



Welcome to the ABS Newsletter for February 2017. While those of us up North are getting our beauty sleep, the ever-working folks in the South are starting to rev up. Speaking of the South, be sure to check the Upcoming Events for the Combined 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ABS + BSF convention coming up!

A huge thanks to those who have submitted articles and feedback! Please keep the articles, ideas and feedback coming to me at: [dave.paris@w3works.com](mailto:dave.paris@w3works.com) The more content we have, the more in-depth and cohesive we can make each issue of the newsletter.

If you're in a cold part of the country, grab your favorite hot beverage .. or in the South, your favorite cold beverage, sit back and we hope you enjoy this issue.

### **My Dad the Bonsai Guy** **By Zach Denny**

Hi. I'm Zach Denny. I am 17. Therefore, I know everything, including about bonsai. Actually, my secret is to know just a little bit, but act like you know a lot more. When I was 9 or 10 my bonsai crazed father would come home from his annual pilgrimage to Brussels Bonsai Nursery and pull his newly purchased trees from his vehicle. I would look at his new maple, nod my head approvingly and, and say, "Nice nebari!" I could see my dad's head swell. Then he would pull out a new brush cherry and I would say, "Nice ramification!". Or, "Great aerial roots" to his tropical grove. I would score a lot of points. My dad loves his bonsai. And I kind of admire some of them, too. However, it's not all roses at our house when it comes to bonsai. I have been left home from family trips so someone could water the darn things by hand with his beloved copper watering can. The hose worked just fine

and I was done in half the time. (Keep that one under your hat, please.)

I like to have friends over for bonfires in the limestone fire pit. But, wait, first I have to ask permission to move one of his many benches and trees, so I don't start a very small forest fire. Then, I have to return everything to its original place – perfectly. I figure I am helping him out by rotating his trees, if they aren't replaced perfectly.

When the weather turns bad like wind, rain, cold temps the old guy shows signs of clinical paranoia. It's called weather, Dad. It's pretty normal stuff. Once, however, he was actually right. I went out onto the deck and suddenly patio chairs started flying. Yes, flying. I grabbed a couple. Then the bonsai trees began blowing off their stands. I hollered inside for him to come help save his 400 trees (slight exaggeration, slight). We grabbed as many as we could and placed them on the ground. However, he lost the tops out of two of his favorite trees – a red pine and a newer white pine which he had high hopes for. I was glad I could help him limit the damage. He was so distraught he immediately called Gary Wood, a bonsai teacher, to see what he should do to try saving the top of the red pine. The surgery seemed a success, but ultimately the top died off.

Speaking of Gary Wood, I have met some very interesting folks because of bonsai. Andy Smith was cool. So was Matt Ouwinga from Chicago (now Maryland). And the "Azalea guy". Gary was the coolest, though. He comes by often. Once, I came home from high school and Gary and Dad were working in the cold garage on trees. Gary called me over and said, "Hey, you want to see a coin trick I learned in prison?" I didn't know he was in prison once. I hesitantly watched the coin trick. It wasn't until the next day I learned Gary never was in prison. Advice to

adults: do not punk a teen. It can only lead to bad things.

Hey, I am not the only one in our family who picks on pops. Mom would say to him, "Honey, I am so proud of you. I tell all my friends that you are the new president of the short tree club." I snorted my soup on that one. Good one, mom.

Okay, I have picked on my Dad enough. Bonsai are cool. And I admire anyone who has a passion for something in life, even if its bonsai. Dad, I promise not to give you too much grief about your trees. I might even water them or help you move them inside each fall. But, don't even think about leaving them to me in your will!

**May 25 – 29, 2017**  
**Moving American**  
**Bonsai Forward**  
**The Florida Hotel,**  
**Orlando Florida**

**Presented by the American Bonsai Society**

**And the Bonsai Societies of Florida**

**Thursday** – All Day Joshua Roth New Talent Competition and BSF Scholarship Competition

**Friday** – A Day of Demo's, in fact 14 Demo's: Morning afternoon and evening

**Saturday & Sunday** – 41 Learning Seminars & workshops accommodate all instructional levels!

**ABS 50th Anniversary Celebrations throughout the weekend**

Go to [absbonsai.org](http://absbonsai.org) and click on 2017 Convention for registration and more information. If you have any questions, email [ABS@pfmbonsai.com](mailto:ABS@pfmbonsai.com) or call Pauline (518) 882-1039 Register sooner rather than later!

Join us in this very special event - the joint 2017 ABS/BSF Convention. Help us celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the American Bonsai Society. This sort of National Bonsai Event happens in the State of Florida only once every 12-15 years. Don't let this opportunity pass you by!

**List of Outstanding Seminar Teachers**

Juan Andrade, Jim and Linda Brant, Randy Clark, Yamil Collazo, Jim Doyle, David Hodgetts, David Knittle, Mike Knowlton, Boon Manakitivipart, Frank Mihalic, Pauline Muth, Jason Osborne, Budi Sulisty, Ed Trout

**Talented Florida Artists**

Randy Clark Retired - Bonsai Learning Center, North Carolina  
Mike Lebanik 2016 BSF Scholarship winner  
Hiram Macias OliCata Bonsai StudiMary Madison Internationally known as the 'Buttonwood Queen'  
Stacy Muse 2014 BSF Scholarship winner  
Jason Osborne BSF Scholarship winner  
Mike Rogers Mike Rogers Bonsai Studio

**Donated Trees to be auctioned at the Convention – Don't Miss it!!**



**Exhibit Submissions no later than 2/28.**  
**Email Contact – [luluquilter@gmail.com](mailto:luluquilter@gmail.com)**

**Sprucing up**  
By Andrew Smith

I've got a tiny little spruce tree in a tiny, fancy pot. The pot is Japanese, with a landscape painted on it, and only half the size of a shot glass. But it's still much too big for the tree, which is barely

an inch tall with a trunk the diameter of fishing line. The bark is smooth and it has one itty-bitty side branch.



The tree came along with a piece of moss I gathered from a shady limestone cliff. The spruce was so small I didn't even notice it until I got home and was preparing the moss to put on a pot for a bonsai display. I didn't want the tiny spruce in the pot with my bonsai, but instead of tossing it aside I put it in its own pot with some moss and used it as an accent plant.

That was five years ago and the tiny spruce has not noticeably changed at all. Honestly, it's barely even a seedling and can hardly claim the title of bonsai. It's too small to wire or prune. A middling-size ant could clip it off and haul it away. But every year it opens a miniature bud and puts on maybe a millimeter of new growth. Or,

maybe not. It doesn't seem to be in any hurry to become a big tree.

I really don't know why it grows so slowly since it gets the same high-level, expert care as all my other trees, and none of them seem to be in suspended animation like this tiny one. But since it's virtually unchanged after five years in a pot, I wonder how old it is, and how many years it was growing on that cliff before I took it home? So I find something amazing and mysterious about it. And it makes me wonder how long a tree might sometimes grow before it leaves some record we can trace.

I began to like that tiny tree so well that this spring I went out and collected some others. These are also about an inch tall, and I potted them in an oyster shell. I picked them out because even at an inch tall they already sort of look ancient. I have no idea what their age may be, but if they've been growing as slowly as the other one they could be quite old – I'd guess 20 or 30 years anyway. But I have no way to verify that.

Spruces, like maples, are a shade-tolerant species, which means they can survive for decades in the understory without much light. They do so by growing very, very slowly until finally an opening in the forest canopy occurs and they get enough sunlight to start growing more vigorously and become a full-size tree. So they are able to survive with very minimal growth for many, many years

I think spruce trees are my favorite tree for bonsai, and especially our local variety, Black Hills spruce, which is essentially white spruce; *picea glauca*.

I like them for a lot of different reasons. They're as flexible and tough as ponderosa pine, so they are easy to style and work with. The needles are small and deep green, and much more in the right

scale for a bonsai, so it's possible to work with smaller trees. When the new buds open in the spring they're as beautiful as bright green flowers against the darker mature foliage. The jins are hard and naturally long lasting. And the tree itself is hardy and easy to grow.

Years ago someone sent me a magazine clipping that said white spruce would make a good houseplant. I've been meaning to put this to the test for quite a while, and late this fall I finally brought a small one in the house and set it by the window. After a month indoors, I admit, it looked a little peaked. But I'd be feeling kind of crappy too if I had to spend a whole month in the house without ever going outside.

But then it started using water, the buds began to swell, and now they are pushing out bright green shoots. Only time will tell whether it will be



happy in our house. But it would be cool if it would. It would be awesome if you could grow an old spruce tree as a bonsai indoors.

Spruces generally like cool, moist growing sites, and especially the finer-needled species like Engelmann, red, white and black spruce.

Colorado spruce is more drought resistant and I've seen some great ones on some pretty dry, rocky sites.

Spruces also tend to be very cold hardy and most species are good from zones 3 to 7. White spruce is hardy to zone 2. When I first started bonsai I deliberately left a spruce forest I had planted in a shallow tray sitting outside unprotected on a table all winter. Despite temps down to -10F and sometimes below, the trees all grew the following spring, although many had winter burn on the needles.

I am not quite as reckless with my trees nowadays, since I've realized what a fragile miracle a bonsai really is. And I have found that nature's erratic bounty provides enough horticultural disasters to regularly thin my collection, without any additional help from me.

But although spruce may be able to handle the bitter cold of winter well, they are surprisingly susceptible to cold once the buds have opened or the tree has been exposed to warmer temperatures for a week or two.

Last year we had a very warm, dry spring in the Black Hills and many of my bonsai started growing many weeks earlier than normal. Eventually I moved established trees outside so I could protect new transplants in the greenhouses. All was well until I made a trip out of town and the temperature suddenly dropped to 16 degrees one night while I was gone. So I had pines and spruces that were starting to grow, sitting outside in a very hard freeze.

What happened was interesting. On the pines, the soft portion of the new needle that was emerging from the shoot got burned by the cold and later developed a brown band, usually about a half-inch down from the tip. It almost looked like needle cast, or some fungal infection. But the rest

of the needle growth that year was normal and green.

But on the spruces that were outside the new shoots wilted, turned brown, and died. And this is what I saw out in the woods too; the foliage on the spruce trees was much more badly damaged by the cold snap than the foliage on the pines. And twice I've seen spruce trees drop virtually all their needles when they were exposed to violent winter temperature fluctuations. Surprisingly, both times the trees survived. I have never seen a pine do that.

Right now my tiny spruces are sleeping through the winter cold, waiting for spring to bring them back to life again. And when the days get longer and the sun gets warmer they will burst into new green growth and shoot up maybe a millimeter towards the sky. Or, maybe not. Maybe they're just not in any big hurry.

***And I wouldn't want to rush them. But I'll be amazed either way.***

## **Pinus thunbergii 'Nishiki Eechee'**

by Peter Jones

Thanks' to Dennis Dodge of Bethlehem Nursery (now deceased) I have a most interesting Pinus thunbergii 'Nishiki Eechee'. I met Dennis at an American Conifer Society national meeting in 1999. In our conversation, we talked about Japanese pines that we each had. It was during this conversation that we agreed to exchange scion wood for grafting. He wanted scion wood of Pinus parviflora 'Zuisho', which my dear friend Jules Koetsch had given me in the mid 90's. It is sad that Dennis is no longer here so I can share my joy with him.

After successfully grafting this pine in early 2002, I watched it grow hoping to learn what it growth

habits would be. As this pine grew I tried to find out what it's characteristic would be. In bonsai, knowing how a tree will grow and develop is important. Having grown and propagated the *Pinus thunbergii* 'Nishiki Tsukasa' (Introduced by Mr. Yoshimura) for years, gave me some idea as to this pine's development.



In April of 2016, the Northern Virginia Bonsai Society (NVBS) had its annual Roy Nagatoshi bonsai workshop. Since introducing Roy to the NVBS club in 1985, Roy and I have become good friends. Months before the workshop, I sent via email pictures of this tree to Roy, and he promised a great style for this tree, but I had to wait until the workshop. Although I had grown this pine for years, I realized that at 75, time is not on my side so I needed to do something with this pine now.

As with most pines there is some information available in books or on the Internet about their growth, where it grows best and what the tree requires to do well. I have searched for information about this pine but so far have not been able to obtain any information as to growth, size or bonsai training. If anyone has any information about this pine, I would appreciate it if they would share any information they have with me. I have grafted a few pieces of this pine

so I can watch them grow but now wish to train them as they grow so someone else would have a very nice cork bark pine to train as a bonsai.



Collecting and growing conifers for landscaping and bonsai training has been most rewarding for me. Working this pine into a nice bonsai will take a few more years before I wish to show it. Since I couldn't find any information about this pine, I will treat it as a regular Japanese black pine is trained. So far it has responded well being styled and planted in a bonsai pot.

Three weeks after being potted up, a feeding program was started to encourage new growth. As a 'Nishiki' the Japanese word for cork bark, I believe American horticulturalists refer to this as a *Corticos* variety, makes this very interesting. Most grafted pine in this variety don't develop a

nice base, however, Nishiki Eechee seems to develop a nice base with corking. My tree has a 4-inch trunk base, with corking. I had grafted this tree in the root crown so a graft union would not show.



Eechee'. My biggest joy is this is a pine that I grafted, grew, styled with Roy Nagatoshi help and now get to grow and develop this nice bonsai.



In June, excess needles were removed so that more sunlight could reach the enter branches to encourage adventurous buds to develop. So far this tree is responding well to my care and growing and training this tree will be quite a learning experience. For winter protection, I have put the bonsai pot with the tree in a black nursery container, filled the container with fine pine bark mulch up to the lip of the bonsai pot. I have used this method for winter storage of cascading bonsai for years.

Spring of 2017, will be the start of scheduled training for this pine. Most of the wire was removed over the summer and fall. Branches seem to be staying in place and most have developed corking. Seeing the corking develop was most rewarding. It will be exciting seeing how the corking will continue to develop.

Since this pine has such interesting bark and it is showing signs of back budding, I plan to graft a few more in February/March so I can continue learning as I grow *Pinus thunbergii* 'Nishiki

Join your fellow ABS members  
To Celebrate 50 years  
of  
Moving American Bonsai Forward  
with the Bonsai Societies of Florida  
May 26-28, 2017  
at the Florida Hotel & Conference Center  
Orlando, Florida, USA



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REGISTRATION FORMS AT  
[http://www.absbonsai.org/  
PDF/2017-reg.pdf](http://www.absbonsai.org/PDF/2017-reg.pdf)

Reserve the dates now and call in your  
hotel reservation to  
1-800-588-4656  
Rooms are \$106 + tax  
use code ABS/BSF 2017



**Upcoming Events**

March 18-19, 2017 - Atlanta Bonsai Society  
Annual Show  
Atlanta Botanical Gardens  
[AtlantaBonsaiSociety.com](http://AtlantaBonsaiSociety.com)

April 7-9 2017 – MidAtlantic Bonsai Societies  
Annual Spring Festival  
<http://midatlanticbonsai.org/>

May 25-29 2017 – ABS / BSF Convention  
Moving American Bonsai Forward – ABS 50<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary.  
[http://bonsai-bsf.com/?page\\_id=3103](http://bonsai-bsf.com/?page_id=3103)

**Newsletter Submissions:**

Please send submissions, upcoming events, article  
ideas, raves, rants, and so forth to  
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