your Plan

Our trees can only improve by taking positive action. Progress occurs on the basis of an informed opinion. A little research and planning can go a long way towards improving our trees. But if this planning doesn't answer all the questions, at least it will be the first step towards finding something you can begin to work with.

This is John Walton

by Sylvia Leroy

John joined the TBS (Toronto Bonsai Society) in 1974, shortly after meeting Norman Haddrick and Edith McKenzie at the TBS bonsai display at the Horticultural Center at the CNE (Canadian National Exhibition). The display at the CNE was an event organized by the TBS to display their trees and to attract more members to the organization....it worked for John. He was not new to the look of bonsai, but his introduction to a group willing to teach and guide was irresistible. The group he adopted in the club was keen. John was influenced in his early years by them, as well as masters like the famous John Naka, Bill Valavanis of Rochester, and Frank Nakamura. He also dated, by chance, the grand-daughter of one of the founding members of the TBS, who passed archival material on to the club.

John has served the TBS as President, Vice President, and Recording Secretary...no mean feat in the day before computers and email. Later, his association with the club waned...life happened, but he came back to the fold as George Reichert's helper in 1997, when the TBS hosted the BCI (bonsai clubs international) conference. John still volunteers regularly as a workshop instructor and speaks at the general meetings on bonsai topics.



Although only 24 years old when he joined, he came with a green thumb and an interest in horticulture, passed along to him from his grandparents. To be successful in bonsai, John believes you need to learn basic horticultural principles as they apply to growing tree species for bonsai. As well, it is helpful to develop your artistic flair for design and bonsai styling....and practice, practice, practice - read and practice constantly. Regularly attending bonsai shows and conferences is also very important in order to see the best bonsai on this continent and beyond.

Constant practice means many trees are going to die before you achieve some mastery and comfort in the art of bonsai. John is still mourning the loss of his beloved larch forest, which perished in December, 2013, after the ice storm. The death of bonsai has never gotten easy for him, and he finds himself in a constant fight to make conditions as perfect as possible in order to limit 'total permanent jin'.

John presently has approximately 25 trees, mostly collected cedar and larch, native to Ontario.

John excitedly revealed his true bonsai passion, the joy of finding the 'right' tree for him in the wild. Of all the aspects of bonsai, collecting trees is the most enjoyable for him. More experienced club members, such as Norman Haddrick, and George and Gisela Reichert, introduced John to the techniques of collecting. He has spent many hours with a number of keen collectors over the years, scouring miles of scrub in order to find that one tree.

Collecting trees requires special skills developed over time. The trips themselves can be quite arduous, requiring extensive planning. And collecting is more enjoyable with friends. John advises giving a concerted effort to only collect the 'perfect' tree, which has at least an even chance of survival.

He does an initial rough styling at the collecting site and carries out only what he needs. He recalls times when he was establishing his collection that he often took off for a weekend alone and camped in or close to the collecting area. Collecting was over when the car was full.

John is attracted to our native cedars for their beautiful twisted trunks and shari (deadwood on the trunk of the tree), and the larches for their dark trunks and golden autumn foliage. He described digging up a cedar tree from limestone. The best cedar trees seem to always be embedded in a pile of broken limestone. The roots must be extracted in stages. You follow each root, and pry off the rock, literally digging the tree out of the limestone by hand, and finding as much of the live root as possible.

John has talked about the viability of collecting of trees from nature. Does tree collection further deplete the number of old trees available?...Yes, but nature also has a way of killing trees as well, which die by natural causes in their natural habitat. A collected tree may have a better than even chance of surviving longer than if it had remained in the wild. Many of the trees he has collected were on properties slated for cottage development. The numbers of bonsai artists collecting trees in Canada are also relatively few. Bonsai collectors must collect responsibly, and respect protected areas.

If any member wishes to learn more about bonsai John recommends that they be more assertive in asking experienced members for help and information. He believes that mentoring new or inexperienced members by more experienced members might accelerate their progress as a bonsai practitioner.

Announcements

Workshops

Workshops are held during our monthly Monday night meetings, on weekends, and in backyards on Saturdays during the summer. To register, contact **Kem Shaw** (see back cover), or check in at the membership desk at 7 p.m.

Membership renewal

Your TBS membership comes due in September at the beginning of the club calendar year. If you have not renewed yet, we sent you an email reminder recently. Please pay your dues on or before the January meeting. If we do not receive them by that time, you will no longer receive information from the club in the form of emails or **The Journal**. If you plan to participate in any club activities, you are expected to renew your membership. We have an event-filled year you won't want to miss! If you cannot make it to this meeting, or remember to bring payment, send an email to **Sylvia Le Roy** (on back cover) and she will confirm your membership. You are welcome to use e-transfer or you can mail a cheque to the address included on the membership form.

TBS elections

Our club elections are upcoming in June. In keeping with process, we will be organizing a nomination committee for candidates.

Coffee, refreshments & clean up

We are in dire need of volunteers for the coffee preparation at meetings. If we had just a few volunteers we could take turns and share the job, making it lighter work for everyone involved. Some people have been doing it for a long time, which sometimes interferes with their ability to participate in meetings. If several people volunteer now, we can enjoy coffee and refreshments at each meeting: some to prepare, some to clean up, etc. We all enjoy our coffee and tea, so help out! Please leave your name with **Sylvia Le Roy** (see back cover) if you are willing to help a little.

Bonsai tools?

You need bonsai tools; we sell bonsai tools, among other paraphernalia. Contact **Gim Retsinas** (see back cover) to order.

Rules

Yes – there are bonsai rules. Get to know [Brent Walston's](#) set.

Bjorn Bjorholm

See how Bjorn deals with a “pigeon breast” in his [online mugo pine demo](#). Visit his [website](#) and [vlog](#).

Bonsai without borders global summit

Bill Valavanis just came back from the 'Bonsai Without Borders' exposition in Nanxsum (near Shanghai), China, where he worked alongside many other bonsai experts from around the world, including Bjorn. Check his [bonsai blog](#).

TBS website

Angelo has loaded the pictures from our recent fall show: <http://torontobonsai.org/galleries/tbs-shows/2016-fall/>

Wanted: club vice-president

We are actively looking for a vice-president, to help Carlos, learn the ropes, and take over the presidency in June, 2017. Please contact Carlos (on back cover).

Forms

The membership form, introduction to bonsai, bonsai record form, and the sales sheet form are located under 'Documents' (at the top right of the screen) on the **TBS website**: <http://torontobonsai.org/documents/>

TBS on Facebook

The TBS is on [Facebook](#). (Click on link and like us today.)

Bonsai Penjing Canada

[Bonsai Penjing Canada](#) promotes our club, and other Canadian clubs.

Publishing deadline

The publishing deadline for the February Journal is January 30. Please forward all photos, articles, notifications and materials to gquinn@hotmail.com before then.

Links to local bonsai clubs

Bonsai society at the RBG: <http://www.BonsaiSocietyatRBG.com>

Matsuyama bonsai society: <http://www.informdurham.com/record/OSH1103>

Misseto bonsai club: <http://www.missetobonsai.org/>

Kitchener-Waterloo bonsai society: <http://www.kwbonsai.com>

Buffalo bonsai society: <http://www.buffalobonsaisociety.com/>

Ottawa bonsai society: <http://www.ottawabonsai.org>

Societe de bonsai et de penjing de Montreal: <http://bonsaimontreal.com/#&panel1-5>

Bonsai Society of Upstate New York: <http://www.bonsaisocietyofupstateny.org/>

Landscape Ontario: <https://landscapeontario.com/bonsai>

Regular TBS meetings

Meetings take place on the second Monday of every month, except July and August, at the TBG (Toronto Botanical Gardens), located at 777 Lawrence Avenue East, at Leslie Street, in the studio rooms upstairs at 7:45 pm. The general meetings frequently include demonstrations of bonsai techniques, critiques of bonsai trees, and workshops, in which each participant styles a tree with the help of an experienced member. These meetings are preceded at 7:00 p.m. by the Bonsai 101 beginner sessions.

A small fee is charged for workshops; a tree, wire and an instructor are provided. To participate in workshops, it is necessary to register in advance of the meeting so that materials can be provided.

Members are encouraged to bring in bonsai to show and work on during the meetings. Wire is provided at no charge. Non-members may attend a meeting at no charge to see if the club is of interest to them.

Library hours and policy

The library is open to members at the beginning of our regular meetings. Members may borrow books free of charge for one month. Late returns cost \$2 per month with a minimum charge of \$2. Please return all materials during the next meeting, and before the summer break.

Tools & supplies

Tools and supplies are sold by the club at most meetings. It is a good idea to contact the 'Tools & Supplies' executive member in advance of the meeting for specific tools and supplies.

TBS executive

President

Carlos Bras
carlos@offthebench.ca

Vice-President

- vacant

Treasurer

John Hoffman
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Recording Secretary

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Membership Secretary

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New Member secretary

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Bonsai 101 coordinator

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Visit the Toronto Bonsai Society's web site, at:
www.torontobonsai.org

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