



TAUNTON & SOMERSET BONSAI CLUB

Bonsai Newsletter June 2022



I read somewhere, a long time ago, that people who do bonsai inhabit two very different time "zones", for want of a better word.

The first is Man's creation, to put order onto the days and years. Each day divided into hours, each hour into minutes and so on. Things happen at the designated time and we are all guilty of running our lives according to the watch on our wrist or the mobile in our hand, depending on which generation we subscribe to!

The other "zone" is nature's domain. Things happen because of a complex chain of factors. A tree doesn't flower because it's Wednesday the 13 April. It flowers because the intensity of light, the ambient temperature, the length of daylight, available water and nutrients, amount of stress, and a whole host of other factors trigger the process of flowering and the continuation of that tree's genetic material into the future. When we become "Keepers" of bonsai we have to accept that the tree will respond to nature's timings and not to ours, however much we would like it to be different.

And so according to our time it is now half way through the year. Things should be well under way, trees in full leaf and ready for their first defoliation/trimming of the year. Everything is either flowered and setting fruit, or flowering or getting ready to flower. All is nice and orderly. But nature has other ideas. Some Beech and Hornbeams have only just leafed out whilst other trees seem to be marching to a drum that only they can hear.

Thankfully, there were enough trees in leaf to make our recent summer bonsai show a success and enough "problem" trees for our June meeting to see a record number of attendees and tables groaning with bonsai needing help.



New and old members alike, paying attention to the wise words of our Chairman.

We try to have at least one meeting a year that focuses on "problem" trees. Of course the tree itself is not a problem; it's deciding what we can do with it that becomes a problem. However, there are always plenty of ideas about how to style or develop each tree and all the owner needs to do is have the courage to choose an option and stick with it. Of course, there is always the "stick it in the ground for a couple of years" option but luckily I didn't hear that being proposed as an option this time!

It was good to see former member John, back after a bit of a pandemic break. John brought along a few trees and was happy to follow the guidance of our President. So off with its top and wire the rest! Result.





I brought along two trees as examples of "problem" trees.

The first was a Pyracantha that I have owned for five years and in that time it has never produced more than two or three groups of flowers. I have tried every technique on the internet but to no avail, so I put it on a bench in a shaded area of the garden and left it alone.

Hey presto it produced flowers on every branch and hopefully berries will follow.

The other was the "Toilet Brush Yew", which some of you may remember from the club's pandemic blogs. It doesn't look anything like a brush anymore and shows what can be done with inexpensive material if you have the courage to prune, wire and keep to the plan.



Our Chairman Ade, brought along this lovely little group of Japanese Maples planted on a natural stone. Doesn't look like a problem to me, just a nice simple bonsai well executed.

Along with the trees needing direction, there were several trees getting prepared for the next show. Below you can see Brian working on his Chinese Elm, fresh from our Summer show and then on to the Exmouth Bonsai show on the 12 June as part of our club's display.



In this picture you can also see Michael and Roger, on the left, discussing Michael's Larch group. Two of the three trees in the group were the same height and it was decided that although they were different size trunks, their tops needed to complement each other rather than compete. So off with a couple of inches and then wire up a new leader.



Michael's Larch group with new outline courtesy of the tree on the right.

In the above picture you can see on the left, Paul and Cathy, busy filling out their membership forms. Paul and Cathy came along to our summer show and as well as admiring the trees on display they also purchased a number of trees from our sales table. These were the sort of trees that you would bring along to a "problem" tree meeting, and so that's what they did. Hopefully they liked the advice and will be bringing their trees back next year to show the improvements.



Here you see long time member Geoff, advising Bob on what to do with his two trees. Bob also came to our show and I remember spending time with Bob, looking at photos of his trees and talking bonsai. Bob has been doing bonsai for a many years but due to other commitments has not had as much time to devote to it as he would like, however that is changing and he brought along two collected trees for advice.

The first was a Larch with really good nebari and a solid trunk but only one branch that formed both the first branch and the apex. Advice please! In the end Bob decided to go with the one branch option and removed the apex. The trunk will need to be carved to give it some taper and the remaining branch will be wired down to create layers of foliage but in a couple of years this will make a lovely shohin tree. You might see it in our 2025 summer show. Bob's other tree was a triple trunk Hawthorn that just needed some movement in its main trunk. A few guide wires and some time will see this tree looking good. And maybe, a bit of carving to add some character?

Tony and new member Simon discussing the joys of cultivating Japanese Maples



At our June meeting in 2019, our President and resident bonsai professional, John Trott issued a challenge to all club members. "Create the smallest bonsai that you can in one year". Due to unforeseen circumstances that year became three and it was now time to judge the results.



John kindly brought along a couple of examples of the sort of thing he was hoping to see. On the left we have a *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Sekka' and on the right *Ulmus parviflora* Hokkaido. Both trees are less than 6 inches high and give the appearance of age well beyond their years. So how did our members do?

Richard P's Cotoneaster



Tony W's Pine and Ade's Ivy



Michael's Cotoneaster and

Richard M's Oak



And the winner is Michael and his semi cascade Cotoneaster in a nice little Tokoname pot. John judged Michael's tree to be the one that showed the most development in the time given and presented him with his prize, a bronze figurine to display alongside his winning tree.



Envious members look on whilst Michael enjoys the moment.

And so another meeting closed, with happy members taking home trees that now had a future design and direction. Once again I apologise to those people who I didn't get a chance to speak to and take pictures of their trees, the Richards, Dave and Nigel. Hopefully, next time.

Next meeting is on Wednesday 13th July, focusing on "summer styling" and the theme of the "tree of the month competition" is "summer growth". Must be summer!

Till the next time, staysafe and "keep doing bonsai".

Alistair