Sandhills Horticultural Gardens
Sandhills Community College 50 Years 1963-2013

The Bloomin' News

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The Sandhills Horticultural Society - dedicated to the support of the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens since 1987. Please help the Gardens grow by becoming a Society member.

The Art of Bonsai

Skip Ragland

In the late 70's I discovered bonsai. Walking to my hotel one crisp fall night in Basle, Switzerland, I passed a shop with a beautiful small maple tree in the window. The tree was about a foot tall and the leaves were in full golden fall color. The tree looked much like a full size maple, but there it sat barely reaching the height of my knee. I was fascinated then and continue to be awed by bonsai.

Multiple tree bonsai, courtesy National Arboretum

It wasn't much later when I bought my first tree at a bonsai nursery near San Antonio, Texas. I did some research and decided that I was more interested in deciduous trees than tropicals mostly because I couldn't get the image of that first maple I had seen with its fall leaves in full color out of my mind.

Bonsai trees are interesting during all seasons. When the leaves are off the trees in the winter you can appreciate the beauty of the trunks and limbs of the trees. Bonsai experts agree that the trunk and limb structure is every bit as important as the foliage of the tree.

Many people think of bonsai trees as houseplants and bring them inside to live. Heating and air conditioning in homes has often killed bonsai. It dries them out. Bonsai trees are just like normal size trees. They need to be outside most of the time and brought in for display for only a few days at a time. Some tropical such as figs can usually be allowed to stay inside a great deal of time, but it is wise to regularly take them outside.

Most of my deciduous trees stay outside year-round. They spend the winter under my deck covered with a layer of pine straw. Temperate trees need to be allowed to go through their natural dormant period. My tropical trees go in a cool room under my house.

I first had the impression that bonsai were Japanese trees that were hundreds of years old and had been grown from seed. Many "masterpiece" trees have been grown that way, cared for by generations of people over the centuries. These are the trees which are exhibited much like fine art in museums. Most people obtain their bonsai differently. Bonsai trees can be collected from the wild. Others grow them from seeds. Some buy young normal nursery-grown plants or buy established bonsai trees from bonsai nurseries. My preference is to procure trees with bonsai potential from the back lots of local nurseries. Usually these are the end of the season, old, passed-over, broken limbed trees that are on sale. If they have broken limbs or have been neglected, they are prime material for bonsai starters since a lot of the limbs and foliage will have to be cut when creating a new bonsai.

Also, the trees you buy at a regular nursery don't have to be very small. If you have limbs growing low on the tree and a nice trunk, you can literally cut feet off the height of the tree. It seems a bit extreme, but you can cut the top out of a tree if you have a lateral branch growing beneath the cut. You can wire the lateral branch vertically and create a new apex. Most of the growing season foliage will cover the wound so you don't see it. After a number of years it will be hard to tell the top was ever cut out. Today, many of the most magnificent bonsai trees have been created that way.

Most heights of bonsai are acceptable. Mame is the smallest at about six inches. Standards run around a foot or so and then there is giant which can get up to four or five feet tall. I don't grow mame because they require a great deal of care. Since there is so little soil in a container holding a six inch tree, it needs to be watered a couple of times a day. I like the standard height because you can make them appear pretty natural. I would like to try a giant someday, but it usually takes a couple of people to move them around. Groves of trees make very interesting bonsai. My favorite bonsai is a grove of four feet tall junipers that are housed in the National Bonsai Collection in Washington D.C.

Collecting from the wild is a great way to acquire bonsai material. Trees near rights-of ways and railroad tracks have been cut time and time again and have had a chance to develop a nice trunk. You might come across a larger tree that you want to turn into a bonsai. Take your time. Root prune the tree one fall and come back the next to lift the tree. It works.

continued on page 3

Good Neighbors Make Great Gardens

Rebecca Rodriquez

Now I'm not talking about the friendly lady next door that gives you seeds or daylily divisions (although those neighbors are wonderful), I'm talking about plants in your own garden and what is known as companion planting. The Oxford Dictionary defines companion planting as 'the close planting of different plants that enhance each other's growth or protect each other from pests.' Companion planting is most often done in the vegetable garden, but it can involve flowers, herbs, and fruits as well.

There are several ways that companion plants can help each other grow. They can physically help each other, such as taller plants giving shade to more sun sensitive plants or sturdy plants providing a structure for vining plants. Nitrogen fixing plants can help improve the soil conditions for heavy nitrogen feeding neighbors. Companion plants can limit pest problems by either repelling pests or luring them away from more susceptible plants. Finally, you can use companion plants to attract beneficial insects to your garden which helps with pest problems and pollination for fruit formation.

Here are a few companion plantings I will be growing this year, either at the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens Vegetable Garden or in my home garden. A quick internet search will lead you to many more. Try inviting a new neighbor into your garden this season, you'll like the results!

The traditional Native American 'Three Sisters' companion planting. Plant corn in the center of a small mound. When it is 6 inches tall, alternate pole bean and squash seeds around the corn plant. The corn will provide a sturdy pole for the bean plants to vine up. The beans fix nitrogen in the soil for the other two plants. As the squash vine covers the soil, it will block out weeds and provide natural mulch regulating soil temperature and moisture.

Adding nasturtiums to your vegetable garden will not only give you a beautiful, and edible, flower, but it can help lure aphids away from other plants, repel cucumber beetles, and provide a great habitat for beneficial predatory insects.

Planting basil in between tomato plants is reported to improve the flavor of tomatoes, and I can personally attest to the fact that it makes a really yummy instant garden snack. Many a sun warmed basil leaf and cherry tomato went directly from the plant to my mouth last summer – delicious neighbors!

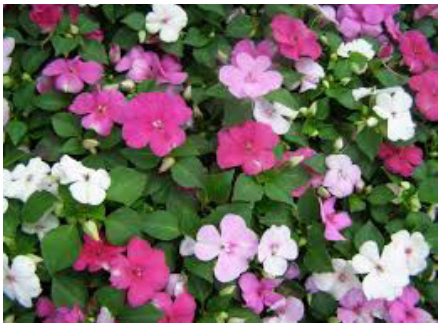
Interplanting marigolds with members of the tomato family (potatoes, peppers, eggplants) can help control soil nematodes. I've also found that rabbits don't like marigolds, so planting them on the border of your garden can help deter those unwanted furry neighbors. But don't plant them too close to your beans or cabbage, as marigolds can limit their growth. Not all neighbors are good neighbors.

Whatever you decide for your own vegetable garden this year, break away from the straight rows of single crops. Mix things up a bit; you'll find it improves the neighborhood.

"Three Sisters" garden. Illustration by Elayne Sears from an article by Barbara Pleasant in Mother Earth News, April/May 2011.

Impatiens Problem

Dolores Muller



It's always been challenging to find showy flowers for shade gardens. That's why gardeners have treasured impatiens (specifically, *Impatiens walleriana*). They have long been the go to plant when color is needed to brighten up a shady spot in the garden. No deadheading is required, just water and a little fertilizer provide colorful flowers from spring to frost.

The last couple seasons something has been happening to impatiens that have people wondering why their plants look wilted, collapse or disappear all together. This problem has been happening on the east & west coasts, the Midwest and from Ontario to Texas. Starting in 2011 impatiens have been hit with a strain of downy mildew. The disease is a mold (*Pkasmopara obducens*). It thrives in cool, damp conditions & first appears as a downy coating of spores on the under side of the leaves. Early symptoms on *Impatiens walleriana* can be very subtle. It starts with a slight stippling or chlorosis (yellowing) of the leaves. These symptoms might appear similar to a nutritional deficiency or spider mite injury. Leaves can flag or curl downward, sometimes giving the appearance that the plants need to be watered. Under humid conditions, you will see a coating of white-colored sporulation on the undersurfaces of some leaves. Sporulation may not always be present or easy to find: you need to look closely at any chlorotic or downward curled leaves. If infected when young, plants will appear stunted; in advanced stages, plants will drop their leaves and flowers and the stems will collapse. This makes it easy to miss until the flowers start drooping. The spores on the underside of the leaves can disperse if splashed with water or blown by the wind. More spores are on the stem, and these can be released into the soil where they can live through the winter waiting to infect new plants in the spring. Local growers indicate the problem is not with any greenhouses that grow impatiens as they use sterile soil in sterile growing conditions. Growers are suggesting rotating plants, just as the farmers do their crops.

All cultivars of *Impatiens walleriana* (standard garden impatiens, including double impatiens and mini-impatiens) as well as any *I. walleriana* interspecific hybrids (such as Fusion® and Butterfly® impatiens) are susceptible. *I. balsamina* (balsam impatiens or garden balsam) are also susceptible. New Guinea impatiens, *Impatiens hawkeri*, as well as hybrids such as SunPatiens® are not susceptible to impatiens downy mildew, nor are other garden plants.

At this point in time the danger of this colorful shade plant seems to now outweigh the positive aspects, since the disease can be spread down the street or carried for miles by the wind. Experts are encouraging people to dig up all the diseased plants and bag them for trash removal, and advise not to compose them because the spores can spread. Further north frost usually kills the disease but we in the Sandhills do not usually get cold enough for this to occur, although this very cold winter that we are experiencing might be just what is needed to break the cycle. It remains to be seen if this cold winter will help. In the meantime alternative plant suggestions, that are not susceptible to the disease are, New Guinea impatiens, green leaf begonias, caladiums, coleus, begonias dragon wings, torrenia (wishbone flower) and colorful heuchera.

Impatiens are one of the most popular bedding plants in the US, primarily because they do a job that many other plants can struggle with but this season might be an opportunity to try an alternative and find we like the new results.

The Art of Bonsai Continued

So many people think all bonsai are distorted, abstract-looking plants that look like modern museum pieces rather than actual trees. There are many styles of bonsai trees including upright, semi-upright, slanting, cascade and many others. I prefer to make my trees look as natural as possible. I stand back from a tree and imagine what it would look like if it were on a hill and I am viewing it from a distance. Bonsai is not literal. You can't make it look exactly like a big tree, but you can make it resemble one.

Cypress, juniper, Japanese maple, cryptomeria, azalea and flowering quince are good plant materials for bonsai. Large leaf trees such as magnolia don't work very well. It is hard to reduce the leaf size. Fruit trees work well if they have very small fruit such as crabapple. I have seen a regular apple bonsai with a fruit almost as large as the tree. It looked a bit weird.

Most trees and shrubs can be turned into bonsai. I have even seen a grape vine bonsai. I once told a friend who was getting interested in bonsai about vines such as wisteria making nice bonsai. He went into the woods and gathered what he thought was a thick grape vine. Unfortunately it turned out to be a poison ivy vine. It was quite a learning experience.

Bonsai do require a bit more care than a lot of other plant material. Because the tree is grown in a small pot with holes in the bottom, it needs a daily drink of water. All that water flushes nutrients out of the soil, so it doesn't hurt to fertilize once or twice a month and change the soil once a year. Bonsai are susceptible to diseases and insects. Good mild fungicides and insecticidal soaps are important to use when needed.

Roots need to be pruned once a year and during growing season I find it is very relaxing to trim the leaves to keep the trees in shape.

I would highly recommend trying your hand at bonsai. Today you will find many books, DVDs and internet sites available to help you get started.

Horticultural Society Events

Dolores Muller

It is with great anticipation that I look forward to the events we have planned for 2014 after finishing out 2013 with well attended, exciting programs. We started the new year with 94 people attending a pruning workshop given by Moore County Agricultural Extension agent Taylor Williams and a waiting list of people wanting to attend Joan Williams Follow the Leader Oil Painting class in February.

Horticultural Society trip to The Orchid Gallery

One of the highlights of last year was our fall bus trip to The Orchid Gallery in Pittsboro and lunch at the Oakleaf. The trip was sold out. Everyone gave rave reviews to the restaurant and the presentation given by Jeff Baldwin of the Orchid Gallery and many people came home with orchid treasures. In November, Carol Dowd of Botanicals in Southern Pines, gave a program on holiday decorating and participants made two small arrangements to take home. Our Annual December Flower Arranging workshop by Maggie Smith had the usual very long waiting list of people wanting to attend. She always brings copious amounts of materials and ideas to make a flower arrangement for Christmas. We are finding our classes and workshops to be very popular and they fill up fast so I encourage you to sign up and get your money in as soon as possible so you won't be disappointed. Receipt of your money guarantees you a place so: call to register then send in your check. I look forward to seeing you soon at one of our workshops or programs.

Looking Ahead – Programs & Workshops

To register for workshops & classes – Pre-payment is required.
Send payment and name of class to Sandhills Horticultural Society, 3395 Airport Road, Pinehurst, NC 28374. Attn: Tricia Mabe. You must cancel within 48 hours of the event to receive a refund or credit toward another workshop.

Growing Vegetables in Containers
March 1 (Saturday) 10AM - Noon Stephens Laboratory – Steed Hall
Jan Leitschuh, Master Gardener and organizer of the popular 'Farm to Table' program will conduct this workshop. Participants will go home with a 5 gallon and a 1 gallon container of vegetable plantings.
Space is limited Horticultural Society Members $20, Non-members $25

Moles & Voles in the Lawn & Garden
March 20 (Thursday) 10AM – 11AM Ball Visitors Center
Peter Hertl of NC State University will give a presentation on coping with moles and voles in your lawns and gardens. Co-sponsored by the Sandhills Horticultural Society and the Council of Garden Clubs.
FREE but reservations necessary.

Summer & Fall Blooming Bulbs
March 27 (Thursday) 10AM – 11:30AM Ball Visitors Center
Hilarie Blevins, Horticulturalist at CCNC, will present a talk on selection, planting and care of summer and fall blooming bulbs. Varieties will be discussed and will be available to order at the spring plant sale. Reservation is necessary.
Horticultural Society Members $5, Non-members $10

Plant a Living Wall Picture
April 5 (Saturday) 10AM – Noon Stephens Laboratory – Steed Hall
Linda Hamwi, the "Plant Diva", will conduct this workshop. Participants will make a wall picture with plants like the ones at Belk in Pinecrest Plaza. This is a make it and take it workshop.
Space limited to 18.
Horticultural Society Members $60, Non-members $65

Sandhills Horticultural Society Spring Plant Sale
April 12 (Saturday) 8AM – Noon Steed Hall
Perennials, woody plants and bulbs will be for sale at the horticultural building area – Steed Hall. For information or to pre-order, call 910-695-3882.
Horticultural Society Members receive 10% off orders of $50 or more.

Annual Bedding Plant Sale for the Benefit of Student's Educational Field Trip April 25 – 26 Friday 1PM – 5PM and Saturday) 10AM – 2PM Steed Hall
Annuals, herbs, tomato and pepper plants are available. Pre-orders are recommended to get the best selection. Order forms are available at the Ball Visitors Center. To order by phone call 910-695-3882 or 910-695-3885.

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Membership Renewal Reminder

The deadline to renew your membership is **April 1, 2014**.

Mail to: Sandhills Community College, Attn: Dee Johnson, 3395 Airport Road, Pinehurst NC 2837

Your membership dues and the programs sponsored by the Sandhills Horticultural Society provide the funds for planned development and maintenance of the Gardens. Your membership includes a free subscription to Better Homes & Gardens, a discount at the student's plant sales, use of the Ball Visitors Center for garden related events, and more. Thanks for your continued support.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State_____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email Address_____

Please make checks payable to: SCC – Sandhills Horticultural Society.

☐ Individual $25.00 ☐ Family $45.00 ☐ Individual Life $350.00

Spring Gardening Tips

- Prune hybrid tea roses in March
- Plant cool season vegetables at the end of February, beginning of March
- Renew your Horticultural Society membership before April
- Fertilize and prune azaleas after they have bloomed
- Prune ornamental grasses before growth begins
- Plant warm season vegetables after the last chance of frost
- Inspect irrigation system for possible winter damage