

Preparing Bonsai for Display by Roger Snipes

One could say that everything we do to style our trees prepares them for display. The purpose of this article is not to discuss major styling and training, but to address the final tasks one must complete prior to displaying a bonsai. Assuming that major styling work has already been completed and the design of the tree is approaching a finished state, preparing a bonsai for a show or display is primarily a task of attending to detail work.

Foliage and Branches

The foliage should be groomed for display by removing any damaged or discolored leaves or needles. On pines the needles that are pointing straight down from the branches should also be removed. Shoots and/or branches that extend outside of the designed silhouette should be pinched or trimmed off. Branches that are not in the correct position should be wired and positioned correctly. Wiring should be neat and as unobtrusive as possible.

Soil

The soil surface should be neat and free of weeds and debris. It may be desirable to place moss on the soil for esthetic reasons. If moss is used, the moss should be placed in small clumps to provide texture. Moss placement should be done far enough in advance of the show that the moss will have a chance to become established prior to display. If it looks like the moss is just loosely resting on the soil as if it were just placed there recently, it would be better not to have it there at all. Mud men or other such figurines should not be placed on the soil. Normally the only acceptable item that can be placed in the pot with the tree, other than moss, would be a stone that is used to camouflage a root or trunk defect.

Pot

The pot should be cleaned to remove any dirt, stains, or calcium deposits left by watering. Some people rub a small amount of mineral oil on the pot to improve the appearance.

General Considerations

The tree should present an overall healthy appearance. It should be fertilized properly and treated for any disease or insect attacks as necessary well in advance of the show. A tree should not be taken to a show if it is diseased or infested with harmful insects.

Although not a requirement for an informal display, bonsai are customarily displayed on some sort of a stand to set the bonsai off from the surface of the display table. A stand can be a small wooden table, a slab of wood, or a simple mat of bamboo or some other material. The stand or mat should be larger than the bonsai pot. A general rule is that the stand should be about a third larger than the pot in length and depth.

It is customary to include one or two other elements in addition to the bonsai in a display. A small accent plant, a *suiseki*, or a figurine displayed on the table next to the bonsai, or a scroll hanging behind the bonsai, are all items that can be used to enhance the display. Whatever is used should harmonize with the bonsai and add to

the feeling that one is trying to create. Accessory items should not overshadow the bonsai. Everything else in the display (pot, stand, and accessory items) should be subordinate to the tree.