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The Yarra Valley Bonsai Society Newsletter

Highlights from March & April 2023

The YVBS meets on the **second Tuesday of each month** at Chirnside Park Community Hub
33 Kimberley Drive Chirnside Park
Meetings begin at 7:30pm.

Saturday Workshops are  **37 F3**
 1-4:00pm on the **Last Saturday** of the month, at the same venue as monthlies!

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The March Club meeting featured a presentation by our own Lindsay M on Shohin size bonsai—generally regarded as trees less than 20cm above the soil level, or that can easily be grasped in the palm of one hand. Lindsay was heavily involved in the New Zealand bonsai scene for many years, and has recently followed family to settle in Australia. Having been forced to dispose of his extensive bonsai collection prior to moving, he has very quickly built up a smaller but still impressive bonsai collection locally here over the last 3 years. Lindsay is passionate about shohin, and has indicated that plenty of good stock is available—he estimates that 40% of his current collection was sourced at YVBS Sale Days!

Lindsay says that shohin bonsai are quicker to develop than larger trees. When looking for shohin stock, he always starts with good trunk caliper and looks for thick and gnarly characteristics—something that gives the appearance of age even in a small size.

Heavy trunk chops or the bottom part of an air layer can provide a good source of shohin material, especially for deciduous trees. Irrespective of the starting material, Lindsay favours repotting from larger tubs into a small pot in one step, but acknowledges that this can be risky sometimes!

Shohin can come in many different bonsai styles, including informal upright, slanting, literati, raft, forest and cascades. The literati style can break the normal height limit, provided that the pot is small enough to pass the one hand rule.

The size of the pot constrains the future growth of the tree, however shoots should be cut on a regular and ongoing basis on vigorous trees. Lindsay uses a soil mix of equal parts of akadama, coarse sand and pumice, well sieved for size. He waters once per day, maybe twice on very hot days, and favours sitting the pots on a tray containing pebbles and sand to maintain humidity around the trees. Morning sun only, avoid the hotter afternoon sun.

Shohin display at Shows is an art unto itself, and normally comprises a multi-tree display on a special shohin stand. Trees are selected to produce interest through variety, but must be in visual balance. Some “rules” that should be followed:

- No two trees of the same type



Above - Lindsay M sharing his passion for Shohin size bonsai.

Calendar Dates:

- 29th & 30th Apr (Saturday & Sunday) Bonsai Northwest Exhibition. Footscray.
- 9th May (Tuesday) YVBS Monthly Meeting. 7:30pm. Chirnside Hub.
- 14th May (Sunday) BSV Bonsai Display at Ripponlea Elsternwick.
- 20th & 21st May (Saturday & Sunday) YVBS 2023 Show. Chirnside Hub.
- 19th to 22nd May (Friday to Monday) AABC National Convention. Perth.
- 27th May (Saturday) “Last Saturday of the Month” Workshop. 1:00pm. Chirnside Hub.
- 13th June (Tuesday) YVBS Monthly Meeting. 7:30pm. Chirnside Hub.
- 24th June (Saturday) “Last Saturday of the Month” Workshop. 1:00pm. Chirnside Hub.

See also the Events Calendar on our website: www.yarravalleybonsai.org.au

Highlights from September & October - Cont. From Page 1

- No two pots of similar style or colour
- Add colour by including a flowering or fruiting tree
- Movement in the trees are arranged to balance each other
- The most powerful, masculine tree is placed on top of the stand, with more feminine trees on the lower levels.

Accent plants on very tiny 30mm pots may also be incorporated in the shohin display, as well as small suiseki viewing stones.

Lindsay's next shohin project is to attempt a multi-tree shohin display using only Australian natives.

The April Club meeting featured special guest presenter and AABC Visiting Tutor Tony Bebb, who spoke and demonstrated on the topic "Approach to Styling". Tony is a well-known and experienced bonsai professional from Brisbane with much international experience, and we consider ourselves very fortunate that he consented to come down and share his expertise with us in workshops and his presentation.

When approaching styling, Tony's advice is to read the tree and listen to what it tells you. Bonsai is a combination of art and nature, and styling uses artistic principles rather than set rules. Most Japanese practice as covered in the literature is based on pines, and historically we tried to style all species like this to our detriment. A better approach is to study old trees in nature—these are what we try to emulate. Look at them from a distance first, and look for a 'bonsai front'. Above all, bonsai is the art of space—leaving room for the birds to play, both between branches and within the branch.

Tony adopts a number of steps when approaching a new tree to style:

- Clean the tree. Remove old dead growth, internal growth close to the trunk, crutch growth. On leafy trees, remove the old parent leaves where new shoots have occurred. Focus on cleaning and decluttering first to open up space within the tree so that its structure can be seen. Only remove weak branches if there is a strong branch close by.
- Examine the trunk root base - the nebari. Nursery stock is often planted deep, so expose the trunk down to the root base. We want to see or produce a broad, even nebari to promote the look of stability in the tree.
- Look at the lower trunk, which should not be vertical or straight. The upper part of the tree should be leaning towards the viewer.
- Look at the lower branches. Rather than a Left-Right-Back viewpoint, Tony prefers to consider the branch placement as Directional, Balancing, and Depth branches. The first branch, the Directional branch, follows the direction of the trunk movement, the Balancing branch is on the other side, and the Depth branch behind. Asymmetry in the tree is very important.

After considering all of the above, a front is selected, which may in fact be a compromise between the various factors above.

Remember that old trees have a rounded top rather than a pointed top, and that foliage pads should be irregular—like a cauliflower rather than smoothed topiary. Keep the front branches short, the back branches may be longer. Do not expose all of the trunk—hide some parts with foliage to tease the viewer and avoid the "flasher" look. The taller the tree, the shorter the branches. The Japanese consider a 6:1 height to girth ratio to be ideal, 4:1 is a "sumo" look and more a European preference, but up to 10:1 is okay.

The books Tony recommended are "The Japanese Art of Miniature Trees and Landscapes" by Yuji Yoshimura, and "Bonsai—Its Art, Science, History and Philosophy" by Deborah R. Koreshoff.



Above - Special guest presenter Tony Bebb illustrates his approach to styling a new tree.

Library Check-out!

YVBS has a comprehensive range of bonsai books and magazines in our library, all of which are available for borrowing without charge. Remember, the checkout period for books and other library material is one month. If you check out a book and are not able to make the next meeting, you can return the book at a workshop or even post it to the club PO Box. Now under the management of new Librarian Fiona M!



Trade Table Cheque-out!

The trade table has been restocked with new tools, wire and other accessories. A selection of pots are also in stock. Don't forget the club's tool sharpening kit, available for use at meetings. Anything else you would like to see stocked? Just advise at the trade table or to any committee member.



AABC National Bonsai Convention 2023

The next AABC National Bonsai Convention will be held in Perth from 19th—22nd May 2023, hosted by the Bonsai Society of Western Australia in partnership with the Association of Australian Bonsai Clubs.

The National Conventions provide an opportunity to see selected International bonsai artists and some of the best Australian bonsai artists as they demonstrate their techniques and vision on great material.

The featured artists at the Convention will be Masayuki Fujikawa from Japan, Rafael Torres from Spain, and Scott Martin and Lindsay Bebb from Australia.

For more information, visit the Convention website <https://aabc23.com.au/>. Online virtual participation is available.



Tutored Workshops With Tony Bebb

While we had Tony Bebb down, a number of tutored workshops were held and 16 members eagerly took advantage of the opportunity by booking into two sessions on Easter Monday.

Tony worked his way around each participant in turn to start off the session, and all attendees learned from his analysis and suggestions for each tree. Then work on trimming and wiring commenced, with Tony continuing to circulate and offer ongoing assistance and advice.

The trees under work ranged from new raw stock which required initial design, to existing bonsai which benefited by redesign or tweaking.

All participants were extremely happy with the invaluable guidance received, and went home with vastly improved trees.

On Easter Tuesday, Tony visited the homes and personal collections of two lucky members, to offer personal tutoring and assistance. Congratulations Steve M and David R.




Special Dinner

Workshop participants and selected guests accompanied Tony Bebb to dinner at a local restaurant on the evening of Easter Monday to continue the fellowship and to better get to know Tony in an informal setting.

There were not too many places open on the Easter holiday, but all present enjoyed the meal at the York on Lilydale hotel—even though it was a bit noisy!

A great opportunity for members to get together outside of the normal Club environment and share a little more of themselves, as well as to hear some of Tony's stories.







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2023 YVBS Bonsai Show

Our Bonsai Show for 2023 is scheduled for Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st May at the Chirnside Park Community Hub. All members are strongly encouraged to offer at least one tree for display at the Show, so consider your collection now and start planning the work required to prepare the tree/s for display.

The Last Saturday of the Month Workshops in April is a good opportunity to bring along potential display trees for advice and assistance. Also, bring it along to the May meeting—the display table theme is “Trees for the Show”. Steve M would really appreciate the chance to see the trees with regard to his planning for the layout.

Talk to any Committee Member if you have any concerns about your tree, and its worthiness for inclusion or the work which should be done to improve its appearance. Our aim is to introduce the concept of bonsai art to the community at large, and feel that it is important to show trees of various ages and development stages to inspire visitors to “have a go”.

The 2022 Show was very successful with the new display arrangement. Display organizer Steve M has a few ideas for further improvements, so the Show should be even better this year. Publicise the event to your family and friends and encourage them to come along!

The Sales area will be active and we expect a large range of trees will be available for purchase.

Tree drop-off time is from 5:00 to 7:00pm on Friday 19th May or 8:30am to 9:30am on Saturday 20th May. Pickup time is Sunday 21st May at 4:00pm. Volunteers will be needed to assist with various aspects of the Show, so please let Patrick I know if you can help at any of the various sessions or days.



Above - A section of the new display arrangement at the 2022 Show.

End-Of-Month Saturday Workshop

The regular Last Saturday of the Month workshops are a relaxed place to work on our trees, discuss our bonsai activities with like-minded people, or seek advice or assistance with our trees.

They also often provide a first point of contact for interested parties who are considering learning more about bonsai or joining the club.

Visitors are always welcome! Bring along any trees that you may have for advice if needed, or just come along for an introduction to the art of bonsai. There is no obligation or cost.

Open from 1:00pm to 4:00pm on the last Saturday of each month except December, at the Chirnside Park Community Hub.

Right - Members at work at the March Saturday Workshop



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Tree Profile: *Cotoneaster*

General information: *Cotoneaster* is a genus of flowering plants in the Rosaceae family and depending on the definition, of up to 300 species. It's native to temperate Asia, Europe and North Africa, with a strong concentration of diversity in the genus in the mountains of southwestern China and the Himalayas. They are related to hawthorns (*Crataegus*), photinias (*Photinia*), rowans (*Sorbus*) and firethorns (*Pyracantha*) but without thorns.

There're many varieties, but the *Cotoneaster horizontalis* is the most popular species for bonsai. It's cultivated for its flat, symmetrical sprays of glossy green deciduous or semi deciduous leaves (depending on season and location) and masses of bright red berries from autumn through to winter. Its flowers appear in summer, and can range from pink to white.

Position: Full sun to partial shade in summer - airy for best growth, not to be exposed to temperatures below -5°C, protect from frost!

Watering: Moderate, they are more heat and drought tolerant relative to other species. Don't let them dry out, but don't over water either - they don't like wet feet!

Feeding: Fertilize every two weeks with high nitrogen in spring, balanced feed in summer and low nitrogen in autumn. They don't respond too well to heavy fertilising!

Repotting: Annually in early spring in free draining mix. Up to one third of roots can be removed - do not bare-root!

Pruning: *Cotoneaster* responds well to heavy pruning and will bud back on old wood. It constantly generates suckers, which is o.k. if clump style is intended - otherwise remove promptly to get trunk development! For best result grow in the ground - very slow growing in pot. Cut new shoots to one or two leaves during growing season!

Wiring: Wire only when needed in late winter or early spring before bud breaking - it takes well to wiring, but watch the bark!

Propagation: From seed collected in autumn and sown in early spring, air layer in spring. Root and softwood cuttings in summer, but also from suckers by division.

Pests and diseases: Aphids, spider mites, lacebugs and scales. Leaf blight, crown-gall and fireblight.

Styles: Cascade, semi-cascade, slanting, clump, multi-trunked, exposed root and root-over-rock. Perfect for Shohin and Mame!

Some species suitable for bonsai:

Cotoneaster horizontalis* /Rockspray *Cotoneaster, spreading deciduous shrub with herringbone pattern branches. Rounded to elliptic, glossy dark green leaves turning red in autumn. Pink-tinged white flowers in late-spring in pairs.

Cotoneaster dammeri* / Bearberry *cotoneaster, fast-growing evergreen low shrub with creeping branches and small, dark green, elliptical glossy leaves. Small dull red berries persist into winter. Great for cascade and semi-cascade styles.

***Cotoneaster microphylla* (*C. integrifolius*)**, stiffly branched, compact evergreen shrub with ovate dark green leaves and solitary white flowers in summer followed by red/pink fruit.

***Cotoneaster congesta* (*congestus*)**, Very small Pyrenees *cotoneaster* with dull bluish-green leaves- an evergreen shrub with white flowers and red fruit - very good for mame.

Cotoneaster glaucophyllus* /Large-leaf *cotoneaster, a large evergreen upright shrub growing to 3m tall that has escaped from gardens and is considered a weed in Australia. Larger leaves. Can often be found self-sown in gardens.

Cotoneaster divaricatus is an upright form of *cotoneaster* that works well as a hedge.



Photo courtesy of S & S Bonsai
www.bonsaitoolchest.com

On The Display Table



A selection of trees on the Display Table at the March and April meetings—all Shohin size above.



Bonsai Calendar: May - June

As Autumn draws to a close, your deciduous trees have completed their growth cycle and are in preparation for dormancy. Evergreen varieties may not stop growing completely but their growth rate will slow down dramatically. Among many other tasks, winter is a great time to contemplate styling and restyling your bonsai (especially deciduous trees). Having the ability to see the skeleton of your trees will assist you in improving the basic branch structure and ramification of your bonsai.

Here are a few things to consider over the winter months.

- Remove all fruit and seeds from your trees as it can promote die back and disease.
- Once all the green leaves have changed or fallen you can begin cutting back on deciduous trees to shape with out fear of the tree bleeding.
- After all leaves have fallen, clean up all debris around your bonsai area (including the tops of the pots), to reduce potential homes and hiding places for pests.
- Any trees that have been protected from the summer sun can be pushed back into the open. The winter sun will promote bud development and tighten spring growth.
- Adjust your watering routine as your trees will be using less water. Rain may be more common. Avoid over watering at this time of year as trees are extremely susceptible to root rot. Keep deciduous trees on the dry side to promote autumn colour.
- If possible, make a habit of watering at the warmest part of the day. This will give the excess water a chance to drain before the cold nights.
- Keep an eye on pots that get completely covered with moss. This may interrupt the water intake and increase the chance of root rot.
- May and June are the best times to do heavy pruning and shaping to most conifers.
- Wire and bend branches while trees are on the dry side of the watering cycle. This will improve the flexibility of the branches and so reduce cracking or breaking.

Fertilizing isn't required for any dormant trees, but evergreens can still benefit from a light feeding.

Bonsai Novice Training Courses

The 2023 Bonsai Introduction Course was held in March and April from 9:00am to 1:00pm on the Saturday mornings before our normal Last Saturday of the Month Workshops. As usual, comprehensive course notes and a free tree to work on were given to all attendees.

The next course is scheduled for early in 2024, however we remain open to schedule a second course in 2023 if there is sufficient demand. Register your interest in future courses to Lindsay H (0403 800 671 or linhad14@gmail.com) at any time and your name will be added to the list. Numbers are limited to a minimum of 6, maximum of 12, which will define when a further course will be confirmed.

Kudos, Accolades and Thanks

- Special thanks to our Club President Patrick I and wife Marion for hosting Tony Bebb during his visit, including billeting, transport to and from the airport, and driving Tony to the various functions.
- Thanks once again to Tracey F from Murrumbung Studio Ceramics for her generous pot donations.



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ヤラ谷間盆栽会

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www.yarravalleybonsai.org.au

A group for all lovers of bonsai in the "far east" of Melbourne



Yarra Valley Bonsai Society
PO Box 345
Mount Evelyn, Victoria 3796
Australia

*Looking Ahead to
May & June 2023*



The monthly meeting on Tuesday 9th May at 7:30pm will be the ever popular Team Challenge—members will form into small teams to work on a given tree and create the best bonsai possible within the given time. Display Table—"Trees for the Show", or Member's Choice.



The YVBS Bonsai Show 2023 will be held on Saturday 20th May and Sunday 21st May from 10:00am to 4:00pm at the Chirnside Park Community Hub. A great selection of trees on display, and a large sales area for trees, materials, tools and supplies.



The Last Saturday of the Month Workshop will be held on Saturday 27th May from 1:00pm to 4:00pm.



The monthly meeting on Tuesday 13th June will be a Panel Discussion session on problem trees. Bring in any trees for which you can't see a way forward! Display Table—"Cascade or Semi-Cascade", or Member's Choice.



The Last Saturday of the Month Workshop will be held on Saturday 24th June from 1:00pm to 4:00pm.



Other Events



Bonsai Northwest will hold their 2023 Bonsai Exhibition on Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th April from 10am to 4pm at Footscray Community Arts Centre, 45 Moreland Street, Footscray. Entry \$5.



The Bonsai Society of Victoria are staging a one-day Bonsai Display at Ripponlea on Sunday 14th May. Ripponlea Estate, 192 Hotham Street, Elsternwick.

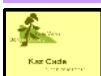


The AABC National Bonsai Convention 2023 will be held in Perth from Friday 19th May to Monday 22nd May. Featured artists will be Masayuki Fujikawa from Japan, Rafael Torres from Spain, and Scott Martin and Lindsay Bebb from Australia. Attendance can be in person or virtual online. See aabc23.com.au for details.



YVBS FORUM: For new members, it bears repeating that our club has an on-line bulletin board and archive. In addition to the announcements and discussions on topics of bonsai interest, the forum also contains many newsletters from other clubs around Australia. These are to be found (surprise, surprise) in the folder entitled "Newsletters from Other Clubs" or in "Library" and are kept for at least six months. If you visit the site and register as a user, please email Lindsay via the club gmail yarravalleybonsai@gmail.com so that he may add you as a club member user, or if you have any difficulties. Just visit our main webpage

<http://www.yarravalleybonsai.org.au> and follow the FORUM link on the left to the forum.



Member Benefits Refer to the website for a list of discounts to members upon presentation of a current & valid YVBS Membership card. "Freebies" of donated items are also made available from time to time at monthly meetings.

ADVERTISERS & SPONSORS:

Advertising on our website and/or in the newsletter is available for any registered business or sole trader. Society Sponsorship opportunities are capped at three for any year, however supportership opportunities still remain for any business in an area related to the craft of bonsai.

For a prospectus or further information contact us via the society's external email: info@yarravalleybonsai.org.au