

# Autumn/Winter 2020

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## SA Bonsai Newsletter

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### AGM March 2020

Following elections at this year's AGM we congratulate **Luke Parsons** who is now officially the club's Vice President, **Annie Reid** who remains the club Secretary and **Joseph Rabig** who continues in the role of Assistant Treasurer.

The following members were elected to the committee:

**Jenni Carnie, Michael Coward, Philip Ekers, Greg Horner, Howard Hamon, Malcolm Roberts, Janet Sabey, Shane Watson.**

We are delighted to welcome **Michael** and **Shane** to the committee as they are relatively recent members and will come with a fresh perspective, assisting us to properly cater to newer members.

**Hugo Welling** has resigned from the committee and we thank Hugo for all the work he has done to support the smooth functioning of the club.

Remember that your committee is always keen to hear your suggestions or concerns so always feel free to discuss them with any committee member.

You might prefer to put your ideas in writing so you can always email the Secretary at [secretary.sabonsai@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.sabonsai@gmail.com) and your suggestions will be put forward for discussion.

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## President's report

*Matt Sharp*

It's hard to know what to say in this report, so much has happened since I last wrote for the newsletter. Hopefully you are all well and doing your bit to stop the spread of COVID-19 and, as restrictions are slowly lifted you continue to be cautious.

Back in March we made the decision to cancel all meetings until further notice, which was slightly ahead of the Government restrictions that would have meant we couldn't meet anyway. Since then the committee has been holding monthly meetings via phone as the situation is quite fluid and we wanted to be able to respond quickly to any changes. The club has been using the popular Zoom platform to hold regular workshops on the first and third Tuesdays of the month, plus a bonus demonstration every Saturday morning. These are now being published on Youtube, and the links are sent out via email.

The two visiting tutors that we had scheduled to come to Adelaide – Neil Padbury and Andrew Edge – have agreed to run a Zoom demonstration in the months ahead so we'll be getting the dates out soon. We also have an agreement in principle to hold another dig in the Onkaparinga Gorge National Park once the details of the social distancing rules have been finalised, so it's great to have some events to look forward to.

I don't need to tell you that it's been a tough year for everyone but it has given us the chance to reflect and think about the priorities in our lives. For some of you your bonsai may have slipped down the order of importance. For some it may have risen. We all respond differently to times of stress, but regardless of how the rest of the year pans out for you, the S.A. Bonsai Society will still be here, the committee will still be working hard, and we'll be providing ways to connect with fellow enthusiasts and build on your knowledge.

It's winter now, a great time to find somewhere warm and work on your trees, let your mind relax and become absorbed in the task at hand. We are luckier than most with having a pursuit that can heal the mind so make the most of it.

I've really enjoyed the online meetings, it's been great to see and hear from people I've been missing, but I look forward to seeing you all in person down the track. Take care.

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If you saw Henry at a meeting of the South Australian Bonsai Society, you might not have known him or appreciated the effort and work he contributed behind the scenes. In fact, there would be few who would recognise Henry as one of the longest standing supporters of our bonsai community. Henry was not a financial member in that he paid no subs but his contribution to the society far exceeded any financial reward we would have received had he chosen to be a member. Henry deserved honorary life membership of SA Bonsai because for many decades he was the auditor of our accounts. He also provided his unerring support to his wife Marie in her various roles over the years as club Treasurer, Secretary and President.

We bid you farewell Henry, honour you and appreciate the support you gave to Marie and the Society in so many different ways.  
Rest in Peace.

The Society has expressed our condolences to Marie and their sons.

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## Sunday in the garden

*Alan Jabs*

A last minute email into my in-box highlighted that the SA Bonsai Society was having a walk in the Botanic Gardens simply named 'Fig Walk' – and just in time too, as the Covid-19 lock down occurred the following week.

So, with absolutely perfect weather eight of us found ourselves outside the main gate all eager to see what we could find.

Very near this gate we looked at the form and structure of several huge fig trees and discussed propagation methods and how best to get them going.



Inside the Botanic Gardens, the obvious area for figs is the area supported by the Murdoch family that has very large trees planted on both sides of the avenue.

Surprisingly it is not the only area as there are figs to be found all over the

gardens. Many different types and cultivars of all sizes and shapes were everywhere we walked. Even off the main footpaths one was able to find yet another. Some of us found seeds on the ground just waiting to be planted and with very good advice and tips I have no doubt that come summer there will be an influx of seedlings ready to plant out into larger containers.



Of course, there is so much more to look at in the gardens and discussions ranged widely covering natives to European species.

Figs (*Ficus*) are very suitable for South Australians wishing to set forth on the journey that is Bonsai. Easy to grow and care for, they do not mind being pot bound to some extent and if you make a mistake, there is plenty written about them and many

they forgive by re-shooting giving you a chance to save your vision. There are many social media videos where one can source information about growing them as Bonsai. As well, many members of the SABS have a wealth of knowledge about growing them.

Four hours spent and very pleasant it was, finishing up with coffee and cake at the café. Many thanks to Janet and Andrew for organising the excursion and making yourselves available and offering the knowledge.



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## Ficus make excellent bonsai

Janet Sabey

There are hundreds of varieties of figs and many of them are suitable for training as bonsai. A walk around our beautiful Botanic Gardens is a great way to learn about some of the types of fig, their growth habits and their suitability to the South Australian climate.

The most commonly known fig is the **Moreton Bay Fig**, or **Ficus Macrophylla** but this variety is most unsuitable for bonsai as it suffers from dieback and is an unrewarding tree to work on. Try to avoid it and save yourself lots of disappointment.

*Ficus Rubiginosa*



### Recommended Fig Species

**Port Jackson Fig**, or **Ficus Rubiginosa**, is very common, easy to grow by seed or cutting, has a good growth habit for bonsai and is very hardy. An excellent subject for bonsai, especially for beginners.

The **small-leafed Moreton Bay Fig**, **Ficus Platypoda**, is a very attractive tree, thrives in our climate and is excellent bonsai material.

The **Laurel Fig** is sometimes referred to as **Chinese Banyan** or **Tiger-leafed Fig**, is **Ficus Retusa**. It is commonly

featured in books/magazines, has strong prominent root growth and is easy to grow from cuttings although it needs constant care to keep its shape.

The lesser known **Willow-leafed Fig**, **Ficus Nerifolia**, from Hawaii, has a very narrow small leaf and the **Natal Fig**, **Ficus Natalensis**, which strikes very easily, also has strong root growth. Both these varieties are being used more often for bonsai in S.A.



*Ficus Nerifolia*

### Propagation

From November to early March is fig time – they can be root pruned, defoliate, cuttings taken and seeds planted warm to hot weather. If collecting fruit, soak it for about 24 hours, gently squashing the fruit with your fingers. Tip the squashed fruit and water into a cloth to drain then lay the cloth in the sun for at least a day until the seed dries. It can then be sprinkled on a tray or box of soil and gently watered. It is not necessary to cover the seed with soil although some snail bait spread lightly around would help keep slugs and snails off at night. The seed should germinate in about 4 weeks.



*Clump style*

### Cultivation

Once seedlings begin to grow, they can be heavily fertilised during the warm weather. Don't transplant them into individual pots until the following summer. When your seedlings or cuttings begin to grow and strengthen, try to shape them with wire as soon as possible, remembering that you don't want numerous perfectly straight and dull looking figs. Instead, they can be wired into cascade shapes, informal uprights or tied in-groups to make clump styles. If you have plenty of seedlings you can certainly afford to experiment with them.

Each time you repot a fig, lift it a little higher in the pot and wash away most of the soil from the trunk – this is how those stunning bonsai are created with the huge exposed roots.

Most fig leaves will reduce to about one tenth of their normal size with constant pinching, complete defoliation or just diligently removing larger leaves when they appear.

Most figs will appreciate humidity as well as warmth, so think about placing them on bricks in a large tray or box

water, so that there is moisture around the tree at all times, even though the bonsai pot is not actually standing in the water.

In Queensland and NSW bonsai figs grow aerial roots which give an aged appearance but we rarely see aerial roots on trees in S.A because of our dry climate. Nevertheless, the Ficus is a wonderful species to work on for bonsai and most attractive bonsai specimens can be created in a relatively short time.

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## Taking the next step with your bonsai

Adapted from an original article by *Andrew Ward*

The process of improving our bonsai, indeed developing our own bonsai skill, is a complex and multi-dimensional evolution. It has been said many times "the fastest way to develop a bonsai is slowly". The English bonsai master John Hanby recognised that 'in the west, we try to do too much, in too small a time span ... and consequently kill many potentially good future bonsai'. For those of us who are seeking to achieve refinement and development in our bonsai, the process will take time, effort and perseverance. So what can we do to move our bonsai to the 'next step' and in the process, develop our skill?



*Olive progress 2015-20*

### 1. Keep a journal

A notebook or an online file is a simple way of tracking the development of your bonsai. It's worth the time to document dates and take photographs because when you refer back to these images you might be pleasantly surprised at what you've achieved and how much your trees have developed.

### 2. Make sketches

This can be a vital element of design. You do not need to be an artist. You simply need to make sketches that can be used as 'blueprints' for what you envisage to be the future development of your bonsai.

### 3. Return with the same tree

Bonsai enthusiasts often keep on working on different trees, thinking that they are developing many bonsai. What they are doing is starting a number of bonsai and never following them through to future development. One



thought is to possibly specialise in particular varieties, becoming proficient in a particular species of bonsai or a handful of species. Keep workshoping the same bonsai, not every month, but keep revisiting and refining the same bonsai so that you are able to develop it to the next step.

### 4. No one source has all the information

The SA Bonsai Society library offers a variety of bonsai information and there is a wealth of online information available. However, what works for one person in one backyard, in one climate zone, may not work for another. Seeking information from a variety of sources is essential if you are to develop your bonsai skills.

### 5. Participate in workshops

Take every opportunity to participate in workshops, especially those with visiting demonstrators. The demonstrators cater to all different levels of ability and confidence, and workshops are scheduled throughout the year ... make the leap! Your participation might mean investing in some stock plants, plants that are worthy of being developed in workshops so watch for members sales nights or club digs.



*Eriocephalus 2015-20*



#### **6. Attend workshops as an observer**

This is a chance to 'eaves drop' on the advice and discussion that occurs between participants and the demonstrator.

#### **7. You won't learn everything from just one other bonsaiist.**

In reality you might not agree with the advice you receive from one other person. Look for more ideas, listen to others. You are the person who looks at and enjoys your bonsai on a day to day basis. It is ultimately your decision as to what to do with your tree, although considering the advice of other experienced bonsaiists is valuable.

Remember however, that for many of us, bonsai is a past-time. While we move towards development in our little trees, it is essential to remember that we have fun in the process

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### **Bonsai Northwest Melbourne – Member Showcase videos**

Because the Bonsai Northwest May Exhibition was cancelled, they decided to do an online video showcase of members' trees and have asked that we share them with our club members.

[Part 1:](#) [Part 2:](#) [Part 3:](#) [Part 4:](#) [Part 5:](#)

[Part 6:](#) [Part 7:](#) [Part 8:](#) [Part 9:](#) [Part 10:](#)

[Part 11:](#)

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**Meeting Venue:** Goodwood Community Centre, Rosa St. Goodwood

**Postal Address:** PO Box 159, Goodwood, SA, 5034

**Patrons:** Dorothy Koreshoff, Carlien Walter

**Office Bearers:**

**President:** Matthew Sharp

**Vice President:** Luke Parsons

**Secretary:** Annie Reid [secretary.sabonsai@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.sabonsai@gmail.com)

**Treasurer:** Terry Bertozzi

**Assistant Treasurer:** Joseph Rabig

**Newsletter Editor:** Annie Reid

**Committee:**

Jenni Carnie

Michael Coward

Philip Ekers (assistant to the Secretary)

Howard Hamon

Greg Horner

Malcolm Roberts

Janet Sabey

Andrew Ward

Shane Watson