

Our first meeting in the Methodist Hall, Rhododendron Avenue was received very well. This meeting was in the afternoon of the Barnstaple u3a coffee morning which consequently prevented several of our regulars from attending due and it being on a Thursday. This has been attended to and the u3a Bonsai group will now meet on the first TUESDAY afternoon of each month at 2:30. **We will therefore meet next on Tuesday, 2 July.**

As we have to pay for the hall it seems that Tuesday afternoon will allow more people to come to the Bonsai group so we can maintain the £3.00 fee. Ideally we need a minimum of 12 people for each session.

Once again, a special thank you to Paul for his excellent photography.



Betty brought a pair of Rowan or Mountain Ash saplings in that were heavily wired to initiate a windswept bonsai.

Due to the leaf structure several small leaves making up the whole leaf a windswept would not be as convincing as perhaps some other species.

The two trees were trimmed to a more informal upright design.



Austin, brought in this rather nice sycamore that had been in this blue pot for many years.

Half the tree was defoliated now in early June so a second flush of leaves would be generated. This will produce smaller leaves and aid the creation of a tighter ramification.



Ramification will form a denser, inward growth of branches rather than an outward growth; making the foliage canopy thicker. This process also allows the bonsai leaves to receive more light, consequently, more energy and growth.



Another of Austin's mature trees is this splendid beech. Again, the same process of defoliation could be done like the sycamore above to achieve the same end of increased ramification.

Deciding on a possible front took a fair bit of discussion.



The theme for this meeting was to look at two very common species to the UK. Firstly, Oak which is found all over the country and secondly, the Cotoneaster which is to be found in its various forms in very many domestic gardens.

OAK

Oak is not traditionally used for bonsai in Japan, but its use began in western countries in the in the 1950s. The thick branches are easily fractured, and the tree is sensitive to root pruning. Oak is always one of the latest trees to leaf and following a harsh winter they leaf even later. The biggest enemy of oak bonsai is wind. Strong winds will quickly dehydrate any delicate buds and leaves so a sheltered position is preferable.

Hard pruning should be done in early spring before the buds open. Strong terminal buds can also be removed then. New shoots cut back leaving two leaves. Do not defoliate oaks - it would weaken them too much; you can however remove the largest leaves. Trim the upper parts of the crown because they grow stronger than the lower branches.

If oaks are wired, be careful to remove the wire before it cuts into the bark. Wire marks will be there for a very long time. Guy wires are good choice instead.

Really only suited to the informal upright style, or maybe group plantings of younger trees.

Below is a 10 year old tree and 4 youngsters, two which were provided by a u3a member - these 4 were given to members of the group.



COTONEASTER

Cotoneaster can be deciduous or evergreen shrubs or small trees, with simple, entire leaves and clusters of small white or pink flowers in spring and summer, followed by showy red, purple or black berries

Cotoneaster. horizontalis is a spreading dwarf deciduous shrub up to 2m in width, with distinctive, flat, regularly-branched sprays of foliage with small glossy leaves that turn orange and red in autumn. Pink-tinged flowers and red berries.

Cotoneaster is an excellent subject for bonsai, and particularly smaller sized bonsai, with its small leaf-size, responding to hard pruning, producing prolific flowers and berries.

As bonsai they have a reputation for being a little temperamental at times as some enthusiasts have had theirs unexpectedly die. They are usually a very tough species as long as they have the correct, fast draining soil mix and the tree is fed the occasionally with an ericaceous fertiliser, particularly in hard water/lime water areas.

They are not strictly acid-loving, but they do appear to deteriorate slowly in a pot when subjected to high pH conditions/hard water on a long-term basis. Fortunately not something that concerns us in the west country.

Bear in mind also that Cotoneaster as a genus are often found growing in very poor, thin and stony soils and therefore require well-drained soil when cultivated in a pot and do not respond well to heavy bonsai fertilizing for any length of time. Regular but light feeding regimes are preferred!



A selection of Cotoneaster bonsai showing different styles

A Recap

Our meetings will be on the first TUESDAY of the month, making our next get together on **2 July**. This will be 2:30 – 4:30 pm.

There is a cost, I'm afraid, to cover the hall charge of £3.00 each per session. There is an excellent car park.

Where is it?

Sticklepath Methodist Hall, Rhododendron Avenue, Sticklepath, Barnstaple EX31 2DJ



Please contact me for further details.

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All the best - Nigel