

# Columbus Bonsai Society

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Columbus Bonsai Society  
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Meetings start at 2pm unless otherwise noted



**COLUMBUS**  
**BONSAI**  
**SOCIETY**

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What's up for Sunday, December 18

There is no regular meeting in December.

See Coming Attractions for details of the January 15 meeting and the February 19 meeting/clay workshop.

Down the Rabbit Hole ~ President, Mark Passerello

My computer ate the President's article.

Random Thotz ~ Zack Clayton, Editor

Well the weather has been odd this year. I put my trees on the ground under my benches after some hard freezes – usually the first weekend in December. I'm still waiting. Most everything is dormant but I had a Japanese maple that was green and growing until I brought it in to the garage for half hardy care.

You may look around and wonder why we treat some trees as tender or half hardy when they are growing in the yard. Generally the hardiness of a tree in a pot is one agricultural zone less than that same tree growing in the ground. Part of it is the depth of the freeze zone. In a pot it is the entire pot and by extension all the roots. In the ground it may go a foot to three feet in Central Ohio. Below that the roots are in liquid water vapor above freezing. The top of the tree may be frozen in both growth regimens but the roots are what determines survival. As the tree prepares for winter, the sugar concentration of the sap increases and acts as a natural antifreeze down to a certain temperature. Much of this is stored in the roots for spring growth, but you can still freeze that sap in a pot.

You do not need to dewire you trees. In the past, many sources said to

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take off the wire so it wouldn't freeze the tree branches. Think about this. How much colder than the ambient real temperature will wire be? The same as the branch. You may say "But the wind chill . . ." which doesn't measure a temperature, but the rate of cooling down to the real temperature. Once you get to the real temperature, wind chill on an object (tree) doesn't count anymore. Air is just moving over an object the same temperature as the air.

## Articles

### Rose of Sharon aka Althea as Bonsai, *Hibiscus syriacus*

By Ken Schultz

I've often wondered why I hadn't seen Althea as bonsai. They are plentiful and offer a variety of flower colors. Once, I started an entire tray full of plants from seeds that I'd collected from the row of Althea we had as a hedge across our backyard when we lived in Westerville. I ended up giving the tray to Ken Schoenfeld. Despite being a member of the Hibiscus family, Rose of Sharon or Althea are hardy to Zone 5. My grandfather had a row of Althea he'd trained as Standards in Cleveland Oh. They were small tree looking plants about 8' tall. On one he'd grafted three branches, each with a different colored flower. I saw a similar one offered on the Internet for \$9. His branches started about 40" above the soil.

To develop this article, I did some Internet research, and did find an Althea on the Bonsai Boy site for \$195, but it was sold. Imagine my surprise, since I frequently see Althea offered at big box nurseries from \$7 - \$20. On the Internet different cultivars range, Mostly in the \$40 range for desirable colors or double flowered ones. I paid \$30 for "Lavender Chiffon" at Lowes, but I could see it has a single trunk and has double flowers. Althea want to be a bush and are usually found with multiple trunks.

The Rose of Sharon is native to China and Korea, infact one called "Blue Satin" it is the Korean National Flower. I found it interesting that the leaves are edible and can be used in salads, preferably newer leaves in spring. Leaves and flowers can also be used to make a tea. (the tea is used to cure diarrhea, abdominal pain, and promotes longevity) For those who worry about plant toxicity, this should be comforting. The leaves and flowers are high in vitamin C. Typically the flowers only last 3 days. They also close at night. The flowers come in a range of colors from white, pink, Red, and Purple. Some cultivars have colored throats White with wine centers is particularly striking. The flowers are usually about 3" across. Regardless of color, the flowers have no noticeable fragrance. Flowers begin to appear in July and continue through fall. Despite their lack of fragrance, they do attract hummingbirds and butterflies. If you see Hibiscus that have 9" wide flowers, this type dies to the ground below freezing, but comes back in the spring. Also, Hibiscus which are not Rose of Sharon or Althea are not cold hardy and will die if temperatures fall below freezing. The Lowes near us sells all, Althea, Hibiscus and the perennial type; so select wisely. If you leave the flowers on your plant, they will develop seed pods with a number of seeds in each pod. The hedge we had in Westerville.

were volunteers from my parent's yard near Painesville, OH.

The Bark is light grey with a tinge of tan. With age the bark does develop some craggy-ness. The leaves vary in size depending on the cultivar. The Chiffon cultivars seemed to have smaller leaves, about 2" in length. Other cultivars may have leaves up to 4" in length, they also have a variety of shapes, some have three lobes. Usually the edge is coarsely toothed. The leaf color on a healthy tree also ranges from a light to a dark green; leaves darken with age. The leaves emerge in late spring (mid-May) long after maples and Honey-suckle. The plant itself varies in size too, ranging from 8'-15' when planted in the ground. Due to the leaf size and Althea's tendency to have course branching structure, expect to develop a bonsai at least 24" tall. Though you should get leaf size reduction with bonsai care. There is a dwarf variety called "Little Kim".

Occasionally you may find a Hibiscus that is called Marsh Mallow, it has small leaves and small pink flowers. It is not outdoor hardy and as I discovered, susceptible to root rot from over watering in winter. Oakland Nursery used to carry them. It looks like a dwarf variety of Althea.

The literature gives mixed signals about longevity too. One site says 10 years and another 50 years. Also different cultivars have different growth habits, some are more upright and others more spreading. [Editors note: in the ground it is well over 20 years.]

**Location:** As bonsai your Althea will need at least 6 -8 hours of bright sun if you expect it to flower properly. Try to keep the roots cool and moist in a pot. A lighter colored pot helps. Planted in the ground they are able to take full sun to partial shade. They are hardy from Zones 5B-9A. In the winter follow normal hardy bonsai care. They don't seem to need pampering but winter wind protection is advised.

**Watering and Fertilization:** Its noted that they are susceptible to root rot, so don't over water; on the same page, if you let them dry out, they will drop their leaves and flowers. It is suggested that the solution is to mist to provide humidity to prevent leaf drop.

The Althea is not a heavy feeder, in fact it says if you over feed nitrogen you'll get nice leaves, but no flowers. Fertilize with slow release fertilizers, organics, 10-10-10, Bloom Booster 10-20-10, Holly Tone and Bone meal. I did read that a periodic dose of water containing Epsom Salts aids plants in taking up fertilizers and provides Magnesium. It's also good for your tomato plants.

**Pruning and Wiring:** When wiring is mentioned it suggest doing so in the winter when leaves are not present. Althea are thin barked and it is easily damaged by wire, especially if left on to long. It seems Clip and Grow gives better results. Here again, I read that they are slow growing and also that they can grow 2' in one year. Major pruning, like initial styling is best done in the winter. Light pruning during growing season should be based on bud direction. As is normal, upward, downward and inward growth is usually removed. New growth can be reduced to one or two leaves on a healthy plant. But Althea only bloom on new wood, so constant pruning means, no flowers. Heavy pruning also means fewer larger flowers, light pruning more smaller flowers. Bonsai styles seem to be upright, both informal and formal, Broom and Literati. I did see one awesome example of Literati with one red flower.

If you collect your Althea from Urban Yamadori, do so in April before it leafs out. Althea are shallow rooted and thankfully seem to have fine roots close to their trunks, making success more likely. Yamadori can be reduced by 75% of their height. Eventually you should be able to chop all stems to the ground except for the trunk you are trying to develop. The stump should push a lot of new growth for you to select future branches from. Ultimately you should be able to develop a tree about 18" tall. If your plant is a nursery selection, follow the 50% cutback guideline. You should see back budding in 2 weeks.

**Repotting and Soil:** Soil should be free draining, to prevent root rot and acidic. I read in a Virginia Tech gardening guide that they prefer a 3.7-7.3pH soil. Expect to use a deeper 8" to 12" pot. I think a standard bonsai mix should work nicely as long as it doesn't retain too much water or dry too quickly. I did not find a suggested interval of time to repot. Watch

drainage and repot when it seems pot bound.

Pests and Diseases: Aphids, whitefly and Japanese Beetles are specifically mentioned. The beetles can be picked off, unless there are a large number. For aphids and white fly, use insecticidal soaps or Neem oil weekly. For me, I use Bayer's Systemic and Orchard Spray.

Under diseased they list Leaf Spot, Canker, Flower Blight and Root Rot. These fungal diseases are best treated with a copper based fungicide.

Propagation: I found two extensive discussions on growing from seed and striking cuttings.

Seeds yield plants that may not be the same color or flower as their parent. The seeds need to be stored in your frig until two months before the last frost. Then sow your seeds 3 in a 4" pot, 1/4" deep. After planting keep the pots at 75-82 degrees. Cover the pots with a bag after watering that you remove after the seeds sprout. Fertilize weekly until they can be taken outside. They will need protection from direct sun and rodents their first year.

Cuttings should be about 6" long and pencil sized of "semi-ripe wood"- before the tip of them stem becomes woody. Remove all but the top 3 sets of leaves. Wet them and dip them in rooting gel or powder and strike them 3" into the soil of an 8"-10" pot. Again cover them with a bag. Water every 4<sup>th</sup> time with a solution containing 3% hydrogen peroxide to prevent rot. If you air-layer wait until the roots are at least 3" long before cutting it from the plant.

## 10 Commonly Asked Bonsai Questions

No, everything you need to know is not on this list, and the answers were not kept in a mayonnaise jar on Funk and Wagnall's porch. However, some myths may be debunked.

How old is it? This question, considered by all true bonsai artist as one to evade, is usually responded to by the rhetorical question, grown in the ground started at the same time as one of our miniature beauties may be 25-40 feet tall, but look young. Natural bonsai grow in places, which are inhospitable, causing the tree to remain small because of poor conditions. Age is truly determined by counting tree rings. A bonsai artist can tell you how long he has had a tree. In some cases where records have been kept, a tree's age can be documented back to the 1700's; such as the two *Chamaecyparis* in the Arnold Arboretum in Boston, two of America's oldest bonsai.

Does the wire keep them small? No, wire is to direct the branches to grow where we want them. Keeping them small is a combination of growing and pruning practices. New growth is trimmed at the tips of the branches and when they're repotted their roots are also

Where can I buy bonsai seeds? While you will see bonsai seeds for sale, if you plant these seeds in the ground, a normal sized tree will grow. Seeds sold as bonsai seeds are species of trees commonly used as bonsai. These species have become favorites because the plants themselves have characteristics bonsai artists look for; such as, small foliage, strong back budding and interesting bark.

Can I keep it in my living room? Yes, for a short while. In Japan, trees are displayed in special indoor areas for a few days and then returned to their spot in the garden or window. People who see pictures of bonsai in photographs mistakenly think that's where they are grown. Bonsai can be generally classified into two groups, indoor and outdoor. While this is an over simplification, the indoor trees are generally those which grow in the tropics. We bring in our tropicals here so that they survive our cold winters. Outdoor trees are trees that could be planted in your yard. These trees need to go through seasonal changes and get the benefit of a winter's rest. It is quite striking to see a maple turn red or a Ginkgo turn yellow.

How often do I water them? They need to be checked daily, especially when it's hot. Really small pots may need to be kept buried in sand to keep them from drying out. As

with keeping houseplants, you learn to notice signs that a tree needs to be watered. (Color of soil, weight of the pot) put a finger into the soil, use a meter; regardless of the method, watering is key to keeping the plant alive. Watering is a learned skill; true masters will let you wire, then prune, but watering is taught last. We use fast draining soil, so most trees are watered nearly every day in the summer. They are watered until the water comes out the bottom hole. Then watered again.

**How do you fertilize to keep them small?** Regular fertilizer is given, though diluted in strength. Some favor slow release; others favor organics with low numbers to prevent the roots from being burned. The trick to fertilizing is to fertilize enough to sustain healthy growth. A weak tree will die; its foliage will look chlorotic (yellow). Too much fertilizer may cause large leaves or long internodes between leaves. We fertilize from early spring until late summer.

**Can any plant be trained into bonsai?** No, bonsai plants need to have woody stems, hold their shape when wired or pruned, bud on old wood, and most importantly adapt to life in a pot. This is why nut trees, which have taproots, are not usually seen, nor are paw paws, which have large leaves. Some Bonsai may be developed from landscape material bought from "big box stores."

**How often will I have to repot my bonsai?** Younger trees need repotting more often. Older trees less. A normal suggestion is; deciduous trees need repotting once a year in early spring right before the leaves come out. Conifers every other year, again the best time is early, before the buds start to open or pines candle. Older trees may go three to five years.

**How long do I leave the wire on?** The best answer is watching the wire to make sure it's not cutting in. If you start to see that the tree is growing up around the wire, take it off! As with repotting the amount of time varies. You might have to take off wire in a couple of months, or six months or a year. It may be necessary to rewire if the wood hasn't "hardened off" in the direction you want the branch to grow.

**If I go out today and buy a plant, how will I know what to cut off?** □The best thing to do is to check photographs on the internet for the plant you've bought. Add the words "as bonsai" to your search. Some bonsai books or YouTube videos will show you pruning techniques. You will need to pick a "front" for your tree, the view you think most looks like the "old tree" you are trying to create. You may want to sketch your design. Pick your lowest branch. Generally, the first branch on a bonsai is about 1/3 of the way up the trunk. If your rough tree is too tall, you may end up shortening the tree by selecting a lower branch as its new top. In between the top and the lowest branch start by taking branches out that grow straight up, or straight down and unless you need them for your "old tree", branches that grow towards the middle of your tree. Soon, maybe with a little a little wiring, you will see your "old tree."

Remember you can always come to a Columbus Bonsai Society Meeting and ask . . .

*Prepared by Ken Schultz - 2017*

## Seasonal Care

Water your indoor plants frequently. Daily may not be too often. If you are growing in boot trays or styrene storage containers, I have found that when the bottom of the tray is dry, you can top water the plants, and then add enough extra water to ¼ inch depth. That holds the moisture for about a day and a half in my house. Succulents need a bit less, and thirsty plants need a lot more. I have a Parrots Beak that I have in a large saucer that holds ½" of water and it gets sucked dry daily.

Outside is iffy. When they are forecasting a chance of rain, see if it does. I have cut back on water to every three days, but I overpot my trees for hot weather and they hold more moisture than normal. You know your plants and watering better than I do. Your Mileage May Vary. I will probably put my trees down soon even if the weather continues warmer than normal. One nice thing is I have a 4 gallon sprayer backpack that I can fill inside. It is about right for keeping the outdoor moisture levels right this time of year when you don't want water standing in your hoses.

Start making lists of work for Spring, supplies needed, tools desired, and styling ideas. Sharpen your tools.

## Found on the Web

This month will look at websites. Not all websites are created equal, often free opinion is worth what you paid for it. These sites are places I would go for good information, online demos, and blogs. This is not an exhaustive list, there will be more in the future.

<https://www.bonsaify.com/> Eric Schrader

<https://bonsaitonight.com/recent/> Jonas Dupuich Blog and store

<https://www.bonsaiwirepodcast.com/> Bonsai Wire Podcast Jonas Dupuich, John Eads, Michael Hagedorn, Andrew Robson, Carmen Leskoviansky

<http://www.natureswaybonsai.com> Jim Doyle

<https://crataegus.com/> Michael Hagedorn

<https://stonelantern.com/blogs/bonsai-bark> blog and shop

<https://www.firstbranchbonsai.com/> Todd Schlafer

<https://www.bonsaiempire.com/> A Co-operative of experts and enthusiasts. Classes, general education, and a forum.

## Coming Attractions

Our first meeting of 2023. 60 years of growing small and thinking big!

Our topics will be "So you got a tree for Christmas." How to keep it alive through winter. This will run concurrently with the first stage of the library liquidation.

Over the years CBS has amassed a sizable library. As the availability of bonsai books has increased over time, our ability to store and distribute this valuable resource has become limited.

We will begin to liquidate our holdings, starting at the January 2023 meeting. There will be a variety of bonsai books available - the common and rare, the inexpensive to the highly valued. CBS members will have first crack at this impressive treasure trove, which will be offered by straight sale, live auction and silent auction for the first few meetings of the year. Sales beyond that point will depend on the success of the member response through the March meeting.

The January meeting will be Sunday the 15th at Franklin Park Conservatory. The room location will be announced in the January newsletter.

The February 19th meeting will be a build your own pot workshop at The Kiln Room. 2000 S High Street, In The Fort, Columbus, OH 43207. They are closed Sundays so we will have exclusive use of the facility. Staff will offer building assistance, glazing, and will fire our pieces after they are dry. See the website for details and registration. There is a \$55 cost associated with this workshop for materials and service. This has been a popular workshop in the past and some very nice work has come out of them.

## Bonsai Here and Beyond the Outerbelt

Our normal schedule is meetings at Franklin Park on the third Sunday at 2:00 for general meetings, and 10:00 for scheduled workshops. Please stay tuned for new developments as we get short notice from FPC of location changes. Thanks for your understanding and patience!

2023

January 15 "You got a tree for Christmas" is aimed at new folks that were gifted, or decided to jump into the hobby. How to keep them alive and healthy.

And, concurrently the first phase of the Library liquidation will be ongoing in several formats – direct purchase of duplicates and common books, silent auction of uncommon books and possibly a live auction of rare books.

February 19 Sunday Workshop session at Kiln Room Columbus. This is scheduled for 3 hours starting at 2:00 PM. Cost is \$55 including building, glaze, firing, and finished work delivered at the next meetings. See the website for registration.

March 19 Repotting – preparation, tools, techniques, wiring in, and finishing.

April 16 ? Huth-A-Palooza? Pending confirmation.

May 21 BYOT and Show Prep. We Upped our game in 2022, Lets keep it going.

June 18 BYOT and Show Prep.

July 21 Show set up - time TBD

July 2 2-23 Show venue at Dawes

July 23 Show teardown 5:00

August 20 Tropicals – Guest Artist TBA

September 17 TBD

October 15 Picnic, pot luck, member sale

November 19 Election and ?

December ? Holiday Gathering

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**Membership form** - Due to a streamlined work flow for handling memberships our dues policy has changed to the website online, credit card, or paypal. There will be no further paper forms. Website is <https://columbusbonsai.org/product/memberships/>

This change was prompted by historical failure to correctly connect membership payments to an email and newsletter delivery. The new system has a structure that should solve these problems. To go with this new procedure, all 2022 memberships will expire with the January 2023 newsletter. After that you can still renew, but you will not get the newsletter to remind you about it. You can go to the website, or the facebook group to link to the website.

Going forward, the newsletter delivery will run January to January with the exception of class participation membership and early joining members at the show or after. These exceptions will include the current year and the next. So the FPC class of 2022 membership is good for 2023 as well. New members who joined at the Dawes Show are also extended thru 2023.