



# SNIPS 'N CLIPS

A Publication of The San Antonio Bonsai Society, Inc.

<http://sanantoniobonsai.org>

JULY 2021

VOLUME 46 NUMBER 07

## BONSAI CALENDAR

THE MEETING THIS MONTH BE AT  
KEVIN AND HATTIE'S HOME

### Updates to "Bonsai Calendar"

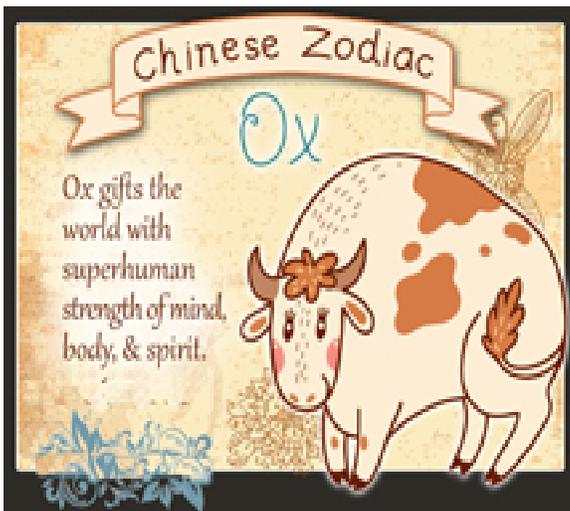
July 8<sup>th</sup> – No Club Meeting

July 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> – In-person Club  
meeting and pot sale (Kevin and  
Hattie's House), 9:30am

August 12<sup>th</sup> – In-person Club Meeting  
on Curating and Bonsai Manage-  
ment, location TBD, 6:30pm

THE OX IS MAKING THIS A GREAT  
YEAR!

WE WILL SOON BE BACK TOGETHER,  
PRUNE ON! PRUNE ON!



## President's Message

By

**RYAN O.**

Thank you to all Club members (new and existing) and the public for coming by our Rainbow Gardens-Bandera Exhibit in June. We had a tremendous turnout despite scorching hot temperatures on Saturday and a heavy downpour on Sunday. Our exhibit curators were presented with hundreds of questions regarding our displayed trees as well as when each of us were working on various trees of the course of the weekend. I even assisted a young boy in the styling of his first bonsai. Jay N. gave a great impromptu presentation on the art and history of bonsai while working on a juniper and Donna D. worked on a boxwood from the nursery that was raffled off to a lucky winner.

A true highlight was the appearance and meeting of Charles Koll, one of two surviving (the other Marty K.) founding members of SABS. Mr. Koll brought with him the very first published booklet following our incorporation of SABS in 1973. He also brought along our Club's first ever convention booklet. He also brought many pictures of his personal collection he once owned. Below is a photo of Mr. Koll and myself... former and current Club presidents. How cool!!!!



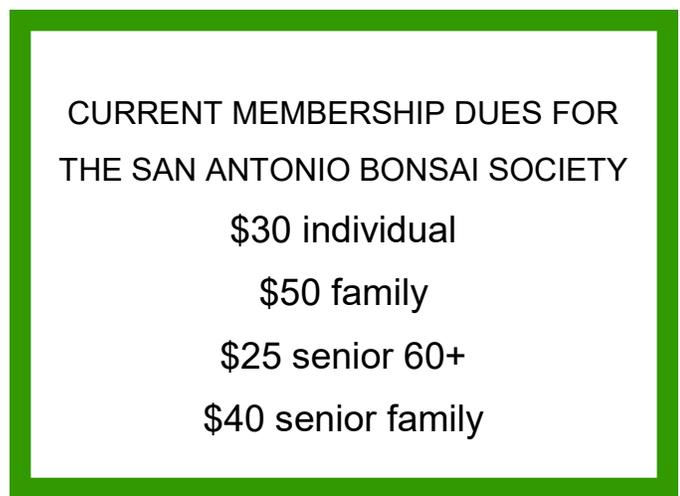
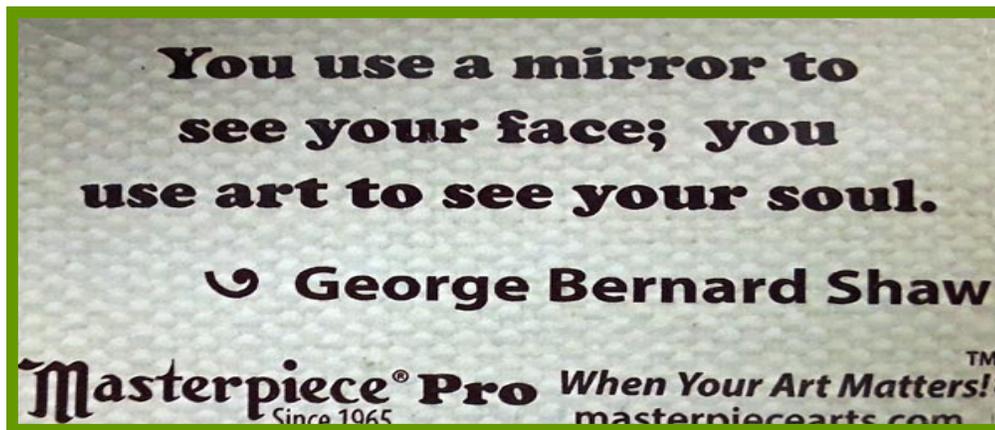
Thank you to (in no particular order) Jay N., Don B., Donna D., Steve Y., and Virgie V. for assisting with this exhibit.

SABS is growing.... We currently have 95 Club members, 432 Facebook followers, and 707 Instagram followers. Many thanks to all those that keep posting to our social media sites to keep us active!!!

This Saturday, SABS and Kevin and Hattie P. are hosting a Triple B... What's a triple B you say??? It stands for **Bonsai, Barbeque, and Beer!!!!!!** Yes, we are having our summer picnic this Saturday at Kevin and Hattie's house at **SATX 78260**. This event begins at 9:30am with a pot sale and bring your own tree workshop. We will have Club sponsored hamburgers and sausages (as well as veg-gie burgers/links) and we are asking for those in attendance to bring sides, desserts, water/soda, and if you choose a small case of beer to share with others. Please also bring lawn chairs, tools, wire, trees to work on, and fat wallets for the pot sale. A raffle shall follow shortly after lunch.

The pot sale includes pots, rocks, tools, stands, and bags of lava and a few potential bonsai. Kevin and Hattie will be donating 20% of sales back to SABS. Saturday's pot sale will accept cash, check, and credit cards while the continuation on Sunday will be cash or check only.

**2022 Convention Update:** About 15 members gathered last month to "re-start" our convention planning meetings. This was an informal meeting to get ourselves back in the groove of where we left off from last August 2020. We discussed various roles within the convention, current supplies, vendors, hotel space, and workshop trees.



## Watering Basics for Bonsai by Vicki A.

Recently I had the opportunity to speak at the SABS June meeting regarding the topic of Watering for Bonsai and was asked to share my notes from the evening. For those of you that don't know me my name is Vicki and I started Bonsai in 2018. It's ironic that I was asked to discuss the topic of watering because it is one of the things that I have struggled with the most. Over the past three years I have killed a handful (okay more than a handful) of trees by improper watering. So, this was a good opportunity for me to do some online research and increase my knowledge of watering. Hopefully you will find some of this information helpful.

As it turns out, watering a tree that is confined to a small container is not as straightforward as you might think. The leading cause of death among Bonsai is from improper watering, either drowning from too much water or dehydration from lack of it.

Let's start by touching on some of the factors that affect the water requirements of our bonsai trees, starting with soil mixture. Using the right soil mixture for your bonsai trees is crucial. It's been said that there are almost as many soil mixes as there are bonsai growers so while I can't give you the perfect mix for your specific needs some items to remember are:

- The soil needs to be able to soak in and retain sufficient water to supply moisture to the bonsai between waterings.
- Excess water needs to be able to drain freely from the pot.
- The particles should be big enough to allow tiny gaps, or air pockets providing oxygen for the roots.

Tree Characteristics such as tree species, tree size, pot size and tree health also impact watering needs.

Different plants use water at different rates, for instance buttonwoods and bald cypress are thirsty specimens while pines and junipers prefer life a little more on the dry side. Unfortunately, there is not enough time to review all the different species & their requirements but a great resource for learning more about specific trees and their water needs is our club "Green Book".

Climate and time of year play a huge role as well. Sunlight, wind, temperature, and humidity all affect how quickly your tree will need watering. Plants use more water during the growing season than they would during the dormant season. During the hottest times of the year, you may need to water several times a day. Wind, like the sun can dry soil out quickly and in high humidity trees will dry out much more slowly

.When is the best time to water your Bonsai? When they are thirsty of course! If they would all dry out at the same time, determining when to water would not be a problem. Unfortunately, this is not the case, watering is a balancing act that must be learned from monitoring your bonsai. However, the simple answer is water when the soil is dry - NOT bone dry, but almost completely dry to the touch.

Cont'd page 4

Although all trees have different water needs there are two basic watering guidelines for almost all Bonsai:

- Allow the soil to dry out between waterings, but never allow the soil to remain bone dry, particularly in the hot sun.
- Water thoroughly when you water. There is an old Japanese saying that goes: **“Water three times - one for the pot, one for the soil, and one for the tree.”**

Remember, a tree that’s planted in free draining soil in a pot with drainage holes can take a good amount of water without the risk of over watering. When you water thoroughly, the water washes the stale air out of the container. If the soil drains properly, excess water runs out of the pot and the available space will contain a mixture of fresh water and air.

Checking the soil daily is crucial to determine if it’s time to water your bonsai. As you become familiar with your trees and the conditions in your own garden this will become more natural. However, there are three methods that will help you know when it is time to water your trees. ***The fingertip method, the chopstick method, and a moisture meter.***

For the fingertip method start by examining the look of the soil. Is it visibly wet or dry? Sometimes the top layer of soil can be misleading. If you have received a brief rain the topsoil may be wet however the soil may be dry below. Likewise, the topsoil may have dried out while the lower soil is still moist. Next push the top layer of soil aside and insert your finger approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 inch into the soil. You should be able to get a sense of how damp the soil is. If the soil is dry to the touch, chances are good that you’re ready to water.

A second method is the chopstick method. Take a chopstick that has no coating on it and gently stick it in the soil of the pot. After a few minutes, remove the chopstick and notice how it looks. If it’s dark and moist with some soil on it, there’s probably no need to water your bonsai now. If it’s the same color as the rest of the chopstick and dry, your bonsai probably needs a good watering.

If the fingertip method and the chopstick method are not scientific enough for you, you can invest in a moisture meter to help take the guesswork out of when to water. Such devices are inexpensive and readily available at most garden centers and online. A moisture meter measures the water content of the soil at the root level of your tree. You simply insert the probe into the soil aiming the tip near the root ball. The scale then shows a moisture level reading. Most scales range from 1 (dry) to 10 (wet), so it’s very easy to read. A level of 3 would indicate it is time to water for many typical bonsai

Now that you have checked the moisture level and determined it’s time to water - what is the best way? Besides natural watering by rainfall there are several methods including overhead watering with watering cans or hoses, and water immersion or dunking.

The overhead watering method simulates natural rainfall using a watering can or hose attachment with a fine spray. You can help ensure that your trees are thoroughly watered by top watering for a few seconds then stop for a few seconds, then top water again.

Repeat as needed making sure water is running out the drainage holes. Be careful making sure you deliver a fine spray of water,

otherwise a strong blast of water can dislodge soil or damage your bonsai. It is generally recommended to use a watering can or hose fitted with a fine rosette tip for just the right spray. If using a watering can, look for one that is rust-resistant with strong welded seams. Stay away from big holes, smaller and more numerous holes provide gentle watering. I soak my watering tools in vinegar occasionally to get rid of lime buildup.

Watering your bonsai can also be done by immersion. For this method - Place the tree and pot in a tub or bin with water up to just below the rim of the pot. Leave the tree for about three minutes. This allows for the water to seep into the smallest cracks. I often see this method used for freshly transplanted bonsai as it helps make sure the entire body of soil is receiving water.

Regular trees in the natural environment can adjust and regulate their water intake by growing more or less roots. If there is not enough water, trees will extend their roots far into the ground searching for moisture. As a result, trees that grow in drier climates have larger root systems. On the flip side, trees that grow in damp conditions where moisture is readily available don't need long roots to get enough water and they tend to develop shallow root systems.

In pots, Bonsai lose their ability to regulate the moisture. They become reliant on us to give the water it needs. There is increased possibility for bonsai to dry out. This leads us to our first common watering problem which is under watering. Never doubt that the quickest way of killing a bonsai is to allow the compost to dry out completely. Plants need water to distribute vital nutrients to their system.

The symptoms of under watering are rapid. The leaves wilt, go dry and crispy and drop off.

#### Some common signs of under watering include:

- Tiny creases on the trunk that indicate the tree is shriveling up.
- The soil feels hard and dry.
- Yellowing or dying leaves.

If your bonsai is completely dried out or the soil has become hydrophobic, watering by immersion can provide a quick fix but only if caught before major damage is done. Watering by immersion will evenly re-wet the soil.

While watering is important, too much water can be fatal. The effects of over watering are more subtle and can take a long time to be detected. ***Over watering creates a permanently wet environment and prevents roots from getting enough oxygen*** and eventually the roots will suffocate and die. One of the first symptoms is the wilting of the leaves and loss of vigor. At the same time, roots start to rot spreading root-rotting bacteria throughout the root ball. As the roots die back the tree gets less and less water.

Unfortunately, the signs of over watering can look similar to plants that are facing drought stress, often causing people to water already waterlogged plants

Cont'd next page.

Signs of over watering include:

- The bonsai looks tired and no longer appears healthy and vibrant.
- Many leaves turn yellow or brown, and eventually fall off.
- The smaller branches of the bonsai may shrink and then die away.
- The roots of the bonsai may appear to be experiencing rotting.
- Roots may smell like decay.
- The trunk may be soft.

Tiny white things present in the soil which is an indication of fungus gnat larva. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If you are likely to be an over-waterer then you may want to consider using a fungicide every 4 to 6 weeks for prevention. Make sure to practice safety and read all instructions when using fungicides.

### ***So let's conclude with some Tips and Best Practices:***

- Remember to check your soil daily
- Check your moisture level where there are roots.
- Don't water if your bonsai soil is still wet.
- Water when the soil feels slightly dry.
- Never allow the tree to completely dry out.
- When watering a healthy tree, pass over it with water at least twice. Deeper containers & more compacted root systems may need a third or fourth pass before it is thoroughly watered.
- Weak trees with poor root systems need extra care. Do not over water these, keep them lightly damp & mist the foliage.
- Always check the temperature of the water before watering. Water inside a garden hose can be scalding hot in the summer. Test the hose output with your hand, you may need to run the water thru the hose for a bit to ensure water has cooled off.
- Water your bonsai when freezing weather is expected. Root damage can occur if there is not enough water in the pot to insulate the roots when it freezes.
- Water should only stand on the surface of the bonsai pot for a few seconds before sinking in. If it does not sink in quickly, it may be an indication the soil is too dense & should be changed for a better draining mixture or the tree is becoming root bound and may need to be repotted.

***It's not uncommon for us to see a blistering heat spike in San Antonio. Here are some additional steps you may want to take to protect your bonsai:***

- Move your pots closer together, allowing the tree's foliage to provide shelter for the bonsai pots.
- Move the bonsai into the shade.
- Rotate pots so that the lower branches shade the south-facing pot sides.
- Set boards up to shelter the south-facing slope of the pots

*Hamisu is the practice of summer misting.* The light topical watering wets the foliage, trunk, pot and first half inch or so of soil. This is useful especially if you normally water in the morning. When temperatures rise above 90 degrees as they frequently do in San Antonio, your tree will often need this lighter watering in addition to the regular watering schedule. But be careful not to water to late in the day which can lead to fungus problems. Water on foliage should dry before night sets in during the warm months.

- Use burlap to cover or wrap pots. It helps keep the pots cool & you can wet it during the day to help keep pot temperatures down.
- If you find that small containers are drying out too quickly, try nestling them in a tray filled with sand or pumice. Thirsty plants such as bald cypress can be placed in trays of water which allow the roots to soak up the additional moisture they need. I like to add some Mosquito Bits to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in these moist conditions. (They are safe for plants).

At some point you may want to consider building a shade structure and using shade cloth or a trellis to provide sun protection.

Watering bonsai the RIGHT way takes time and practice. But think of this time as “quality time with the kids”. It gives you a daily opportunity to visit the trees and inspect each one to see how it is doing.

Sources: Michael Hagedorn - <https://crataegus.com/>; Bonsai Tree Gardner - <https://www.bonsaitreegardener.net/>; Bonsai4me - <http://www.bonsai4me.com/>; Bonsai Sanctum - <https://www.bonsaisanctum.com/>; Bonsai Learning Center <https://bonsailearningcenter.com/>; Bonsai Outlet - <https://www.bonsaioutlet.com/>

THE END



The informal upright style (Moyogi) is considered the most popular shape in all bonsai, especially suited to our native Ashe Juniper.

Our logo, represented by this informal style stands for the informal nature of the San Antonio Bonsai Society, Inc. This popular, interesting style depicts the objectives of the Society—promoting participation and enjoyment of Bonsai.

The emblem was adopted as the official logo

---

FACEBOOK: @sanantoniobonsai      TWITTER: SATXBonsai

INSTAGRAM: @sanantoniobonsai

**THE SAN ANTONIO BONSAI SOCIETY, INC.**

[sanantoniobonsai.org](http://sanantoniobonsai.org)

Advertising for Snips 'N Clips is based on the minimum size of 3 1/2" by 2 1/2" for \$35 per year. Single ads of the above size can be run for \$5. Ads must be camera ready. The Editor must receive changes in existing ads by the 20th of the month preceding the month of publication. Send ads and payment to San Antonio Bonsai Society, Inc., Attn: Advertising, P.O. Box 6658, San Antonio, Texas, 78209. For situations other than the above, please contact the Editor, [two2views@yahoo.com](mailto:two2views@yahoo.com). Original articles from Snips 'N Clips may be reprinted only in their entirety. Full credit must be given the author and to Snips 'N Clips.

All correspondence should be addressed to:

**San Antonio Bonsai Society, Inc.**

**P.O. Box 6658**

**San Antonio, Texas, 78209**

The *San Antonio Bonsai Society, Inc.* is a member of the *Lone Star Bonsai Federation, Inc.*

*Bonsai Clubs International*, and the *American Bonsai Society*,

*SABS is a non-profit 501c (3) organization* Newsletter editor: Donna D. [two2views@yahoo.com](mailto:two2views@yahoo.com)

**San Antonio Bonsai Society, Inc. P.O. Box 6658 San Antonio, Texas, 78209**

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: [two2views@yahoo.com](mailto:two2views@yahoo.com)

Technical Support to Board of Directors Ryan O.

