



TAUNTON & SOMERSET BONSAI CLUB

Bonsai Newsletter March 2022



Ade's Corylopsis in flower

Welcome back to another club meeting report. I hope you are all well and that your trees are starting to wake up now spring is almost here. Our topic for this meeting is repotting and general workshop "stuff". After last month's auction it was good to see so many members bringing in trees to work on. Some were getting on top of their repotting whilst others were working on pruning, weeding and general tidying up. But more of that later!



Brian working on repotting one of his Japanese Maples.

Next up is Dave, who brought in a couple of trees to work on. The first is a slant style Yew which needed a root trim and refresh of the growing medium. I don't know about you but I am never sure what to call the stuff we grow our bonsai in! As most of it is inert and often contains little in the way of organic material, calling it compost or soil seems wrong but then so does calling it "bonsai substrate", "inorganic growing medium" or just plain "cat litter"! If you can think of a better snappy name, then let me know. So back to Dave who is seen here working on a chuhin size Yew



Club Treasurer Roger, eyeing up Dave's Birch.

First up is club stalwart Brian who brought along a Japanese Maple to repot. Unfortunately, I can't tell you what variety of maple it is, as a rogue quail/partridge/grouse (I forget which but it was one of the ones you can eat) had recently run amok in Brian's garden and pulled out all the plant tags. I kid you not! Anyhow it is a nice shohin size tree and will look lovely in its bright red spring foliage. Hopefully Brian will bring it to a future meeting, so I can get a picture.

Dave's second tree was an interesting medium size Birch. Dave originally thought that it was a Silver Birch, but several members confirmed that it was a Downy Birch, due to the darker bark.

You don't see that many Birches used for bonsai. Their propensity for dropping branches and generally misbehaving makes them difficult to style and they can also suffer badly from rot. It can be very frustrating to grow one to the point where it is show ready, only for the trunk and large roots to start rotting. I know, as it happened to me! However, Dave is aware of this side of cultivating Birches and has decided to style it in the "barely hanging on to life" style, my words not Dave's, as one side of the trunk has already started to lose major branches. Still, it does look good. What do you think?

Pam, my faithful "bonsai apprentice" was working on a couple of her trees. The first was a root over rock Pomegranate that needed repotting and a bit of weeding. Pam has been tending this tree for five years and it is now looking very natural. The roots are bonding well with the rock and the branches are starting to look old.

At present it does not produce many flowers, but I hope that this will change once the ramification has reached the desired density. Fingers crossed!



Pam explains to Craig how she repots her Root over rock Pomegranate.

Pam's second tree was a Spindle, bought at last month's auction and possibly collected from the wild or maybe someone's garden. Yamadori or Yardori, it has a lovely radial "nebari" which still had all its old clay based growing medium adhering to it. So out with the chop sticks and out with the soil. I wish I had taken a picture of the roots afterwards as Pam had managed to remove all the old claggy clay, leaving space for the new medium to work its way in. Excellent work. Repotting lesson over, 10 out of 10.



Richard working on a shohin size Yew

Moving around the hall, Richard had also brought along a couple of trees to work on. In the picture you can see him finishing the repotting on a lovely shohin size Yew. The other tree was a small, informal upright Hornbeam, if I remember rightly, which you can just see to the left of Richard's hand in the photo beside. Hopefully we will see that tree again, once it is in leaf.

I said at the start that we had a good turnout for this meeting, what I forgot to say was that we had a few new faces; visitors and new members. One of our new members is Zac. Seen here working on a sturdy shohin size Hawthorne. This tree has a lovely characterful trunk and once the branches have gained more ramification it will make a nice bonsai. I look forward to featuring it in future reports. Welcome Zac.



Zac busy with his shohin Hawthorne



Richard and Graham discussing the intricacies of repotting

But these meetings are not all about working. There has to be time to talk to fellow bonsai aficionados, "Shooting the breeze" as our American cousins say. Bonsai can be a solitary hobby, other than going to buy your pots, tools and potting medium, you don't need to see anyone else. Just you and your trees seeing out the seasons. So getting together to talk about your new - pots; tools; growing medium and of course your trees with other people who are actually interested in your hobby can be very uplifting and often inspiring. I know I always get a buzz from going to any "bonsai related thing" even if it does mean having to spend more money!



Tony and a somewhat larger Hawthorne

Talking of Hawthorns, Tony brought along one of his. Slightly bigger and with a few more branches. Tony spent the evening working it up to the next level, in particular wiring the branches to make them more in keeping with the rugged old trunk. Good job Tony.



Time to reflect?

Down the other end of the room, Michael and Dave were engrossed in conversation. Whilst I wasn't party to the discussion, I imagine it was around the intricacies of repotting bonsai. Here is a question for you to consider "When is the best time to repot a bonsai"? Is it while the tree is dormant and before the buds have broken, thereby reducing the amount of energy that the tree can use to produce new growth, or do you wait till they have used some of that energy from the roots, to produce leaves and possibly new adventitious buds? Like most things related to growing bonsai there are many, often opposing, views.



Michael overseeing Dave's repotting!

Always repot your flowering trees after they have finished flowering or is it as they start to flower? Fruit trees in the autumn or just treat them like all your other deciduous trees? All very confusing, or maybe you just spend more time with your trees and let them show you when they need to be repotted. That would work for me!

TREE OF THE MONTH

Last month there was no Tree of the Month competition as we had our auction. So this month there was renewed interest and quite a few entries. The theme was tree and pot combination. Judging was tight but in the end the members voted and the results were:

Novice Class:



Winner - Graham's White pine



Runner up - Craig's Kojo no mai Cherry

Advanced class:



Richard P's Larch



Mike's Kojo no mai Cherry



Richard M's Larch



Alistair's Larch



Brian's Larch group



And the winner of the advanced class is:

Tony's Japanese flowering Quince

If you would like to see how our resident judge scored each of these tree/pot entries then please click [here](#).

As well as making notes for this report, I was also overseeing my "apprentice" and repotting a few of my own trees. Unfortunately, I was not able to talk to everyone who attended and I am sure that I have missed out a few people, for that I apologise but time is limited and once again our meeting had come to an end. But there is always another one, and next month is going to be good. Guest speaker Trevor Banbury will be giving us the benefit of his experience in growing and styling Box as bonsai. So if you are free, come along and in the meantime, stay safe and "keep doing bonsai".

Alistair