

A really lively and entertaining session was held this month, with 13 attendees. This u3a Bonsai group has now been running for a year. In that time we have had 103 attendees. This is superb given that we didn't meet for two of the twelve months! Must be entirely due to owner Ali's amazing cakes at our venue, the Venn Valley Vineyard !

Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, 6 March** in the vineyard, at 2:00 pm.

It is always superb to see a new range of material brought in so we all may learn how to treat different species.

As this meeting was in early February we were able to safely repot an oak tree that had been in the same pot, for about 15 years, on the front door step. Most, but not all trees can be safely repotted December to February but knowing your species and the best times to take action is paramount.

As repotting is such a crucial element of keeping trees in pots (bonsai) it might be helpful to have a step by step list of the classical way of approaching this:

Repotting Bonsai - Step By Step:

Much of the information below can be found on the website www.bonsaiforeveryone.com. Alternatively, the original RHS publication of '*The Little Book of Bonsai*' by Malcolm and Kath Hughes, ISBN 978-1-78472-167-1 is still available.

1. Ensure you have everything ready prior to starting, in terms of both materials and tools. The aim is to offer as little stress to the tree as possible through the repotting and subsequent months to enhance the chances of success.
2. Sort out your bonsai soil mixture and have a plentiful supply ready. Choosing the right soil mixture is crucial for the health of your trees; it should have:

GOOD WATER-RETENTION – To be able to hold sufficient water to supply moisture to the bonsai between each watering.

GOOD DRAINAGE – Excess water must be able to drain from the pot. Soils without such drainage are liable to a build-up of salts and can cause the roots to rot, killing the tree.

GOOD AERATION – The particles used in a bonsai mix should be large enough to allow tiny air pockets between each particle. The tree needs oxygen for the roots, and to allow good bacteria to survive, so the processing of food will take place before being absorbed by the root-hairs or sent to the leaves for photosynthesis.

TYPICAL BONSAI MIX is 50% Akadama, 25% fine gravel (grit) and 25% potting compost.



3. Choosing a pot that really suits the tree is difficult as various factors have to be considered, such as shape, whether the pot is glazed or unglazed and the colour. A few basic guidelines (not rules, as choice is very personal) may be helpful at this point in the selection of the perfect pot.

WIDTH - Choose a pot with a width of about two thirds the height of the tree.

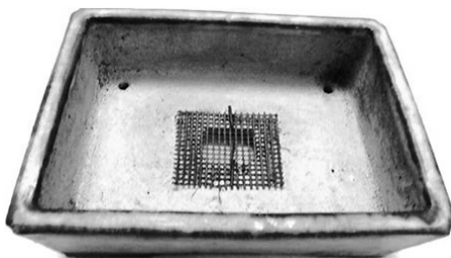
DEPTH - The depth of the pot should be approximately equal to the thickness of the trunk base; young trees or those with very thin trunks are the exception to this

SHAPE - For 'masculine', heavy-looking strong trees use angular pots. For more gently shaped 'feminine', delicate-looking trees use rounded pots.

GLAZE - Use unglazed pots for evergreen species, such as conifers and pine, and glazes pots for deciduous and flowering trees. Do not choose a bright glaze unless the tree has flowers or fruits.



4. Place a small square of plastic mesh over the drainage holes, secure it in place with wire twisted underneath to make a bow like shape this will stop the wire falling out and stops the compost from escaping.
5. The smaller holes in the corners can be used to thread wires through and enable you to secure wobbling trees.



6. Cover the bottom of the pot with a thin layer of grit to create a good drainage.
7. Now use the prepared soil mixture as the second layer, on which the tree will be planted.



8. Remove the tree from its pot, if necessary use a sharp knife to cut around the edge if it is pot bound and stuck.
9. Using a root-hook or sharp pointed object, carefully remove the soil and disentangle the roots. When repotting pine trees never remove all the soil; this would remove the mycorrhizal fungus which is essential for the tree's survival.
10. Cut back long roots; this will help your tree to grow a more compact root-system. Also remove any rotting or vertical growing roots. Prune up to $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total root mass.



11. Place the tree, in position in the pot. Now is the time to change the position especially if you felt the front view should be changed. Usually position slightly to the side of the pot, unless it is a round pot. Secure the tree in position with the wire, lacing it tightly through the roots. The newly planted tree must not 'rock' in the wind, as new roots will develop slowly, if at all, so the finished combination of tree and pot are firmly fixed together.

12. Finish filing the pot using the soil mixture to about 1 cm below the rim; make sure the soil fills the pot completely and no air pockets are left between the roots.

At this point it is worth, with the aid of an old wooden chop stick, 'gently' pushing the soil between the roots to gain good contact. The image shows Rosemary remonstrating with me – most correctly – that I was 'thumping' and therefore damaging the roots during the process. Old, bad habits are really hard to eradicate!



13. The final step is to water the tree thoroughly. Using a hosepipe or watering can with a fine nozzle is preferable, and allows you to water until the pot is flooded. When using products like akadama or pumice, water should be passed through the soil until it appears clear coming from the drainage holes.

14. After Care: protect the tree from strong winds and sun for about two months.

Start fertilizing one month after the repotting.





Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, 7 February** at the vineyard, at 2:00 pm.

It is planned to discuss the merits, or otherwise, of buying material from the DIY sheds or garden centres to create a bonsai. To that end I shall be tackling one of Sainsbury's finest, a Norwegian spruce, better known as a Christmas tree given to me by some friends. It did make an appearance in January where only the top was removed. A complete overhaul is planned with it losing a considerable amount of foliage.



The proposed front, but this may well change once we get inside the foliage.

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.

We started the u3a Bonsai Group last March and counting the number of attendees this last year, we are up to 103! Thank you all for your support and interest. And, that will done with only 10 meetings!

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

Any queries or help needed please email or phone me:

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