

Newsletter of the  
**Hukyu Bonsai Society**

hukyubonsai@hotmail.com of Tampa SEPTEMBER 2006



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In lieu of September's program on moss and accent plants (see announcement on page 2), this grouping of articles from the Bonsai Site (BonsaiSite.com) may prove interesting, informational, and could possibly spur discussion on the topic at our club meeting this coming Saturday. ~Esther

### *Accent Plants for Bonsai...*



Bonsai accent plantings (not bonsai under-plantings) are used to complement the formal bonsai, and are usually small plants such as grasses (like [Mondo Grass](#)), dandelions, dwarf bamboo or seasonal plants such as the bulbs 'Spring Starflower' and 'Rose Grass'. Accent plants are planted in small, colorful containers and displayed alongside the actual bonsai. They are not to be trimmed in the same way as a bonsai and should be left to grow relatively freely. They also are an important element in the Tokonoma arrangement.

### *Underplanting and Accent Plants*

*(Ground Cover and Accompaniment Plants for Bonsai)*

Article written by Kevin Bailey, of [The Vale Of Clwyd Bonsai Society](#).

When exhibiting Bonsai formally, they are kept uncluttered. A minimal underplanting of well chosen and perfectly grown moss is traditional. Many judges prefer this to only cover a small portion of the pot's surface. A well chosen accent plant, in a small separate pot, is better for showing than dense undergrowth. Accent plants also allow the designer to build on the theme started by the tree.

If you are growing purely for your own pleasure, a little more freedom is allowable. Choosing an underplanting scheme can add greatly to the charm of a composition.

How do you maintain the theme of your bonsai with appropriate plants? A root over rock windswept tree, emulates the struggle for life at the tree line, high in the mountains. This or any other "high in the mountains" styled tree would therefore provide a natural home for some carefully chosen miniature alpine plants. There is a bewildering variety of these at many garden centres. Some are termed "choice" - often meaning more difficult to grow. Others grow too large to be in scale with bonsai. So get some advice and ask for the slower growers that remain small.

Continued on page 3



## September: Guidelines for Care

**Weather Protection and Location** - For tender leafed plants, only morning sun is best. If the temperature drops below 50 degrees, then tropicals need to be protected.

**Watering** - Water as needed, but as the days get cooler begin to reduce watering. Don't let the soil stay very wet or soggy.

**Feeding** - Continue feeding with balanced fertilizer (ex. 1/2 strength 10-10-10) about every two weeks, or switch to once a week feeding at 1/4 strength of package directions. For pines and especially black pines, use 2 parts cottonseed meal and 1 part bonemeal. Mix this combination with a little soil and sprinkle over the area to be fed.



**Styling** - Continue your pruning program to maintain your plants' form. You may also wire trees but monitor their growth around such wire.

**Repotting** - You can repot most established tropicals except buttonwood or dwarf black olive.

## September Meeting

On September 4, I received an email from Alan Stafford stating that he would not be able to speak on Mosses and Accent Plants at our September meeting. He had surgery on 6/16 and 9/1 and is confined to a wheelchair. I am disappointed as I had looked forward to this topic and I wish him a speedy recovery.

The meeting will be open for members' input. If you have an idea or topic for the September meeting, please call me at 813-231-6837. I know that several of our members are capable of speaking on any number of topics on short notice.

This is also an opportunity to bring in a plant that you would like help with. If our beginner members take advantage of this lull in speakers, we can make the meeting an informal beginners day.

If none of the above materializes, we will have an informal workshop to work on the plants at USF. The plants need to be weeded and the table area needs to be mulched. We also have a fourth table to put together.

Best regards,

Faye Miller

Most alpiners appreciate all the light they can get and resent being kept wet in winter. They usually thrive when they are provided with perfect drainage, so there should be no problem in your bonsai soil. Most mountain plants are adapted to growing in small cracks in the rock with hardly any goodness in what little soil there is. The feeding that suits your trees may prove rich for the alpiners and they would respond by growing more luxuriantly than in their natural habitat. Taking care to feed the tree only at the roots in the pot, will help. Keep fertiliser pellets away from alpiners. Leaves from trees should not be allowed to lie on the alpine plants after autumn leaf fall.

Many alpiners are also suitable for planting in dishes with other styles of tree, so long as their light requirements are satisfied and they are not dripped on, whenever the tree receives water.

As well as providing a good variety of foliage types, most alpiners can be relied upon to flower every spring before the tree bursts into life.

Many of the plants used as underplantings can be used also as accent plants. Beware though that this does not always work the other way around. Some of the weeds (yes weeds!) that make excellent accents are not at all suitable alongside a tree. This is because they will romp around in the pot and rob the tree of nutrients. Eradication can then prove difficult with some of the more persistent ones. Even a total soil renewal can often leave seeds that begin the process of infestation once again.

#### *A few Suitable Alpiners:*

- *Arenaria balearica* is a tiny creeping plant that forms a bright green mossy cover with tiny white starry flowers in spring. It is suited to a moist, shady site.
- *Calluna vulgaris* HEATHER dwarf forms may be kept clipped for compactness
- *Frankenia thymifolia* SEA HEATH The wiry creeping stems of this small plant have grey downy leaves and very small rose pink flowers in summer.
- *Potentilla* DWARF POTENTILLA Several of the dwarf species are suitable and have flowers in shades of yellow.
- *Pratia angulata* is a mat forming, perennial, alpine plant. Slender stems and a small pale green leaves. Stemless, white flowers.
- *Raoulia australis* is a minute, mat forming, blue-grey plant with unobtrusive, stemless yellowish flowers in July. Its leaves and flowers are so small it looks almost like a blue moss.
- *Saxifraga* is a huge genus. Choose the smallest encrusted varieties which form charming hummocks of tiny rosettes. They have spikes of small, generally white flowers in spring. The Mossy and Kabschia groups of saxifrages also have suitable candidates. *Saxifraga oppositifolia* and its varieties have flowers in purple shades.

Apart from the Alpiners, some other small forms of plants are equally suited to life in a bonsai pot. Success is, as always, dependant upon understanding the needs of the plant and matching it to the tree.

#### *Dwarf grasses & Rushes*

Short grasses can be used for accent plants or even beneath trees as long as they appear in scale. Some thinning and the occasional "haircut" with scissors may be beneficial.

- *Festuca glauca* - Dwarf Sweet Rush is a good bluish grass that will suit larger trees.
- *Juncus effusus spiralis* - Spiral Rush a dwarf rush with spiral stems like corkscrews. An acid soil mix kept permanently moist suits these, so only plant with trees that demand constant wet - Alder, Willow, Swamp Cypress etc.
- *Equisetum hiemale* - Dwarf Horsetail (Scouring Rush or Equisetum) Not really a rush, but one of the primitive horsetail ferns. This again is one for damp plantings only. Roots tend to be invasive so be certain that you want this in your bonsai pot before planting, if happy it may prove difficult to eradicate!

#### *Ferns*

A large sized, woodland tree shaped bonsai or any large forest planting would be an appropriate place for some of the smallest fern varieties. Try to get hold of ferns such as *Athyrium filix-femina crispum* the DWARF LADY FERN. This beautiful lime green, diminutive fern spreads by dark coloured rhizomes eventually forming a congested mat.

**Lichens**

These slow growing, colourful patches of unusual plant are a symbiosis between fungi and algae. They are very choosy as to what they will grow upon and where. Some adhere to bark in damp shady areas others only on fully exposed and well drained rocks. The rock type, air and water quality all help determine whether or not they will survive. The easiest way to include some is to use a lichen covered rock from near where you live, paying attention the microclimate it enjoys and place it on the soil. Alternatively detach a small piece of lichen and wedge it into a tiny crevice. If you are lucky it will take hold and spread, but will grow very slowly. I have tried painting my newly made Japanese lantern with yoghurt and cow muck in an effort to encourage lichen growth but all this has achieved (so far) is instant ageing of the surface.

**Mosses**

Choose the drought resistant, short growing varieties. Suitable pieces from slate roofs, on paving slabs, walls and rocks can be dried and crumbled onto the soil surface. Keep shaded and dampened by mist spraying until the mosses are established.

**Succulents**

All of these are happiest in well drained conditions. Sedums, such as stonecrop, tend to be a little on the invasive side but are easily curbed as the stems remain on the surface of the soil and root shallowly. Sempervivums - also known as houseleeks, are hardy, rosette forming succulents. Some grow too large but there are many smaller forms to be found. Sempervivum arachnoideum is my favourite as it remains small and becomes reddish with a fine covering of cobweb like hairs in well drained conditions. Sempervivella alba- a Himalayan plant consisting of many small hairy rosettes with a loose mat forming habit and fleshy, white, daisy-like flowers.

**Herbs**

Dwarf varieties of Thyme form a carpet of tiny deep green leaves and are smothered with tiny purple flowers in spring.

**Some details on accent plants**

The care of all accent plants is comparable to that of mame trees. Watering correctly is the skill that must be mastered before healthy growth will be achieved. In small pots drying out is the greatest obstacle. I find that standing the pots in a tray of peat, sharp sand or vermiculite that is kept constantly damp (not soggy) is the best way to overcome this. Some overhead protection through the winter is advantageous, especially for the alpiners that dislike winter wet. Many are used to being insulated under a layer of deep dry snow in nature.

I have only given details of a few of the suitable plants here. Dedicated accent plant enthusiasts are constantly seeking new and interesting subjects to display alongside their trees. By vigilant observation of all plants you can come across unusual and evocative accent plants. Trying anything that you think may be suitable often leads to surprisingly good results. A single Dandelion, in a miniscule pot, becomes elevated far above the commonly detested weed of our gardens. Surprisingly, the choice of a pot for an accent plant can be just as much of a challenge as that for a prized bonsai specimen. Small pots as used for mame or shohin trees are becoming more readily available. Companies such as Walsall Ceramics Studios now have an excellent range. If you have the time, it pays to look long and hard to find the ones with the best glazes.

A word on availability. Many of the varieties above may be difficult to find in garden centres. Try specialist retailers and bonsai nurseries. If you cannot locate any plant, then the Royal Horticultural Society's Plant Finder is an excellent source of information with listings of over seventy thousand plants and details of which nurseries stock them.

(Incidentally this is an essential to have in the car when travelling. There are a great many specialist nurseries for trees, shrubs, bamboos etc tucked away in obscure areas, many of them with gems well worth seeking out.)

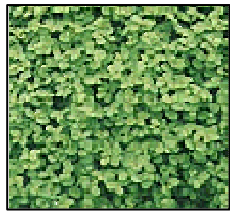
Remember to achieve harmonious groupings, be adventurous in your choices but always keep natural associations in mind. The palette is nature herself, the paintbrush your imagination and the canvas your finished display.

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Visit [The Vale Of Clwyd Bonsai Society](http://www.actionvideo.freemove.co.uk/vocbsindex.htm) at <http://www.actionvideo.freemove.co.uk/vocbsindex.htm>.

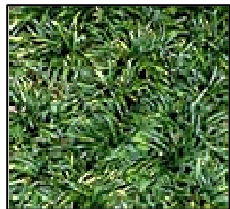
### Ground Covers for Bonsai...

There are many ground covers that can be used as an alternative to just plain moss. For one, they are a lot more hardy and tolerant of changes in temperature and also more interesting than a simple green covering.



An easy, and very hardy ground cover to use that can be constantly multiplied is '*Helxine/Soleirolia soleriolii*' (Baby Tears). A lot of bonsai nurseries use this, providing an instant and bright covering to greatly enhance the plants' appearance. This creeping plant has yellow-green small round leaves and tiny white, pink-tinged flowers, which occur singly in the leaf axils. It has an indefinite spread, and can be invasive if not controlled - but this is no problem in a properly maintained bonsai. It does not crawl up the tree, and if it does hang over the edges of the pot, just pinch the growing tips off.

The small flowers are not that prominent, but having the plant is a great asset. The cover is usually expensive if you buy it at the nursery, but if you buy just buy one pot or propagate it of a friend, the plant will multiply quite rapidly after a few weeks.



A good feature plant to be planted sparingly alongside bonsai to give a very realistic effect is '**Kyoto Dwarf**' Mondo Grass (*Ophiopogon Japonicus* or *Liriope Japonica*). This fine-leaved species is native to Japan and Korea and thus has quite a significant prominence in the world of Japanese bonsai. The short, dark green recurving foliage arises from rhizomes, spreading to form dense, soft mats of at max. 4-5cm high. It is a good cover to use, but should not be allowed to cover more than an sixth of the area of the pot (especially small pots) as this could restrict the bonsai's growth. It should be divided up each time that the bonsai is repotted - every 2-3 years. It is again a very hardy plant

and multiplies rapidly from a very small portion. Used frequently in Asian courtyards and formal gardens, it should not be that hard to obtain. (Also used as an accent plant for bonsai.)

### Moss for Bonsai...

There are functions for everything in bonsai, and mosses and lichens, used as ground covers, are no exception. They, of course, look great, covering the soil surface with 'green velvet' and helping to retain water while holding the soil in the container. For people buying bonsai, the presence of moss is always a good sign. There are a great number of types of mosses and lichens and these can be mixed to provide a very effective result overall. When not used for 'conservation' purposes, they should be planted sparingly so that their effect is natural, and they do not prevent water from reaching the soil.

There is a particular method of mossing a potted bonsai that will produce a smooth mat of deep green, with none of the lumpy growth that can be typical of piecing bits of moss together. With a sharp knife, slice the moss from its growing place, taking as little soil as possible. Put this moss in a container lined with paper, and moisten it lightly (it should be moist, not wet). Remove most of the remaining soil from the moss using sharp scissors, pulling each little tuft away from the larger piece.

Prepare the surface soil in the bonsai pot by scratching it to roughen it up. With long handed tweezers, start inserting each tuft of moss close to, but not against, the trunk. Work out and away from the trunk until you have the look you want, then brush off most of the tufts. Sprinkle dry soil over the moss and press it down with a flat spatula or small trowel (even your hand if you are careful). Mist gently two or three times and the soil will settle down between the tufts.

As an alternative to collecting moss and going through this somewhat time consuming process, you can use dried moss. Gather it, then place it in the shade for a few days until it is completely dry. Put it through a fine strainer - a sieve will do - to crumble it. Mix the particles with some soil and spread it over the bonsai soil in the pot, making a thin, even layer. Press it down with a flat spatula or small trowel and gently mist continually until the soft green moss begins to grow. Some people just scrape soil off the bottom of the moss and put this on the soil of the bonsai, but takes a much longer time to root and is a delight for small birds when looking for worms if left exposed.

Along with the growth of a healthy crop of moss often comes the appearance of a silver fungus around the soil line at the trunk of the tree. This is a sign of a healthily growing bonsai. The fungus develops as the moss takes hold, and it cannot be artificially implanted. In the heat of summer, moss may turn brown. Do not despair - it means the bonsai is getting the water it needs. As soon as cooler temperatures and higher humidity return, so will the 'green velvet'.



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### LOOK FOR US ON THE WEB!

<http://hukyubonsai.com>

Are you in need of tools for our very important hobby? If so, please contact **Steve Varn**. He sells the **Joshua Roth Tool** line at a very reasonable price. See him at a meeting or contact him at: **813-949-7778**.

### HUKYU SHIRTS & NAME TAGS

Contact Cindy Petterson @ 863-683-3555 to order magnetic name tags @ \$10.00 each. Contact Wes Miller @ 231-6837 to order club shirts @ \$25.00 each. We have men's shirts with pockets and a lady's style shirt. The name tags and shirts really look good at club events and club trips.

- Do you have a special concern or interest you would like to see highlighted in the newsletter? Would you like to write an article, provide a picture, or profile to share with your fellow club members? If so, please email them to me at: [esearfos@admin.usf.edu](mailto:esearfos@admin.usf.edu)