



SOMERSET BONSAI SOCIETY

Bonsai Newsletter May 2025



Ade's awesome Cotoneaster

Welcome to the May meeting report. This month, as part of our preparations for our Summer Bonsai show, Ade and John gave a short presentation on preparing trees for show.

So how do you get your beloved bonsai ready for its public appearance? Well, the first thing is to make sure that the pot is clean and suitable for showing. As John said, "don't just take it off the bench and take it to the show". Give it a wash and remove any water stains, cobwebs etc. If the pot is old, then do take care to retain any age related "patina" but not dirt! Give the pot a bit of a polish using a suitable oil or leaf shine. If you are very serious about showing your tree off to its fullest, then you might consider slip potting your tree into a "show" pot for the duration of the show then putting it back into a larger "growing" pot until it is time to show it again. That is what the professionals do, particularly in Japan.



Brian working on his nice Chinese Elm

Next John talked about the top dressing. Firstly, weed your tree! Remove anything that is not meant to be growing in the pot, don't pretend that those weeds are under planting and things like Liverwort are a definite No! If you have moss on the tree, then make sure that it looks good. If it doesn't, then replace it with suitable, short moss. Try not to cover the whole surface of the pot and if possible, use different size tufts to create variety.



This is what a club workshop looks like.



Pam "The Apprentice" works on her Literati Larch, whilst Paul realises how much his new show pot is going to cost!

Lastly you need to look at the visible top dressing. Ideally it should be finer than the main potting medium and not have any distracting "shiny" grit or other things in it. Put your usual potting medium through a fine sieve and then sprinkle it around the tree roots and between the moss, if you are using any. One other thing about moss that is worth repeating is, make sure that you remove any moss that has grown on the roots and trunk. Although it might look nice it will eventually lead to rotting and is best removed before it does any harm. An old toothbrush will do the job but do be careful with delicate or craggy bark, better to not let it grow in the first place.

Moving up the tree, look for any insects, ants, greenfly, scale insects, spiders etc that may have made their home on the trunk or leaves. A week or two before the show give your tree a spray with a suitable bug killer such as SB plant invigorator or Neem oil, just be prepared to apply several applications. It is also worth giving the tree a spray with your garden hose when you do your pre-show watering to wash off any remaining bugs just be careful not to undo all your previous hard work.

Next remove any dead foliage, flowers or twigs from your tree and be prepared to check them again during the show in case there are any more due to the stress of transporting and showing the tree. Look at the outline of the tree, are there any shoots, leaves or needles ruining the desired shape. If so, then remove them. Does the tree need any wiring doing?



Bob's Chinese Elm and project Cotoneaster!

Once the tree is all sorted, it is time to think about what you are going to place it on. John explained that you should really show your trees on suitable stands as they finish the overall image.

A nicely prepared tree, in a suitable pot, on a stand that complements both tree and pot is all that is needed. You can use a table, a wooden slab or a small tatami mat but you should avoid placing the tree directly on the table cloth. When using wooden tables or slabs, make sure that they are clean, polished and free from scratches.

One thing that John does, is put felt pads on the feet of his show pots as this prevents any damage to the wood when positioning the pots. Bonsai show tables are expensive but it is worth getting a few of different sizes and heights to complement different styles of tree. If you are any good at woodwork or know someone who is, then it is worth trying to make some as they don't have to be very complicated and can be made from recycled wood. Google, "bonsai table" for ideas.

Following John and Ade's brief talk, it was time for members to see to their own trees. It was also time for the Tree of the Month competition.



John's Azalea and Bob's Chinese Elm



Tony's Hawthorn



Richard M's Cotoneaster



Peter's Deshojo Japanese Maple



Zac's Cotoneaster



My Common Beech



Paul R-Y's Cotoneaster



Brian's Katsura Japanese Maple.

And the winner of the people's vote is: Well done and I look forward to seeing it in our show.

If you would like to read the judge's comments on all the entries then click [here](#).

Well, that's all for now. Our next meeting is on the 11th June and will be a talk by our President, John Trott, on how to display bonsai at a show.

The tree of the month will be back, with "Conifers" as the topic.

Till the next time, stay safe and "keep doing bonsai".

Alistair