

MONTHLY TIPS

(Ed's. Note: The following article was taken from the 'Bonsai News' the newsletter of The Lake Charles Bonsai Society and was written by Alan Walker)

Although your bonsai require very little attention this time of the year, don't neglect them in the rush of December. Root rot can become a big problem, if you haven't modified your watering procedure from the summer. Make sure that you water only when your bonsai's soil has gotten on the dry side. Your deciduous trees are not transpiring when their leaves have fallen, and the cool temperatures do not promote much evaporation, so your trees are not using much water. If you've been collecting and had to prune your newly collected material, be sure to seal all the cuts. They won't really start to heal until dormancy ends and by the exposure to winter winds will draw moisture from the wounds faster than the traumatized root system can replenish it. Coat all the cut areas with Calusmate or some other sealant to give that new addition a chance to survive.

December is a good time to rewire, since the branches won't begin to swell with growth again until dormancy ends. Be careful with your deciduous material, though. Even though they are denuded and easier to wire, there is less sap in the branches now, making them more brittle. Your pines, junipers, and most other evergreens are still fairly pliable. As always, remember to use wire that is harder to bend than the branch it is to train.

That way you won't need to put your branches at risk from over bending in order to get the correct angle to stay. Also, the heavier wire will be less likely to scar the branch, if you don't notice the branch thickening in time.

Prepare soil now for the potting season. There are so many things to do in the early spring, that any early preparation done now will be appreciated then. Tag any trees which will need repotting. Now is the time to order pots, so they'll be there when you need them.

The slow winter season is a good time to photograph your bonsai. Look up the article by Dan Barton on pages 6-7 in the May 2001 issue of **BONSAI NEWS**. Your deciduous material is fully exposed, and there's nothing like a black and white photograph of a tree to reveal flaws in the branch arrangement. This can be your blueprint for pruning in the spring. Your photographs may also reveal a better front or potting angle. Keep these photographs with your record book. It can quite rewarding to look over your bonsai records and not how your trees have progressed over the years. Bring your records to one of our general workshops or the meeting to get suggestions from other members for shaping and design. If you're afraid of being pressured into cutting more than you want, just having photos or sketches can save you from regrets and still allow you to get the input from others.