

MONTHLY TIPS

Unlike any other month of the year, the bonsai chores are almost exactly the same as the previous month!

There is one big difference, however: March is only a few weeks away, and probably is the busiest bonsai month of the year. That means prepare, prepare, prepare!!! Do you have your soil, screens, wire, the right sized pots, optional repotting nutrients (Superthrive, mycorrhizae, and a touch of 0-10-10), and the other things you need for repotting season?

Look at your trees now and come up with ideas of how you might want to restyle them at the time of repotting so you don't lose so much time later. Remember, if you have ten or fifteen deciduous trees that start to open their buds all at the same time, you'll only have a few days to come up with an inspiration for restyling (which might mean a new potting angle, wiring and major pruning), then root pruning and repotting all ten or fifteen. Since most of us have other things to do in life also (little things like employment, taking care of kids, eating, sleeping, etc) it can be pretty overwhelming, and we often end up saying "what the hell, I'm just going to wait until next year".

Repotting time can be a very enjoyable and rewarding time if you are ready. It's the specific day of the year when a tree can most easily move up another notch in quality, in fact often be literally transformed.

There are, alas, a couple of chores for February itself.

This is a big month for pest control. It's the last opportunity to use true dormant oil to get rid of pine needle scale and over wintering aphids, spider mite, etc on your outdoor trees. If you reduce the strength of your dormant oil, you can mix in a little lime sulfur or certain other pesticides and fungicides (be sure this is OK'd on the label, and follow instructions carefully).

This is also approaching the time when indoor pests go wild. Spider mite especially like the warm dry windless environment of our homes, and can creep up on you.

Some experienced bonsai people believe this is the best time of year to tip prune Eastern white pine, as it forces new buds. But don't do this to your other pines.

Continue to protect your trees from the extreme temperatures. Don't let them dry out, but be sure you don't over water either. Outdoor trees in outdoor storage need water every couple of weeks at the most. Those in garages need water more often. Also, be on the lookout for any deciduous trees that put out buds early. This includes mostly those in warmer winter storage (garages, greenhouses), and those plants which are native to higher numerical (more southern) growing zones where Spring starts earlier. Tridents are among this last category. Remember, if the buds start to suddenly swell, you must repot them immediately if you intend to repot them this year. Needless to say, this is a problem, since we have difficulty in Cincinnati providing the outdoor light new buds need without killing them with frost or carrying them in and out every day.

Finally, read your bonsai books, magazines and websites. The more you know, the more you'll enjoy!

-Doug Hawley