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ADDENDUM TO EDITION OF MARCH 2024 – TEANAH’S NOTES OF MEMBERS’ FORUM

Brian’s juniper – garden

You need (with any juniper) to keep pruning each year in the autumn because they actually continue growing right up until it gets really cold. While it’s warm/mild they will still be pushing out new growth. You need to be thinning out foliage to allow pads to form. By opening it out, you’re allowing light into the inner foliage so that you can keep the branch. If you don’t, the inner foliage goes away, and you’ll end up with the outer foliage just getting bigger.

What you’re looking for is very defined pads that aren’t too deep but that narrow towards the end, getting deeper towards the back of the pad. Pruning so you get the pads right also helps with back budding. Allowing light in will allow those points further back to develop. If there’s no light getting in, most buds will never develop, they just lay there. Dormant buds develop further back and, surprisingly, junipers will actually put back on very old branches if they get the sun.

This juniper is not a variety that’s been grown specifically for Bonsai. It’s a garden variety of juniper so it will probably have originally been bought from the garden centre, and it will be a variety of quite vigorous growth. A lot of the varieties we grow for Bonsai are grown for the specific foliage that is a lot tighter (more clump forming) which creates better pads.

With this, it’s just a case of going through it, taking off the growth that’s going down on the underside of your pads. You want to try and balance it up over the whole tree, so you’ve got signs of dense foliage on every branch. You want the tree to put its energy into stronger branches. That’s what trees do as they get bigger. Weaker branches that are shaded as the tree gets bigger die off, which is what you see on trees in fields that you know are 70ft tall and there’s no branches on the 1st 25ft of the tree. Bonsai is trying to allow the light in, so we keep those lower branches.

In terms of improving this tree, it is a case of just getting the pads. There’s a lot of interesting branches on this and at some point you’ll be looking at wiring and twisting. Some of the twists and movements at the moment are going against the shape of the overall shape of the tree. It might be a case of removing them: this branch twists back on itself and could almost touch the main trunk of the tree so it’s

making this area look a bit full and congested. The problem you've got, if you're keeping this apex, you've got a curve in the trunk that comes round and goes an odd way.

If you want this to be the apex on this side, I would actually twist that whole piece round, bring it further over and then slowly develop this apex.

Think of when your trunk is a certain thickness: if your foliage is huge, it's going to make that trunk width smaller in comparison to the size of the foliage. If you want your tree to be more powerful, you actually want to compact the foliage a lot more. Make the head of the tree look smaller and more powerful by pruning back. Do it in stages: cut it back and just let it recover. Be working evenly on the whole tree. Take it back a little bit and then let the tree redevelop growth and then go back further.

You will find that, on these long branches, you will probably start to get buds forming further back because where branches have come out in the past, dormant buds will start to push out new growth. It takes a lot of time! It won't just happen overnight. It can take several years to do that.

The whole tree needs to be evenly shaped across the whole structure. A good tip is to tag small branches you may think of taking off, so you don't forget which ones you were doing.

It's the same for any tree; if you're not pruning, you're getting too much growth on the end of the branch. The inner part won't grow and develop in the first place .

One other thing: on a mature tree, your foliage should sit on top of the branch. It shouldn't go down from the branch. If you look at the tree in nature, when the branch grows the foliage grows on top of it and it doesn't grow on the other side. You see the structure of the branch and that would give the impression of a much more mature branch because you're looking from underneath. So, taking the foliage out from underneath, exposing the branches, '>:..';.'; and having the foliage sat on top.

Robert's Malayan Apple

Looking at the overall image of the tree, we've got the foliage but it's just starting to hide the structure. Defining the pads a little bit more and allowing a bit more space between parts so that you see more structure to the tree would give it a better image. If you cut it back, you probably won't get the flowers but if you do, and you leave it for a year, you will get the flowers. It will look more defined, but you will lose the fruit this time. You really want to be sure that you can see the structure of the trunk. When you see trees in nature, you don't look at them from above, you look at them from the bottom; from the ground looking up and you can see the structure. With the Bonsai we have to make the tree more open so that you can see that structure and then it looks more like a tree. Otherwise, it will look like a bush in a pot! Once you can see more of the trunk, you will see more of the bark. Over time, hopefully, it will build up more around the base.

For those that are only just starting Bonsai, the most important thing to be aware of is if you keep touching the bark to move your tree, it won't 'age'. Every time you touch it, you knock little bits off and if you keep doing that there's no bark left. You end up with a tree where there isn't as much old bark. The bark is higher up the tree (where you touch it less) and you end up with a narrower part at the bottom of the tree.

Almost like an inverse taper which doesn't look very good. So, don't pick trees up by the trunk! Bark is developing over time and in a few years, you start to notice that effect and by the time you notice that it's effected, it's usually too late.

Try and preserve the bark - avoid getting too much moss growing on the trunk because moss holds moisture. Things like white wine vinegar mixed with a little bit of water just painted onto the surface will kill algae, insects and moss. Clean it off with a toothbrush.

So, the advice with this tree is to give it a bit of a haircut and sacrifice your fruits. It's just trying to make it feature those branches and allow some gaps. Imagine the birds can fly through the branches...Get some energy back in.

Peter Clarke's spruce – 10-15 years old

You've got a lot more growth to get rid of before you bring it back into structure.

Start thinking, "Right, which ones am I going to keep? Which ones would I get rid of?" It's the same issue as with junipers or anything else, the energy in the tree goes into the shoots at the top. It's not putting energy into the lower branches, so you've got to prune the tops of the trees a lot harder than you do the lower branches.

Take out some branches. As a forest planting, you don't need anywhere near as many branches as you would if it was an individual tree. It's quite easy to go through saying: "Well that one's growing into other trees. Take it out! Grow that one that's going out and has got more space." By doing that, and just making sure you're choosing branches that are growing into a direction that is going to get light, over time it will naturally become a Bonsai. Tweak little bits and pieces.

What about the needles?

I wouldn't worry too much about the needles at the top. But, in the apex of the tree, you've got two branches that are potentially becoming leaders. If you prune one back and you left the other one, eventually you're going to get thickening at the point where those two branches are growing.

You want to develop the trunks as well. The trunks are going to develop over time naturally. The more your pruning it, it's putting out growth. For the bark, it is going to start to develop, improving over time but that bark development is something that needs time. There are ways of speeding up but it's still a slow process. The skill with Bonsai is to develop a small tree with really nice bark. Keeping the trunk relatively small - it will always get a little bit bigger and grow more branches. Take photographs of your trees as well so you can go back and compare what has changed. It's about getting that balance between letting the tree grow and removing branches

In terms of your spacing of the trees, they're all very evenly spaced out across the whole pot. In the spring, repot it and bring some of these trees closer and have one or two leaning out a little bit. It'll be a little bit more natural looking. In a small coppice, real trees will be growing away from the bigger trees because they're trying to get more light. I would bring in two or three trees quite close together: some of it further apart.

Over time, if you can get more seedlings of the same variety, you could add younger

trees to it and every time you repot, you add a couple of new and then you start getting a forest growing.

When repotting, don't use standard compost. One of the biggest problems is roots rotting because there is too much moisture. Decent Bonsai compost is very gritty, very free draining for a healthy root system which is not going to rot.

When you're looking from the front, a tree should give you depth of image. Playing with perspective – the more depth you have to it, the bigger the tree will look when looking through it. It's completely personal choice! There's no right or wrong.

Steve's juniper - brand new potting

Allow some growth, depending on how big a tree you want to create, long term. You could allow it to grow out quite a lot but it's going to remain relatively small so do not allow it to push out masses of growth. We want the pads to fill out and grow. The trunk will thicken up in the next two or three years. It will probably be two or three times thicker than it is now.

Growth depends on how much food the tree's getting. A slow release feed (lasts 12 months) in the compost means that you won't have to worry too much about it. A little bit of extra feed won't harm it - liquid feed or granular Bonsai feed on top of the compost. Trees will be getting a little bit of food throughout the year, no matter what. They have a chance of really getting established and growing.

Richard's cotoneaster

When you come to repotting, position the side branches to develop a more interesting shape, without movement coming from the ground

David Atwood's larch (used to be Vics!)

Differently sized needle between Japanese and European larch. Is often planted in forestry for its faster growth.

Editor's note – once again our thanks to Teanah for producing such a comprehensive note – we hope that you can appreciate not only this record but also that its size would have somewhat overwhelmed the March edition! Well done, Teanah.

R and A Gilkes, Editor, March 2024.