

We have come to the final meeting of 2023 at Ali and Tony's Venn Valley Vineyard (between Landkey and Swimbridge) EX32 0NN. Many thanks to them both, for looking after us so well this year. Of course the available yummy cakes and drinks must also be mentioned!

Our next bonsai meeting will be on **Wednesday, 3 January – next year** at the vineyard, at 2:00 pm.



I brought in a few interesting trees to explain their development process and the state they have currently reached.

The first was this Horse Chestnut (conker) that is about 40 years old. The trunk has many twists and turns that add attention to the tree. Having just moved house during the summer heatwave I had put the tree in the full sunlight and found the pot was untouchable due to the heat. I became aware that the tree suddenly looked unhappy – not surprising having cooked the roots at a high temperature for a fortnight! I brought the salvaged tree in to show that cooler remedial placement meant there was a sudden profusion of 'sticky buds' ready for the leaves next spring – whew!

The next tree was an *Acer burgarium* or 'Trident Maple'.

The Maple family is noted for the leaves to have five pointed segments on each like the famous *A. palmatum* to a Sycamore or the Japanese maple. Here, not too subtly, I am pointing out that the Trident Maple only has three segments on each leaf.



Trident maples make good starter bonsai as they grow very quickly, very forgiving, and cuttings can be struck easily. One does have to take care when pruning as the sap is white and creamy, especially in spring time. The roots of Trident maples do have a high water content and if frozen can explode that more than likely kill the tree.





The final tree we discussed was this Chinese Elm, *Ulmus Parvifolia*

This species is superb as a starter in bonsai. They can be pruned to many convincing styles; they grow exceedingly quickly and very easy to take cuttings from the prunings of another tree.

This cutting is only about 4 years old and now needs considerable refinement to create a triangular image as the top is far too heavy for the rather weedy first branch that also needs lowering.

Our latest new member Lyn brought two trees with her, both of which had been in pots for many years.

The first was a Mountain Ash or Rowan, *Sorbus aucuparia* that has a fantastic trunk and a sound branch arrangement. Having pruned out the deadwood and crossing branches a good basis was created to go forward towards the example below. In the meantime some top dressing of soil and some gentle feeding, the tree should respond well in this current pot.





Lyn's second tree was a splendid beech, *Fagus sylvatica* in its full autumnal livery. It also arrived with its own garnish of toadstools! Again, the dead and crossing branches were removed to create a 'goblet' shape from which next year, some styling can move this tree into a nice little bonsai. This is particularly so given the lovely arch of the trunk. At this time of year probably best to remove the top toadstools, top-dress with some soil and a light fertiliser or mulch that should provide enough for a good spring show. Best to leave the tree in this pot for the time being.



Maggie arrived with this extremely pot-bound juniper that had nevertheless developed several trunks.

A different, slightly larger pot after some modest root pruning at this time of the year would work wonders for the health of this tree for next year.

Next spring some discussions can take place in the direction in which Maggie would like to style this tree that has considerable potential.



The final item we covered was the repotting of a recovered Larch. Last year the tree chose to kill off all but the very bottom branch. It was placed in a shady area with a little fertiliser for several months and it then put on much new growth. It was therefore time to consider repotting with an aim to create a 'Shohin' sized tree, ultimately in a smaller diameter and depth of pot.

Before the tree was removed from its training pot the new pot was prepared with

- Mesh that was wired over the drainage holes to keep the soil in and creepy-crawlies out.
- Thin wire was threaded through the drainage holes ready to wire the tree into the pot. In bonsai the tap root is removed so it is imperative that the newly potted tree is held securely in the soil, otherwise the wind will rock the tree and the very small capillary roots would never create a decent binding on the soil.
- Slightly larger soil or gravel is placed in the bottom of the pot for drainage – I used pea-gravel.
- Bonsai soil was the put into the pot, with a small hump in the middle for the roots to be spread out for drainage.
- The tree was then prepared:
 - The wire holding the tree into the pot was cut on the underside
 - The tree was extracted
 - Using a soil rake the pot-bound roots were teased out with much of the soil removed
 - About 1/3 to 1/2 of the roots were removed with scissors
- The bonsai soil in the pot was damp and so were the tree roots. Both were dusted with mycorrhizal powder. This was used to encourage the fungal associations between the tree roots and beneficial fungi. The fungi effectively extend the root area of the tree.
- The tree was carefully placed in the pot on the 'hump' to achieve the desired front, and in this case the trunk was canted back by about 45° to help later styling.
- The wire that was to hold the tree into the pot was tightly bound around the base of the trunk, twisted and excess trimmed off.
- The remainder of the bonsai soil was added to the planting.
- A wooden chop-stick was then employed to push the soil between the tree roots to ensure good contact and firmness of the tree in the pot.
- The tree was then thoroughly sprayed with water with the aim of the smallest soil particles being moved closer to the smallest roots to enable the fasted recovery for the tree.





The finished repotted Larch. The branch actually joins the trunk around the corner adding to the interest.

Not sure whether the tiny jin will stay however.

After the tree has recovered – about 6 months – the branch will be bent almost horizontal and the trunk will be removed to just above the jin.

As the tree develops the remainder of the trunk (and jin) will be removed as the branch would have thickened up making a continuous curve.

New growth from the branch may give further opportunities in a year or two.



Some thank you's to:

- 🔪 Austin, for bringing in a pot of seeds for all to share. They came from his garden where there resides an *Acer palmatum atropurpureum*. I'm sorry Austin, I planted a few of your seeds last week and nothing has come up!
- 🔪 Paul, for leaping out of his chair with my phone and taking excellent photos. This is especially true as it is generally accepted that I am one of, if not the most unphotogenic people on the planet.
- 🔪 To everyone, who so swiftly tidy up the room, stacking chairs and so forth – ta muchly.

Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, 3 January – next year** at the vineyard, at 2:00 pm.

Please bring along any tree that we could discuss as a group; this process gives a broader insight to possibilities across a wider range of material and is also a lot of fun of course.



Further details of bonsai help can be found at www.bonsaiforeveryone.com

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