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The Bonsai Society meets at the Bellerive Community Art Centre,
17 Cambridge Rd, Bellerive at 7:30 pm on the third Tuesday of the month
(February – November)

Website: www.chooseit.org.au/bonsai

Newsletter No 234 – November 2012

Our fickle Spring weather remains as petulant as ever, cheering us with bursts of warm sunshine, which are subsequently undermined by gale force winds, chilly rain and grey skies. Such a day occurred on 16th October, as we met for our regular monthly meeting opened by President Noel, who welcomed 19 members and visitors Sue Cerutti and Ruth Rees. We also welcome Sue and Cameron Wadley as new members to the Society! We had apologies from Tony Brown and David Budd.

A card of thanks was received from the family of Betty Ford, a foundation member of the Society, who had passed away in July. A few members who knew Betty attended her funeral and sent their condolences.

A discussion ensued re arrangements for the dig and bonsai display on 10th November. Members displaying bonsai need to have their plants at The Palais Theatre, Franklin by 9am for set up. Those going on the dig are asked to meet in the car park on the Huon River (across the road from the hotel) between 10.15-10.30am. An email reminder will be sent out on 5/6th November. Gill Roberts will have the map and destination.

Will spoke about the possibility of displaying bonsai in the National Bonsai Collection. The selectors are obviously looking for special bonsai, but it was pointed out that due to our strict quarantine regulations, the owner would have to donate it to the collection.

Our pre Christmas barbecue is set for Saturday 24th November at Risdon Brook Dam (same site as last year). The Society will provide meat and members are asked to bring salads/sweets/cakes to share and drinks. We have the site (which is under cover) from 11am – 4pm, so come and enjoy the lovely surroundings of the park. While there are a couple of tables with seats, it's suggested you include a chair or two. For those not familiar with how to get there the following might be helpful:

Directions from Hobart to Risdon Brook Dam:

Follow Brooker Avenue, turn right and cross Bowen Bridge, exit onto East Derwent H/way/B32 towards Lindisfarne, at the roundabout take 2nd exit onto Grasstree Hill Rd. Turn left, follow directions and drive to the top end of the car park.

Those living on the Eastern Shore would use the East Derwent H/way/B32 towards Risdon Vale and also take the Grasstree Hill Rd. exit.

Park your vehicle at the top end of the car park. Our site is approximately 100 meters above the children's playground. Toilets are located near the car park.

This Month's Meeting: Tuesday, 20th November commencing at 7.30pm. We would like to invite our new members – Heather, Alison, Alex, Jan, Chris, Simon, Trish (and anyone else I may have omitted) to please bring trees you have worked on at our monthly workshops since you joined. And of course members are asked to bring something for the display table as always. President Noel will reveal some of his most recent "travel experiences" during the evening – which I'm sure will be most entertaining!

Workshops: These have been very well attended this year, and it's pleasing to note that our new members took advantage of the earlier starts to seek advice and assistance from experienced members. A decision will be made at this month's meeting as to when we start our workshops in 2013. So please give consideration, especially with regard to the species of plants you have. There may also be other topics such as wiring techniques, soil mixes, fertilisers etc. which can be features of a workshop.

From the Library: Our librarian has asked that we return any borrowed books from the collection at this month's meeting, our last for this year. And Gill Roberts recommends a DVD - "Bonsai Master Class" featuring Peter Adams, as it's worth watching. It is in our library collection.

Events:

As usual, we supported the Horticultural Society with a bonsai display at their Rose & Iris show on 2nd & 3rd November. Our display was enhanced by Ambrose Canning's beautiful Wisteria, which was much photographed by visitors and received a special mention from Show Manager, Mary Crowe, at the finale.

A get together on Sunday, 20th January, 2013 will be held at Island Bonsai, so bring along your drinks, sausages and chops, and a salad or dessert/sweet to share. Start time 12 noon.

Our next meeting: Tuesday, 19th February 2013 commencing at 7.30pm

Raffle: Two raffle prizes - won by Chris Spratt (pot) and Alison Titchen (sprayheads),.

Happy Birthday to those celebrating this month. Birthstones are topaz or citrine. Scorpio is a water sign and those born under it are described as artistic, emotional and perceptive. It is the eighth sign of the zodiac, symbolised by the scorpion and the eagle. The Gunpowder Plot to blow up the British Parliament was discovered on 4th November 1605 and Guy Fawkes arrested, and in 1957, Laika, the dog became the first living creature in space. Tiberius, Emperor of Rome was born in 42BC, and French painter Claude Monet was born on 14th November 1840.

Display Table: was filled to the brim with an array of plants, some of which had been worked on at Andrew Ward's workshops. Instead of listing them, Ambrose has provided some photographs for us to enjoy (see page 3).

Meeting closed at 8.50pm after which President Noel presented his topic on bonsai pots – shape, size, colour, glazed and unglazed, with the following suggestions as a general guide:-

Conifers, pines and evergreens are best presented in matte brown or gray pots.

Round pots suit literati.

Maples adapt well to shallow pots which are light in colour.

Groups also look good in shallow pots (Noel picked a cypress group straight out of a shallow blue pot declaring "I don't think there's any soil left!")

Pot should be 2/3rds the width of foliage in a taller tree.

Pot should be 2/3rds the height of foliage in a wider tree.

Rugged looking trees look better in "masculine" (sturdy) pots.

(Ambrose also provided photographs of Noel's presentation – see pages 4 & 5).



A selection of plants on the display tables, and close up of Will's 10yr old Alpine ground cover in full bloom.

Noel introduces his topic on bonsai pots





Left: Noel warming to his theme – the Cypress group



Right: Explaining ratio of tree to pot



Mame, cascade, deep, shallow, round – glazed or unglazed. Lots to choose from!

This maple might need re-potting!



Excerpts from article published in "Bonsai Magazine" May/June 2012

Azaleas are in just about every garden from the mountains to the sea, in nearly every colour imaginable and ranging from just a few inches high to massive trees (Rhododendrons). In the wild they grow in full sun, dappled shade and there are even a few that are epiphytes (Vireyas), meaning that they grow in the forks of other trees, clinging to branches, on rocks or on the side of cliffs. They are found from the foothills at sea level to a height of about 6.5 kms (18,000 feet). The word 'rhododendron', loosely translated means 'rose tree', so I don't think I can be out of favour with rose growers too much, can I?

Azaleas, rhododendrons and vireyas (tropical types) are all classed and known under the one family name - rhododendrons - and botanically there is no difference between them. They originated in China, the Himalayan Mountains and the cooler parts of south Asia and the first noted record of these plants dates back to 400 BC. There were a few wild varieties (azaleas) found in Japan and in North America but it has only been in the last 200-300 years that explorers have collected and distributed many specimens from the east to botanists, and hybridizing has produced many hundreds and hundreds of varieties that we know of and love today.

When Azaleas arrived in Europe they were named "Azalea" from the Greek word "Azaleos", meaning arid, in reference to the type of dry mountain soil they grow in with decaying mulch to protect the fine fibrous roots.

To save confusion from now on I will only describe and speak of azaleas, the shrubs that we use for gardens, in pots and for bonsai.

When azaleas arrived in Europe and England it was the botanists that wanted to raise hybrids that would be used as floral potted plants for indoor use and for growing in greenhouses. These plants were primarily raised and forced into flower for home decoration and then discarded, as they would not grow in the harsh European winters. It was then in the early 1800s that the Belgians were the chief producers of the plants known today as Belgian Indica azaleas that were hardier, evergreen and produced double and semi double flowers. Similar hybridizing work was carried out by botanists in England, America and Japan and they can also claim their fame in the varieties that they have produced: England for their Knap Hill, Exbury and Illam hybrids; America for the Rutherford and Kerrigan; and Japan for Kurume and Satsukis to name but a few, and I can assure you the list goes on and on.

Satsuki azaleas, I think, are a subject all of their own, but briefly these azaleas are highly revered in Japan and there are hundreds of clubs specializing in these azaleas as bonsai. The word "Satsuki" comes from the old Japanese translation of 'fifth moon', in other words, relating to the flowering time which occurs around the fifth month of the oriental lunar calendar. On one satsuki azalea you often get between 2 and 5 different coloured flowers on the one bush. Botanically, satsuki azaleas are classed as unstable hence the high amount of 'sporting' (different coloured flowers), but the Japanese have used their difference as a specialized art form.

There is another satsuki from the Mie prefecture that is only used as a hedging in Japanese gardens. These are trained into the rounded mounds so often seen in these gardens and their claim to fame is that they respond so well to pruning and have magnificent bronze new

growth in winter. The flowers are not generally the focal point as they are just a plain single pink; it is the bronze foliage that comes to the fore.

So far the azaleas mentioned are evergreens, but there are the deciduous ones that grow in the cooler districts that have a spindly growth pattern and have brightly coloured flowers in yellow, orange, apricot, green, red and mauve and are also perfumed, whereas the evergreens come in white, pink and red and most are not perfumed.

Evergreen azaleas have, I think a magnificent way of growing naturally without ever being pruned (especially the kurumes and gumpos), and when in flower just stand back and look at the overall shape of the whole shrub to understand what I mean. The large Indica azaleas grown in most gardens here in Sydney, take on the appearance of a billowing cloud and it is accentuated when covered in flowers. In a massed display of different coloured flowers in the wild it seems that the mountain sides are covered in multi-coloured clouds. Just take a look around your neighbourhood and you will see azaleas totally neglected; yet they still take on a very pleasing and natural shape and often flower very well on near neglect.

For many years I have grown azaleas in bonsai pots and every year I am rewarded with beautiful blooms set against bright fresh green foliage and I can guarantee they are not as 'finicky' as maybe you have been led to believe. They grow in full sun all year round, get watered by the watering system and get repotted on an average every 2 or 3 years. They strike readily from long cuttings, will keep indoors while in flower for quite a long time, shoot back on old wood, easy to train – what more could you expect from a magnificent specimen to work with? There is only one drawback, and that is the flowers have no perfume, but with all the other good points I don't mind the trade-off. The types I have grown and had success with are gumpos (small up to 12 inches), kurumes, indicas, satsukis, kusianum and Belgian indicas, and a few others.

I have prepared some cultural notes on what I do in my situation (Sydney), but there may be some adjustments you may have to do in your space. By trial and error and understanding how they grow and their simple requirements, you too can be successful.

Soil

Use bonsai potting mix broken down with sharp river sand to make it very porous to allow oxygen to reach the roots. Forget using potting mixes with added peat moss if you have a watering system as the peat stays too moist and the soil then becomes rancid causing root rot. If you do use peat-based mixes in bonsai pots and forget to water a few days, the peat becomes very hard and will not allow water to penetrate to reach the roots and when the fine azalea roots dry out it means trouble. Maybe in a large garden pot it could be alright, but I am a bit wary in small pots. Remember, they grow in well-drained soil on mountain slopes in the wild only protected by decaying leaf litter.

The Japanese grow azaleas in calcined clay. Calcined clay is low fired clay, fired to about 900 degrees, then it is crushed to different sizes ranging from breadcrumb size to about pea size. This then results in a porous moisture retentive vehicle to supply a constant supply of moisture to the fibrous roots. Since I did pottery all those years ago, I have searched all the major suppliers to buy and try it as an exercise but to no avail, I could only find it in powder form, which would be unsuitable.

Fertilizer

Azaleas require an acid soil, and once they have settled down after repotting, I use either **Dynamic Lifter** or **Osmocote slow release** specifically for azaleas and rhododendrons,

whatever I have on hand. As an ongoing regime I use **Miracid**, which is an inorganic fertilizer especially designed for acid-loving plants and this is a very popular product in America. This product is now getting very hard to find, but **Osmocote** now have an identical product that is readily available. It is in a box in powder form and is very inexpensive. Remember that azaleas are not gross feeders so it would be better to give them less but more often, at fortnightly intervals or even when your time permits. **Seasol** is another product I use if I think that the root system needs an extra boost. Seaweed solutions contain elements known as mannitol and alginic acid, which help to acidify the soil and helps the plant to absorb nutrients. Especially good for azaleas, camellias, gardenias and pieris, etc. (i.e. any acid loving plants). If the soil is too alkaline, it will be difficult for azaleas to take up iron and magnesium.

If you are not happy with the amount of flowers you get, you can give a couple of doses through the year of **sulphate of potash, Phostrogen, More Bloom** or **Bloom Buster** (usually used for orchids), but be warned, follow manufacturer's directions closely or if in doubt lower the dosage. You need to study the NPK's on the label of fertilizers and what you are looking for is a very high "K" (Potassium) level to ensure lots of flowers. This will also improve flower quality and quantity.

(Editor's Note: Second part will be published in December issue.)

A number of members asked for the following recipe after tasting it at the last workshop. So thank you to Gill – and happy eating!

Recipe for Date & Ginger Slice

125g butter	In a saucepan over a medium heat, melt the
150g finely chopped dates	butter and sugar, then add dates and stir until the
1/3 rd cup sugar	mixture is soft. Stir in cornflakes and ginger.
3 cups cornflakes, crushed	Press mixture into a greased and lined slab tin.
50g finely chopped glace ginger	Refrigerate. Pour on chocolate and cut into
125g melted chocolate	pieces of your desired size when chocolate is
	almost set. Enjoy!