



# ILLAWARRA BONSAI SOCIETY INC

NEWSLETTER  
**2024, No.9**  
**OCTOBER**

NEXT MEETING 7.00PM MONDAY 21 OCTOBER 2024  
**(WORKSHOP/DEMONSTRATION)**

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Members,

Here we are well into Spring and hopefully the weather will be much kinder to us than what we have experienced of late?

It's a busy time for us with our trees but how lovely is it to get out in the garden to tend to them? We all love our trees, and it gives us all a great sense of achievement to see our trees flourish from season to season. Our newer members will get to know what it is all about as their enthusiasm takes hold and when they can see the 'fruits' of their labour.

Our Sunday workshops have been a 'heaven-sent' activity and seeing the trees every week, helps all of us to see the progress of them. Sharing our experiences with our newer members and seeing all the different types of trees, their experiences with all trees will be 'fast-forwarded' into their memory for years to come.

I would advise everyone, if you can, to attend other club shows to acquaint yourselves with what is happening at other clubs with their trees. This can be a great learning curve for all of us. We are all in this fabulous art form together and we can also learn from each other. You will start to see what you like and what trees are more popular and successful, and the different styling that other enthusiasts do to their trees.

I am speaking for myself now, that in the very, very early days when there was not a lot, if NO information around - no mobile phones, or the internet or bonsai books etc, we were 'flying blind' following this passion and it was all trial and error. (Boy! I am giving my age away now!!!) I remember when I was about 8 – 10 years old, my mother read in an Adelaide newspaper of this "NEW" art form called 'BONSAI'!! She was an avid gardener, and she said to me that we must learn more about this 'bonsai' art form. Now the rest is history, thanks to my wonderful mum!! We grew lots of figs as they were readily available as seedlings and my Mum kept them growing right up until her passing. Hence my love for figs is still with me after all these years and I have quite a few different varieties that I have collected over the years..... I just love them, together with my azaleas, crab-apples, bougies etc. etc. etc.!!!!

## BRING A TREE TO WORK ON

At the next meeting there will be a short talk and show-and-tell on 'Tips and Tricks' and then we can come around and help you with your trees. If you can't attend Sunday workshops bring your tree/s to this meeting and a few of us will endeavour to guide and help you with them. Please don't feel intimidated as this is the time of year to get the most out of your tree/s, especially figs as they need to be worked on now.

Till next time,  
Brenda

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### Meetings:

7.00pm third Monday night each  
month, except January & December  
at Gymea Community Centre,  
Gymea Bay Road, Gymea, NSW





This is the season for fig work, so I just had to put this photo in to show you how adventurous their root systems are!!



A beautiful large fig that was in our show last May.

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## FINAL THOUGHT

### THE OLD MAN SAID.....

'It is not how much you eat, but how much you digest that does you good.  
It is now how much you earn, but how much you save – that makes you rich.  
It is not how much you learn, but how much you understand – that makes you wise:'

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## HANDY HINTS

- Remove any left-over fruit on flowering quinces and also remove the basal shoots coming up around the nebari (rootflare). Trim any long branches back to 2 leaves and then feed.
- Azaleas need to have their old flowers and seed pods removed. (This will stress the tree out if they are left on). If there is any long branch growth extending past the canopy outline, it must be removed. Satsuki azaleas are starting to flower now so wait a while longer to trim them. They are the last to be trimmed and fed. Repot any azaleas, if need be, especially if the water doesn't seep through the potting mix quickly. This is your clue that it is full of lots of fibrous roots and could be the demise of the tree if not done. **NOTE:** Azaleas in full flower can be kept indoors for a couple of weeks. When in flower, they are dormant, and this will not harm them at all. When the flowers start to deteriorate, then they must be returned to their normal place outside. Again, remove dead flowers and seed pods, water and feed as usual.
- Keep trimming all maples, Chinese elms, Desert Ashes etc. to help keep the internodes short, otherwise there will be branch thickening in the wrong places on the tree. When cutting the branches, leave 2 or 3 sets of leaves and always leave 1-2mm so you don't destroy the new dormant buds in the axils of the remaining branch.
- It is FIG season, so go to it by trimming, repotting, feeding, wiring etc. If figs are well fed now, by Christmas time (after Christmas lunch – HA-HA!!) completely defoliate the tree completely and then you will get much smaller leaves. No more feeding after this leaf pruning, if only very little.
- Bougainvilleas need attention now. Prune, repot and feed so you can enjoy the beautiful flowers and bracts coming through now.
- The Bambino varieties of Bougies are great for bonsai as they don't have those long 'whippy' branches and are more compact in growth and have smaller flowers and leaves. All varieties strike so easily from 'giant' thick cuttings. Just place the cutting in a very well drained mix or even in a tray or pot of river sand. These are fuss-free, with no pest or diseases and they show off their beautiful blooms on neglect! The flowers on the Bambino varieties are small and compact and not 'blousey' like their larger counterparts. Even if you forget to feed them, they still put on a great flower show. Great value if you love flowers.
- Crab-apples are all in flower and starting to set their small fruits, so place the pots in shallow trays of water (as they are 'guzzlers') to help them to hold onto the tiny fruits that are just starting to appear. No feeding now otherwise you will sacrifice losing the fruit.
- Australian native trees need copious amounts of water as well and if they seem to be struggling, stand them in trays of water. Feed with Osmocote for Natives or alternatively with Charlie Carp. Callistemons (bottle brush) are in flower now, so wait for them to stop flowering then prune and feed.  
Remove the larger leaves on Water Gums, and trim back the branches to keep the tree compact.
- Cotoneasters and Pyracanthas are in flower now, so it is a good time to give them a dose or two of potassium to get them ready to produce and hold onto the red berries when they appear.
- Junipers – feed them now, remove any brown growth that may be on the inside of the branch structure. When watering, Junis love to have their foliage sprayed as well, as do the pines. They come from mountainous areas where they get this treatment from the mists and fogs.

## TREE COMPETITION –OCTOBER RESULTS

<b>Large</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Mark Patterson	Japanese Maple
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	James Shamoon	Claret Tops
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	-	
<b>Medium</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Mark Patterson	Azalea
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Garwin Phung	Japanese Black Pine
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	-	
<b>Shohin</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Manfred Koch	Juniper Penjing
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Julie Smith	Port Jackson Fig
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Chris di Nola	Port Jackson Fig
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lee Wright	Duranta
<b>Mame</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Garwin Phung	Display stand- Chinese elm, Boston ivy, Prunus
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Lee Wright	Cotoneaster
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	-	
<b>Novice</b>	1 <sup>st</sup>	-	
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	-	
	3 <sup>rd</sup>	-	

## EVENTS

<b>Club Meetings</b>	
21 October 2024	Workshop, and mini demonstration on tips and tricks.
18 November 2024	Workshop, and mini demonstration on problem trees and marketplace.
9 December 2024	AGM and Christmas Party.
<b>Club Events</b>	
10 May 2025 – 11 May 2025	Illawarra Bonsai Society Annual Show (Autumn), Sutherland District Trade Union Club (Tradies) Kingsway Gynea

<b>Other Events*</b>	
12 <sup>th</sup> – 13 <sup>th</sup> October 2024	Canberra Bonsai Society Annual Show Canberra High School Bindubi St. Macquarie Canberra
19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> October 2024	School of Bonsai Annual Show Ray Nesci nursery Sugars Rd. Dural
19 <sup>th</sup> – 20 <sup>th</sup> October 2024	Wauchope Bonsai Workshop Group Annual Show Laurieton United Services Club 2 Seymore St. Laurieton
26 <sup>th</sup> – 27 <sup>th</sup> October 2024	Urimbirra Bonsai Society Annual Show Laurel Room Ribbonwood Centre Dapto
8 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> November 2024	Newcastle Bonsai Society Annual Show Club Macquarie Lake Rd. Argenton
16 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> May 2025	National Bonsai Convention presented by Canberra Bonsai Society. Rex Hotel 150 Northbourne Ave Braddon

## **FIGS FOR BONSAI**

By Brenda Parker

- Ficus (or figs) is a genus of close to 1000 different species which include trees, shrubs, vines, epiphytes all belonging to the Mulberry family (Moraceae). Some begin life as hemi epiphytes – seeds that are dispersed by birds and animals in crevices in treetops.
- Some scientists seem to think that Ficus are an ancient genus being around of between 60 and 80 million years old, but they are coming closer to the age of between 20 and 40 million years.
- The common fig (*F. carica*) has been grown in the Middle East and Eastern Europe in ancient times for its fruit. Some of the other figs have an importance and are eaten as bush food. A lot of wildlife relies on some of the fruits for survival including fruit bats, monkeys and some birds. The Citrus long-horned beetle has larvae that feed on wood, including of course fig trees and in large fig plantations it can become a pest.
- Figs have a very unique and distinctive way of pollination with the help of tiny wasps (Agaoninae spp.) only about 2mm long and enter through an opening at the bottom of the fruit. Once inside they pollinate the long-styled female flowers as they lay their eggs in the ovaries of the short-styled flowers. Without these special wasps carrying pollen from one syconium (seed) to another, there would be no seeds. When the eggs hatch, two wasps emerge: a female and a male. When the male hatches it finds a short-style flower and bites a small hole in the ovary wall. He then inseminates the female through the hole and repeats the process with every female it finds. The female will then crawl out of the hole made by the male. As a last act in its short life the male will chew through the syconium wall to the outside. The females are then able to leave and repeat this process of pollination and laying eggs in other figs. Some figs have two different kinds of trees in the same species; one tree only bears the syconia fruits with short-styled flowers so the wasps can lay their eggs in and this are called a caprifig. The other tree sets seeds and are delicious so animals and birds will eat them and in turn spread their seeds. The caprifigs are hard and unappetizing and the wasps can develop safely without the fear of being eaten. Each fig has its own unique species of “in-house” wasp pollinator. Pollinating fig wasps are no threat at all to human life. The fruit of the fig is actually not a fruit but the flower of the tree until the wasp has pollinated it to become a fruit. In ancient China this tree was actually called “fruit without flower”.
- The sap or latex in figs is white and milky and can irritate the skin on some individuals and is a serious irritant to eyes.
- The wood on figs is often very soft and in ancient times it was used to make mummy caskets in Ancient Egypt and bark cloth in Uganda.
- The Rubber Plant (*F. elastica*) was identified as a powerful air-cleaning plant by the NASA Clean Air Study.
- There is evidence that figs were among the first – if not the very first – plant species that were bred for agriculture in the Middle East more than 11,000 years ago. Some sub fossil figs were discovered and dated at about 9400 – 9200 BC and were found in an early Neolithic village in the Jordan Valley.
- Fig trees also have had religious traditions associated with them. The popular one is the Sacred Fig tree (*F. Religiosa*) or Bo tree under which Buddha was supposed to have become ‘enlightened’ while sitting under it. Figs are revered in religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. Each religion seemed to have a different fig that they honoured. In the bible Adam and Eve covered their nakedness with the leaves of the edible fig. It was even stated that Jesus cursed the fig tree for bearing no fruit.
- Curiosities in the horticultural world are the strangler figs and these begin when a seed has been deposited in the crown of a tall tree in the droppings of birds and animals. Eventually these seeds germinate and over many years roots start to descend down the frame of the host tree to get its roots into the soil so it can survive. It struggles to receive the sun so leaves start to grow so it can photosynthesize to grow healthily. Eventually over time the roots snake down to completely cover and strangle the host tree and kills it. After the host tree dies and rots away over many years, the fig's roots become a free-standing tree on its own with a hollow centre. This hollow centre then becomes the home and breeding areas for many birds and animals.

- Some of the other stranglers like the Weeping Fig (*F. Benjamina*) use aerial roots from their branches and as they thicken form new "trunks". In this way these stranglers grow outward to form a "fig forest" – a single tree with many interconnected trunks. A particular tree that produces these aerial roots from branches is the *F. Bengalensis* in India (also known as the Indian banyan) and it is listed
- in the Guinness Book of World Records (1985) as the world's largest tree, with over 1000 prop roots and covering an area of over four acres!
- In Spain strangler figs are called Matapalo – 'killer tree'.
- Some of the more common strangler figs are – *F. Aurea* (Florida Strangler Fig), *F. Macrophylla*, *F. oblique*, *F. Virens* and many others.

### **GOOD POINTS ABOUT FIGS**

- Spreading buttress roots and thick trunks.
- Leaves miniaturize well with defoliation only after heavy fertilization in early spring and when the tree is very healthy then defoliation can take place around Christmas (December) time.
- Strike well from seed, cuttings and collected as epiphytes on other trees especially large Washington Date palms. Large Root cuttings of some figs especially *Ficus Nerifolia* (the willow-leaf fig) strikes very well.
- Strike back well on old wood. Also, by large cuttings.
- Produce aerial roots.
- Not very fussy on soil or fertilizing.
- Can be grown in any size bonsai from mame (small) to very large specimens.

### **TO DEVELOP A GOOD ROOT SYSTEM**

- Cutting across the bole at the widest point and placing in very sharp moist river sand or the like.
- Making a cone with an aluminium can or similar and placing the young tree roots over the cone and covering with potting mix. Then as it ages, lift the root ball out of the soil to expose the roots.
- Approach grafts.
- Making vertical cuts around trunk and covering with damp sphagnum moss.
- Fig roots like to be exposed to the air and sun. Every time you repot lift the tree another 1-2 cm.
- At the workshops at Leong's with Min Hsuan Lo he told us that at every repotting of figs take notice of the roots – if they are thin grab a few roots and either plait them or twist them together with a little wire and pin the end of the wire into the potting medium. Then cover the ends of the roots only with some plastic held down by stones or simply by placing broken tiles over them. This creates humidity to encourage the roots to 'weld' together to form thick buttress type roots around the trunk. When this happens raise the root flare to show the new buttressing roots that will be exposed.

### **LEAF TRIMMING**

- Cut back so to not allow branches to extend too far and when 4 or so leaves develop; cut 2 off to an outward growing leaf bud. Also nipping out new leaf node at the end.
- The best time to defoliate is mid-December only on a well-fed tree.

### **THREAD GRAFTING FOR A NEW BRANCH**

- This is where a new branch is required on the trunk (usually on the outside of a curve). A hole is drilled straight through the exact middle of the trunk in the position where a branch is required. Then a long thin whippy branch is then threaded through the hole, sealed at both ends and left until new growth is detected and the whip has totally filled the hole in which it has passed. Only then can the back end of the branch be removed and allowing the new branch to continue growing. This is best done in mid spring.

### **WIRING CAN BE APPLIED AT ANYTIME**

### **CUT A WEDGE CUT OUT OF UNDERNEATH OF A BRANCH TO HELP TO LOWER IT. ALLOW THE TREE TO DRY OUT A BIT FIRST.**

- To lower a large branch a wedge cut is made under the branch at the point where the branch

should bend. At the apex of this cut a hole is drilled through the branch which will give the branch more flexibility to bend to the position required. Slowly bend the branch to match up the cambium layers of the existing branch, seal the whole wound and tape up with budding tape once the sealant has dried. This is best done in mid spring. This system works very well on all sap-producing trees.

#### **MOST SUCCESSFUL FIGS GOOD FOR BONSAI**

- Ficus Nerifolia – Willow leaf fig
- Ficus Rubiginosa – Port Jackson fig and variation “Little Ruby”
- Ficus Microcarpa – Hillii fig
- Ficus Microcarpa var. Crassifolia – Green Island fig
- Ficus Microcarpa var. Kimmen – Tiger Fig
  
- Ficus Virens – Deciduous white fig
- Ficus Benjamina – Weeping figs
- Ficus Carica – Edible fig
- Ficus Coronata – Sandpaper fig
- Ficus Deltoidea - Mistletoe fig, pendulous growth but never achieving a thick trunk
- Ficus Religiosa – Sacred fig or Bo Tree
- Ficus Pumila – miniature creeping fig is great for soes or accent plants

**STYLES – Informal, Minis, Semi and Full Cascades, Root over rock, Trees on rock and rafts.**

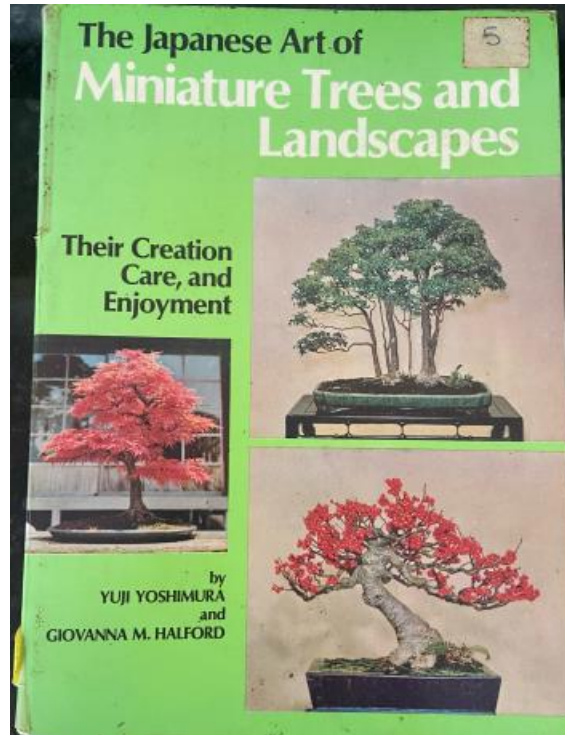
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**Great ally to figs** (which also has a strangling action) – miniature umbrella tree



**Above: A Strangler fig devouring its host**

**THIS MONTH'S LIBRARY BOOK REVIEW**



The Japanese Art of Miniature Trees and Landscapes (No. 5 on the Club Bookshelf)  
By Yuji Yoshimura and Giovanna A. Halford, Published by Charles E. Tuttle Company, Japan, 1957,  
1982.

This book is a step back in time and just as it was an essential compendium on the subject of bonsai in its day, it still holds valuable information to today's bonsai enthusiasts. Of significant relevance is a section of this book related to the classification of bonsai styles, presented as a series of photographs. The underlying reason for the choice of these styles being the knowledge of the way these trees grow in their native habitat, emphasizing the importance of studying full grown trees in nature before training bonsai.

Another section of the book focuses on rock and group plantings and the detailed explanation with accompanying photographs and sketches would be useful for anyone considering developing such landscapes.

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**BRING A TREE TO WORK ON**