

# Summer 2019-20

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## SA Bonsai Newsletter

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### Reminder – AGM in March

Remember that the March meeting is our **Annual General Meeting**. The positions of Vice President and Secretary are renewed this year.

At this meeting, all committee member positions will be considered vacant and nominations called. Nominations will also be called prior to the AGM for the positions vacated.

We welcome all offers of help on our committee and would be pleased to hear from any of our members. It is a great way to learn more about bonsai and help support your club.

The committee is a busy and social group who meet about 6 times per year to discuss, plan and delegate club activities. If you would like to know more, please feel free to contact and discuss with any of your current committee members.

Nomination forms will be available at the February meeting and workshop.

Reminder also that **membership renewal for 2020** is due from the beginning of February.

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### President's Report

*Matt Sharp*

The other day I was listening to some bonsai related podcasts on the way to work and enjoying the various topics being discussed, but I skipped the one titled "Overwintering Bonsai" as I felt I didn't need to hear about protecting my trees from the snow, moving them into protective coldframes or considering what type of heater works best in a green house. So many bonsai articles are written in the northern hemisphere where winter is the most challenging season, and it can be difficult for us to find good information on getting bonsai through our brutal summers.

It's been a strange start to summer continuing the patterns of the last few years of sporadic days of extreme heat followed by mild weather. I've become convinced that shade cloth is going to be more important in the coming years, just as it has been with my vegetable patch. I've had various structures of dubious quality propped up around my tomatoes to protect them on the stupidly hot days and now I'll be making something a bit more robust and extending the structure to my bonsai as well. I'm aiming for something that I can quickly slide the shade cloth back and forth so that I can add or remove shade on a daily basis, as on days below 35 I prefer my trees to get full sun. Last summer when we hit 46 I moved some trees out of the direct sun but quite a few remained where they were and although I didn't have many problems I did notice a few weeks later that the Shimpaku Junipers were burnt on the sunward side and a few olives got some crispy leaves. So shade cloth it will be. If you have a smaller collection it's an easier job to protect your trees, just remember that it's the direct sun on the pot rather than the foliage that does the most damage, effectively cooking the roots. Smaller pots dry out and heat up quicker than large ones, so keep an eye on them. I push my really small trees into a tray of sand, letting the roots escape the drainage holes and into the sand, giving them extra water and protection from the heat.

Watering is the other main task of summer and I'm looking at my modest rainwater tank and wondering if I should add a few more. I use the rainwater for supplemental watering as I couldn't rely on the amount of water it holds for very long, but I figured anything to at least reduce the amount of mains water I take is a good thing. Although we've had below average rainfall we've dodged the appalling drought that's gripped the eastern states and the threat of drought is never far away, so maybe a couple of slim tanks slipped into corners of my backyard would be a good investment.

Our long dry summers can be a bonus as well as our growing season is considerably longer than most countries. Where a deciduous tree in England only has two or three months to push out some leaves and get some growth happening, the same tree in Adelaide can start budding in October and keep growing all the way to April before slowing down, so we can cram a lot of growth into a single season. While you're relaxing your trees will be busy, so keep up the water and fertiliser, keep an eye on your wire biting into the bark, and your trees will reward you while you enjoy the warm summer days and nights.

Have a great break everyone. It's been a great year for the club and I've enjoyed working with you all. I've loved watching the new members gaining experience and confidence with their trees and the more experienced members happily passing on their knowledge. The committee continues to work hard and come up with fresh ideas to keep our club vibrant and support our members, and it's been a joy to be part of the team.

See you in 2020. Be safe. Enjoy your trees.

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## Working with Australian natives – Quentin Valentine

Those from our club who attended the 2019 National Convention with its focus on native plants, returned buzzing with stories, inspired by what they saw and where it might lead us. This direction towards working with native Australian plants was further encouraged by Quentin Valentine, co-founder and President of the Victorian Native Bonsai Club who demonstrated at our September meeting.



Setting up a Callistemon for its next phase of development Quentin prefaced his demonstration by saying that one of the reasons natives are so worthwhile is because their rapid growth enables the bonsai enthusiast to achieve tangible results within 3-5 years.

He had several plants to work on rather than just one which is normally the case for a demonstration because as with deciduous trees, natives initially require what he called 'quick cuts' that set them up ready to grow towards the next phase. This was certainly evident with the first subject, a Callistemon, which very quickly went from a rather tall, overgrown specimen to a trunk with two stocky short branches, but Quentin reassured us that because this species will readily

back-bud on this reduced structure, the tree was well prepared from the next stage of development.

To determine the front of a tree, a 5-point indicator was used with Quentin situating a piece of wire at the edge of the pot to mark each decision. When completed, the area accumulating the most pieces will be somewhere near where the front will be.

The criteria are:

- best front considering only the *nebari* – where the base meets the trunk
- best front for the trunk line
- best front for branch direction
- best front to hide flaws eg. inverse taper
- best front that highlights the features of the species – in this case bark texture



As he worked, Quentin reminded us that all trees should move in a particular direction; that branches should be positioned to assist the viewer's eye to move towards the trunk of the tree, and that it is preferable if trunks move away from the front and then curve forward. He added that sharp changes in direction can make a tree more visually interesting.



Making effective changes to a *Melaleuca linariifolia*. Quentin prefers using copper wire for natives as the branches tend to be more brittle. Aluminium wire needs to be over bent to hold the desired position, whereas copper wire prevents 'bounce back' after bending branches into position.

He recommends repotting at the end of September, early October although he would repot in the middle of summer in Melbourne provided a few days in the mid 20's was forecast. An observation he made while in SA is that although we need to shelter our trees from summer heat with shade cloth, we must be careful to

ensure they have full sun for most of the year if we want to avoid spindly growth and to ensure our trees maintain good health.



*Melaleuca lanceolata.*

His preferred soil mix is 2 parts diatomite (2-5mls); 1 part fine orchid bark; coco peat. This is used for all trees, both native and others. He will add slow release *Osmocote* to the bottom of the pot as putting it on the top can look unsightly for display.

With the exception of banksias and wattles, a liquid fertiliser of half *Powerfeed* and half *Seasol* is applied to all trees every fortnight.

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## Adelaide Royal Show 2019 – a story in two parts

Alan Jabs

**Part one:** Every year the South Australian Bonsai Society has a not to be missed opportunity for promotion through a permanent display for the ten days the show is open to the public.

Of course any planning for the display area really starts at the immediate conclusion of the previous year's show where ideas are bounced around based on knowing the size, location and space we have for our little patch. So each year, Malcolm, Hugo and I all descend on the showgrounds during the week before the doors open to the public. We begin with Malcolm's ideas and work feverishly to put together the display that all will see.



This year an Aussie outback theme was the end result complete with corrugated iron fencing, two cubic meters of sawdust, half a ton of yellow and red gravels, electric wiring, lighting and the all important trees kindly loaned by several of the members of the SA Bonsai Society.

Like Sophie Thomson's huge display just a short wander away, we can also be proud that everything used on site was 100% recyclable (including the core flute sign which can be sent O/S for recycling). With environmental concerns addressed, the display was again a success and a huge draw for the public who, on the day I manned the area, were keenly interested, asking many questions and we even secured new society members.

All too soon the ten days are over and the whole lot has to disappear in a day, packed away ready for next year.

Thanks must go to Malcolm and Hugo who, between the three of us, had the construction up and ready in good time for the opening. Thanks must also go to all who offered trees for the display.

**Part 2:** The Royal Show has a competition where we can all enter our trees into many different categories. Several of our society members take advantage of this and do so every year, many with success year after year. I finally convinced myself to also give it a go, if for no other reason than to promote the art and the SA Bonsai Society and to help fill out the shelves for the display.

Categories chosen, entry forms and fee all covered and trees worked on for the show, I had to gather moss from out in the Adelaide Hills and then bring the trees fully prepared in on the days required to set them up.

As it was my first go I entered into the Novice Section and then wait to see what the would judge decide. Of the three trees entered, I was most fortunate to secure a second, two firsts and one of the firsts was chosen as a Grand Champion – so a really successful outing first time around.



Why do I offer this – well it shows that with just a little work anyone can achieve a successful outcome. Being part of the competition level offers one some of the all important knowledge of what is needed with the care and development of bonsai trees and gives the competitor a sense of achievement. It's great to see your trees being marveled at by the public and well, one never knows – you may also be rewarded with the recognition that comes from the judge deciding your tree has what they are looking for. All you have to do is give it a go.

I can personally recommend it – now. For years I resisted in the firm belief that what I have on the bench in the back yard was not good enough. Now with confidence boosted and skills developed, all thanks to many of the friends I have in the SABS, that challenge is no longer a daunting prospect.

Of those who entered the Royal Show most took home at least one award, and it is to those I say congratulations for the time and effort which led to the success achieved.

Royal Show 2020 is less than a year away. Why not give it a go too. After all don't we all like that little bit of recognition in our lives?



*Hugo Welling viewing the bonsai in competition.*



## 2019 October Bonsai Show

*Alan Jabs*

Following the successful 2019 Royal Adelaide Show, all who had trees either as part of the SABS display or entered into the competition had just a short time to get trees ready for the annual exhibition.

Moss gathered for competition trees now wilting needed replacing so for me at least another trip to gather more to ready my trees.

Friday and bump in happens where an empty room is transformed into a collective nursery of Bonsai trees, pots, tools as well as the demonstration area complete with Barista machine.



Throughout the day members assist with set up and bring their trees ready for display or sale. I did note that



there were fewer trees this year as part of the exhibition and will leave that analysis to the committee because to my mind this annual exhibition is a chance for all of us to celebrate what we have done over the past twelve months and to now show what we have – almost like an extended workshop where the work is already done and we are ready to discuss and offer ideas between ourselves.





On show among all the trees could be found both Grand Champion trees from the Royal Show, poles apart in design, form and texture but there to be seen none the less.

For two full days the doors are open to enable the public to see what we do, find out that all important piece of information that will help them, sit and watch demonstrations with a coffee, family and friends while the smaller members of the family, just a short distance away, create their own Bonsai ready to take home. Then they head to the sales tables to find that little gem so that they too can start the Bonsai journey. The sales area must have been a success this year as by end of Saturday it was looking decidedly empty with plenty of space to bring in more on the Sunday.



Working the floor is a pleasure and the people I meet make the whole experience a joy to do every year. The members of the SABS also there make the event that special one not to miss.

To the new members I welcome you all to our family and while in the early days much may seem a little daunting, keep asking all the questions, experiment and learn as you go. The show is all about us – all of us!



From the new members through to the Life Members, we are all part of what the public wants to know about. All of us play a role in the society and the show is that celebration where you too can be a part, either by walking the floor Like I did or having a tree or two in the exhibition – helping out in some way is also a fun way to spend some time over that weekend.

By late Sunday afternoon it was all done. Within an hour all was gone, the rooms empty and all of us heading home worn out, tired, excited, ready for that next challenge we just thought of or discussed, keen to get our trees back on the benches or simply taking a moment to give thought to what just happened.

The show offers so much to each of us and I hope it inspires you to give serious thought to the coming next year and being a part of the Bonsai journey.



## Working with Ficus

Annie Reid

At least once per year we devote a monthly meeting to working with figs and each year I find myself summarising the advice for the newsletter but before touching the keyboard for this newsletter, I thought I should check my past comments to avoid repeating myself. To my surprise I discovered the



emphasis has been slightly different with each presentation. Now you might argue that I have selective hearing or that there is so much to say about figs, we can be entertained by them for many meetings to come.

I suspect the truth is something in between. I'm beginning to realise through my own bonsai practice that information seems to slide over my consciousness until I'm truly ready and in need of it. A case in point is a comment made by Tony Bebb about the best method of spreading a bonsai's roots and increasing the width of the *nebari*. The advice was to plant it in a wide, shallow pot. Eureka! This gem of advice finally registered for me even though I'm sure I'd heard it many times before.

This brings me back to the presentation about figs during which the key message for me was the importance of defoliation to encourage smaller leaf growth. In truth, I've so far been timid about doing this for fear of weakening my trees but as my confidence grows so does my courage. The message has finally sunk in.

Defoliation is only employed on deciduous trees and can safely begin after the spring growth has begun to harden off, making November the perfect time.

Luke stressed the importance of using very clean scissors to avoid spreading disease as he has had the unpleasant experience of losing a *Ficus* due to mosaic virus. The defoliation process involves cutting off the leaf at its base, *leaving the leaf stalk intact*.



Matt views his tree halfway through the defoliating process.



*Leave the leaf stalk intact*

Its often best to defoliate the entire tree but decisions can also be made about varying what to remove. For example if the top of the tree has most of the growth then this is the area to defoliate rather than the bottom area. This approach will help to restore balance to the tree.

Methods of defoliating differ between practitioners as Janet doesn't totally defoliate at all but rather removes all the largest leaves which has a similar effect, discouraging the continual growth of large leaves.

Following defoliation, figs are quite happy to return to their original sunny position where the normal regime of watering/feeding continues.

## Luke's soil mix

At this point there was a brief mention of the importance of the best soil mix to help figs thrive but I needed to follow up with Luke for more detail as I'm currently struggling to find the right balance in my own mix, especially now we've discovered diatomite tends to break down. The following is Luke's response to my query:

*"I have discovered that it is not so much about the ingredients, or the quantities, but about the particle size. Organic materials like pine bark might hold more water, inorganic materials like pumice might hold less water, and you would need to adjust your watering depending upon the ratio of these ingredients. However, the goal is to have a mix that is able to have available oxygen, which involves having a mix with particles that aren't too fine. The finer particles fill all the air spaces. And nutrient uptake is dependent upon available oxygen (think of the flame that needs oxygen as well as fuel). So, ultimately, you can use a mix of organic like pine bark, coco fibre etc, and inorganic like pumice, diatomite, perlite etc - I use a ratio of about 50:50 organic:inorganic, and ensure that each of these materials has a good particle size of 4 to 5 mm, and that any fine dusty material has been sifted out. You should then have a mix that is free draining but still retains water, and has available oxygen, so that nutrient uptake is good, and your plants should then be green and healthy."*

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## France and the missed opportunity.....

*Alan Jabs*

A recent trip to France offered the opportunity to do a Bonsai related side trip but research failed to find local clubs available, even to attend a meeting. For this reason I cast the net a little wider and one name kept coming up - François Jeker.



Francois is a globally well known Bonsai artist who has several books to his credit and, as I was to find out, also manages bonsai schools in Montreal, Canada and Madrid, Spain. These schools, along with his own collection at home, take up a significant amount of his time.

So with an email supplied from a friend, I set about trying to meet the European Master – even for some short time. As luck would have it Francois was available for a day in between flying back from Canada and needing to leave for Spain so was prepared to see me at his home. With accommodation booked in a nearby town, plans were put in place.



Pear shaped is what happened next. Just days prior to my leaving for Europe, Francois sent a message that his commitments in Canada had to keep him an extra day and he was now unfortunately having to fly direct to Madrid and not able to meet up with me. Oops, so now no bonsai story. Well not quite! François and I communicated over several emails through which he supplied several images of his garden and many of his wonderful trees. A meeting remains on the cards at some point in the future in France and I

am investigating the possibility of a trip by Francois to Australia, including South Australia.



*Left: Mugo Right: Box*

This experience shows that not all the best laid plans work out and that the Bonsai community really is very friendly and accommodating. The silver lining really does exist although this sometimes manifests itself over longer periods of time rather than the instant result we've often come to expect.

Never one to give up, I do plan to venture to rural France some time in the future where again we shall see if a meeting is possible. Now a friend across the distance, François and I shall continue to communicate and forge an even greater friendship which will enhance the global community that is Bonsai.



## The Christmas Meeting

Our final meeting for 2019 had a slightly different flavour this year with the best exhibition trees in each category being selected by popular choice and Luke Parsons providing a detailed critique of each of them.

Matt followed by showing of all the trees visiting bonsai demonstrators had worked on at our meetings during the year. It was most interesting to see the progress that each had made and to appreciate the how good initial styling can set the tree on the right path for its future.





**Novice winner: Jack Kay**  
**Intermediate: Luke Swalling**  
**Open: Greg Patterson**

The evening concluded with the best kind of raffle where everyone wins one of the prizes generously donated by members and this was followed by the opportunity to chat and partake in the delicious selection of food that was brought to share.



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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

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Jenni Carnie

Philip Ekers (assistant to the Secretary)

Howard Hamon

Greg Horner

Malcolm Roberts

Janet Sabey

Andrew Ward

Hugo Welling