

# Albury Wodonga Bonsai newsletter- January 2015

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Fees have been set at \$20 per member or \$30 per couple for the coming year. You can pay Neil at a meeting or post subs to Neil at P.O. Box 135, Yackandandah, 3749

**FEES ARE NOW DUE.**

**PLEASE PROVIDE THE DETAILS ON THE RENEWAL FORM TO NEIL ASAP.**

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, January 27, 2014 at Harry's Hut, Olive St. South Albury with an early start, 6pm onwards for dinner. Usual meeting afterwards.

For those who have not been before, Harry's Hut is the meeting room at the Gardens beside Brown's Lagoon. Entry off Olive st, opposite the end of Nurigong st, South Albury.

## Topics: Figs and Fig workshop

It is Summer again and time to tackle any figs. This month will focus on what to do and when with ficus species. Most of the evening will be devoted to DOING so bring along any figs to show, tell or ask. If you don't have any still come along and find out how great figs are as bonsai. Neil usually brings a few spare figs to this meeting in case anyone decides they really need one at their place.

## Last Month:

Natives as Bonsai.

Australia has a huge range of climates with a matching huge range of species of plants. With bonsai being relatively young in Australia we have barely started to scratch the surface of what is possible with Australian natives as bonsai.

Initially growers tried applying Japanese techniques and timing to native plants with spectacular lack of success (figs excepted) and many bonsai growers were convinced that bonsai with native plants was impossible. Thankfully a few persisted and discovered that a change of timing solved a great many of the issues that had plagued the native bonsai pioneers.

We now have a growing number of people growing an increasing range of species and some spectacular specimens of Aussie natives as bonsai.

***Suitable species:*** So far, Callistemon, Melaleuca, ficus and Banksias seem to be the easiest to keep as bonsai but as more people try different things and different species this list is constantly expanding. Although I have not worked out how yet, I have seen some great specimens of Eucalyptus and Acacia bonsai and there is a growing number of Casuarinas and other species on show each year and I know that growers are experimenting with many other species.

***Timing:*** One of the biggest leaps forward in growing natives as bonsai was the discovery that most of the Aussie plants respond favorably to root pruning during the warmer months. I have successfully root pruned and re-potted my native plants from the end of October through to February.

***Fertiliser:*** Many of us have been told that Australian Native plants hate fertilizer. Nothing could be further from the truth and many of my early experimental native bonsai probably died from malnutrition. Although they have adapted to low fertility soils all Aussie plants need nutrients. Most species really enjoy the same fertilizers as our exotics. The exception is Banksias (and possibly a few other members of the proteacea family) which have evolved specialist roots that are designed to absorb every particle of phosphate they come across. When higher P levels are available the tree cannot limit its intake and may fatally overdose. It is interesting to note that Banksias do not always develop proteoid roots. If they are well fed they tend not to grow these special roots and can survive regular doses of normal fertilizers. To be on the safe side, however, it is recommended to, at least for a start, use only low P fertilizers on Banksias. Look for fertilizers labeled as safe for 'natives' for use on banksias. Remember that you can use any fertiliser on all other Aussie species.

***Pruning and pinching:*** Is much the same for natives as exotics. Like some exotics (pines and juniper) some Aussie species do not produce new buds on older, bare wood so it is safest to leave a few leaves when cutting back. Quite a few Aussies, like maples, etc, do shoot on old wood and can be cut back fearlessly. Banksias, ficus, Callistemon and some Melaleucas will grow new buds from whatever is left no matter how hard you cut them back. This makes those species prime candidates for fast development where we plant into the ground or large containers and allow the tree free growth for a season or 2 to achieve maximum growth then cut back really hard and develop our bonsai from the new buds that emerge. It also means that you can collect these trees from gardens, etc with confidence that they will survive and produce plenty of shoots to make your bonsai.

Once your native bonsai has developed a nice trunk you need to trim regularly to keep growth compact and orderly.

## Business:

**TOOLS:** Another tool order has been sent off and received. Neil still has tools for a couple of members and will try to remember to bring them along on Tuesday.

## Bonsai Events:

**The 4th Symposium on Australian Plants as Bonsai.**

**Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.**

**Saturday April 11, Sunday April 12, 2015.** Follow the link for more details.

<http://www.vicnativebonsai.com.au/p/blog-page.html>

## Albury Wodonga events for the coming year:

I'm pretty sure most of those present at the last meeting agreed that the draft program be adopted. You will notice **WHO?**s after a few of the topics (May - pots; Aug - Soils; Sept - wisteria; Oct - Azaleas). We need members to step up and take responsibility for these nights. You may like to **RESEARCH** and present your findings or maybe just **MODERATE** the discussion that night. Let Neil know if you are brave enough to stand up and contribute.

January: Fig workshop. Start at 6:00 pm with dinner and drinks then work with fig species for the evening. Plenty of advice and demonstrations from experienced fig growers. - **Everyone**

February: Propagating and air layering - **Neil, Ian?**

March: Display bonsai, Bonsai benches/stands for your backyard, - **All**

April: Master class videos - **Wagga boys??**

May: Bonsai pots - how to choose the right one for your tree and where to get them - **Who??**  
Also Club project trees and start new project trees for new members. - **Everyone**

June: Saikei - Miniature landscapes. Demo and workshop - **Neil????**

July: Workshop - with Joe Morgan-Payler???? - **Neil to organise.** Note that this has not been finalised yet. Swap another meeting topic if another month suits Joe.

August: Soils aint soils - **Who??**

September: Wisterias - Wisteria species and culture as bonsai - **Who??**

October: Azaleas as bonsai - [Who??](#)

Early November: possible olive dig? - [Neil to organise](#)

November: End of year social. BYO food and drinks.

Several other suggestions are on the list - hold for next year or substitute for any of the above???:

Flowering Cherries as bonsai'

Draw and photograph bonsai,

Visit to Ian's place: This could be additional to meeting nights if we can arrange a suitable day/time.

## Seasonal Notes:

Some nasty bushfires, a few hot days and some burnt leaves on the bonsai. Pretty much a standard start to an Australian summer.

Hopefully you are managing to keep your bonsai watered well enough to prevent real problems but if you have seen a few leaves dry up or even had one or more die it is comforting to know that you are not alone. Even those of us who consider ourselves experienced growers have had our fair share of dead bonsai. One of Bill's sayings is that you have not really grown bonsai until you've killed a few.

Preventing dehydration is far better than trying to save your tree afterwards. I have found that watering twice wets the pots better than a single longer watering. When you apply water to a dry root ball most of it runs off and around the edges. Some water soaks in but often only a few cm into the potting mix leaving the centre still dry. If you go back and water again the water is now able to soak into the dampened mix and can penetrate still further into the centre of the root ball. If you are still unsure dunking the pots once a week will properly hydrate the entire root ball. - submerge the pot in a container of water (or dilute seasol or dilute fertilizer) at least until no more bubbles come out of the mix then put the tree back in its place. Soaking for a few hours or overnight should not hurt your bonsai at this time of year and can mean the difference if your day to day watering is not as effective as it should be.

If you are unlucky enough to return home to find your bonsai wilting or find it clothed in crispy brown leaves it is time for immediate bonsai first aid. Immediately submerge the pot into a container of water and leave it there for a few hours or overnight to allow water to penetrate the entire root ball and for the roots to take up as much as they need then place it back in its place. If you are worried the site is a bit too hot find a slightly more sheltered place for it. Many species are hardy enough to recover from such an event. With a little luck you should see new shoots emerge in a couple of weeks and provided you can keep the water up it should

continue to provide enjoyment for many more years. Some growers recommend seasoal solution for soaking stressed trees. While I believe that it is the water that is important seasoal won't hurt and may possibly even help with recovery.

At this time of year [Ausbonsai](#) and other bonsai forums have lots of discussion about ways to keep bonsai alive while the owner is away from home. For overnight or a weekend you can leave pots partly submerged in a container of water. Do some trials to see how much water you need to last for a day or 2 days. Leaving trees sitting in water for more than a couple of days can promote fungal infections so if you will be away for longer you will need different strategies. Many of us have discovered that friends, relatives and neighbours are just not reliable enough to look after bonsai during summer. They are not in the habit of watering so often and even the best intentioned can miss a day or 2 with disastrous consequences. Other bonsai club members are more likely to understand and water properly so use your club connections if you need to be away. Shibui Bonsai can also offer bonsai boarding if you cannot find anyone else. Automatic watering systems are becoming ever more reliable and it is quite simple to set up something that will sprinkle your trees each day or even every morning and night. It pays to set up well before you will be away so you can find out where the dry spots are or change the sprays that don't work properly.

I have started to trim and re-pot my native figs ahead of our club workshop. Any time during warm weather is ok for working with figs - Nov through to Feb in our area.

I have also re-potted most of the natives at Shibui Bonsai. In trials I have successfully repotted banksias in Nov, Dec, Jan and Feb but the ones I repotted in March just sulked all winter and did not start growing until the following December. Some older recommendations were to only repot natives when there was no active growth but in my trials I have seen no difference between repotting with active fresh growth or without.

Exotics are also growing strongly and need regular trimming. It is normal to allow shoots to grow 5 or 6 sets of leaves then cut back to leave just 1 or 2 leaves at the base of each shoot. New buds will form from the axils where the leaf stalk joins the stem. Trimming like this makes your bonsai bushier so the more you can promote growth the more often you can trim and the quicker your bonsai will look like a real tree.

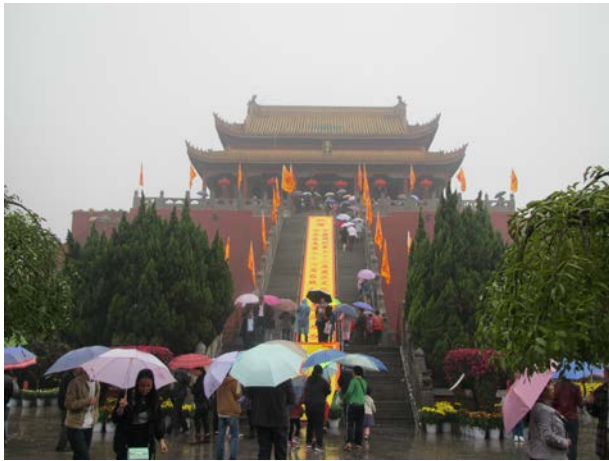
I am also fertilizing regularly over spring and summer. I aim to feed all my potted plants, which includes bonsai, every 2-3 weeks throughout the growing season and I can certainly see the difference when I remember to feed regularly.

I recently purchased 2 cubic metres of potting mix that I think should be pretty good for growing bonsai - that's what I'm using it for. If any members would like to try some I'm happy to make some available to club members at nominal cost. Email or phone Neil whenever you want some brought to a meeting.

Once again a member has contributed to our newsletter.

# HOORAY

Ian G. is a member who doesn't get to meetings but his work in China takes him to some interesting places. He has sent us some photos taken at Dragon Pavilion Kaifeng PR China Oct 14.





Members and visitors are always welcome to bring a tree (or 2 or even more) to our meetings if you want to show off your successes (or failures!), to work on a tree, or to ask about a problem.

If you can't get to a meeting (or even if you can) why not email Neil [neil@shibuibonsai.com.au](mailto:neil@shibuibonsai.com.au) with a question or a comment or even a few photos to go in the newsletter? (does not have to be an overseas trip!)

**Does anyone have anything to contribute for next month's**

# newsletter

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Fees will be due at the annual meeting in March.

We also need to confirm members contact details to keep club records up to date. Please complete this membership details form and lodge it with your payment in March.

Name:

Postal address:

Telephone:

Email address:

Membership type: family

Individual

Concession