From the Chairman’s Keyboard

Mid Winter and the work continues.

At this time of year there is still plenty to do and it is wise to divide ones plants into two distinct categories.

Firstly: those that are specimen Satsuki Bonsai or Bonyo—ie those that are going to be part of your display collection.

Secondly: material that is very much in training and has a lot of growing to do before becoming anything like a bonsai/bonyo.

During my week at Kobayashi Sangyo I found out that the approaches to these two categories of Satsuki plant are quite different.

Inside I have explained what is done to achieve the best final results including some rather revealing information with regard to mixes when using Kanuma.

The Kobayashis have extended an open invitation to me to visit them again so I plan to go back at a different season, but it is naturally very tempting to go when the Satsuki are in flower!

Arthur Robinson
Chairman and Editor
Winter activities

As mentioned before I queried the re-potting throughout Winter and was told that ALL major re-potting, bare rooting and major restyling was done from Autumn through to Spring.

Other Winter activities and some explanations follow. But firstly all wiring that has been on the trees for more than a couple of months should now come off. If necessary re-wire ‘loosely’ because as Spring comes in the wires left on will bite in very quickly.

Mesuki
(pronounced Messki)

This technique is for trees that are established as bonsai and consists of the removal of flowers so that in early Summer all the flowers come out evenly, together at flowering time and are of a similar size.

During July and early August look at the placement of buds on the branch. They should stick up vertically. They mostly do if there is only one flower bud on the twig but Satsuki will frequently put out 2 or 3 buds from the same spot-sometimes more. Look at the general size of all of your flower buds and remove those in these ‘bunches’ that are bigger or smaller than the rest on the tree. This will help to get your bonsai to flower evenly and put the flowers where you need them—at the tips of the twigs on the upper side of the branch. Look for evenness of flower bud size.

Note

ALL plants that are not established in bonsai form and are in the training stage should have all the flower buds removed, otherwise all the energy that should be going into GROWTH will be diverted into flowers. In Japan the plants are not allowed to flower at all until a good basic form has been established.

A very old trunk which has had many new branches thread or approach grafted on to it over the years and is still being developed— no flowers.
This tree was about 75cm-1M tall.
Something to make your mouthes water.

It was an uncommonly cold opening to the Kanuma Satsuki Matsuri. As a result about half of the exhibits were not yet in flower and therefore could not be judged.

Sales tables with my host Hiroharu catching up with old friends

A ‘growing-on’ nursery we visited. These Satsuki are all in the ground and should you be buying one it is dug out on the spot!

On the left is a Kinsai that has been trained in a weeping style. There is no naturally weeping Satsuki so far.

On the right a table of mostly Bunjin style trees at the Kaboku centre in Kanuma
Satsuki Society Meeting: 19th June 2010

Arthur’s talk on some of the latest info. from Japan on their approach to Satsuki soil mixes.

The bottom layer is not just large but a mix of large, medium and small Kanuma which helps to keep the water table down deeper in the pot. If you use large only it moves the main water table up. The middle and top layers are small and medium Kanuma mixed which gives enough aeration and plenty of water retention, but you must water carefully and heavily – water thoroughly about 3 times after you have repotted your trees.

The Kobayashis use 5% Sphagnum moss which has been dried and rubbed through a sieve so you end up with very fine Sphagnum moss which is then added to the mix. (This is a different to the method where you have gaps in the surface roots and you are trying to encourage new roots, you would then use big pieces of Sphagnum moss stuffed into these gaps, which will encourage new root growth.) Arthur suggests with the guidance of Hiroharu that in WA climate 10% of Sphagnum moss would be a good idea.

They also add a small amount of fine charcoal to their mix (possibly found in hydroponic/agricultural supplies). About a handful to a bucket of mix is sufficient. It inhibits root rot and is a purifier. How hot the roots get is extremely important and this is where the Sphagnum moss helps but the use of lighter colour pots reflect the heat a lot more, reducing the heat of the soil mix.

Polystyrene will also help keep the roots cooler, so you could also put slabs of Polystyrene around your larger pots. Misting will help in the dryer regions of Australia. Water established trees in the morning as this keeps the leaves and growth tidier, not at night as night time watering produces larger leaves. This has to be adapted to your local conditions.

PS: Winter cuttings produce stronger trees with greater longevity. See a short article about that.

Susie Nolan

Notes on Winter cuttings

Some members have asked about cuttings taken at this time of year.

I approach them the same way as I do after flowering.

The newer growth has hardened off and should still have most of the leaves removed. They are then placed in water, willow water or water with Clonex, for at least 20 mins (ideally).

I use Superfine Kanuma in the top layer—or sharp river sand can be an alternative. Insert the cuttings and if you have used a 110mm pot, cut a soft drink bottle in half and place over the watered cuttings as a cloche. Then place them somewhere which is light but not in full sun.

Three months later you will find some if not all cuttings have struck.

The advantage of using Kanuma is that potting-on is very straight forward as you are not having to wash out the sand. But do check out the root structure. The roots should not be flat but come down from the trunk at an angle that will give you good nebari later on.

Arthur Robinson

Aozora—pronounced Ow-zor-aah.

This variety is very strong indeed and has small flowers. The leaf is quite tidy and in Japan is grown for small as well as large bonsai. We have a few in WA but it will take 2 or 3 years before we can propagate enough for distribution.

Susie Nolan
Notes on some Winter Activities

1. Removal of old wire and replacement if necessary.
2. Re-potting, major and minor.
3. Look at soil mixes.
4. Practice Mesuki on established bonsai/bonyo.
5. At the end of winter give a feed of high K fertiliser to promote flower production.
6. Take small and heavier cuttings. Check on previous articles.
7. Spray with Bayleton just before and during flowering time.

All azaleas form multiple shoots from the base which can in turn be developed as trunks. By the shape of the flower this might be Nanbanishiki

Callistemon????
Yes, they are quite popular in Japanese gardens now.
They might have a go at bonsai with them some time?

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An interesting display of rocks at the Kaboku Centre in Kanuma