



*The Friendly Club*

# Bonsai Maintenance

## Bonsai Maintenance Calendar



This BONSAI MAINTENANCE CALENDAR for the Newcastle Area (N.S.W. Australia) was copied from the monthly 2005 Newsletters. This monthly advice was prepared and included in the Newsletters by Dave Kiernan who was Club President and Editor of the Newcastle Bonsai Society Newsletter for our 2004/2005 term.

## **DISCLAIMER**

The calendar is intended as a guide only as there are seasonal variations not just from year to year but within the Newcastle area from suburb to suburb within the same season and year. This information is not comprehensive, is provided in a guide only and the Club accepts no responsibility for any problems arising from following the advice in this calendar.

## **JOBS FOR JANUARY**

Watering continues to be our main job till the end of summer and last month's notes are relevant for January as well.

During dry weather, wet the foliage of trees that are prone to 'Red Spider Mite', whilst you are watering, as this is a very effective deterrent for these little nasties, and keep an eye out for any other pest infestation while you're at it.

Aphids and Caterpillars are rife at this time of year, with aphids particularly fond of Junipers and the new growing tips of broadleaf plants especially Figs.

Don't forget to protect some of your 'softer' trees from extreme summer sun and hot winds, especially deciduous trees which will suffer leaf burn and not exhibit great colour in autumn.

Continue to prune long shoots with scissors with the exception of your conifers which should be finger tip pruned. Weeds in your pots are a lot easier to eradicate if you remove them when they first appear.

If wiring at this time of year extreme care should be taken not to damage unhardened wood as it is very easy to scrape off the bark and cambium. Wire also cuts in very quickly as the tree thickens substantially from now until dormancy.

Some people cease fertilizing during this hot period, however with constant watering, nutrients are certainly leached out of the potting mix. Deciduous trees are said to show better Autumn Colour if fertilizing ceases prior to the heat of summer, but I find this debatable.

Now is your last chance to prune Wisteria, Crab apple, Prunus etc. ensuring to leave at least a couple of internodes to allow Spring flowering.

Azaleas and Gardenias can be pruned now also but NOT Camellias as they would have already started to form flower buds for autumn flowering.

Keep your Natives tip pruned to maintain a compact shape otherwise they tend to go 'leggy'.

# **JOBS FOR FEBRUARY**

As was the case for December and January, watering and protection from the scorching sun are the main priorities this month. Trees will appreciate a more sheltered position until the weather begins to cool down.

Depending on the temperature in your area, some of your 'minis', or trees in shallow pots, may require watering twice daily.

Maintain a good layer of pebbles or moss around surface roots of your trees as the fine roots are susceptible to burn.

With the amount of watering over the past months the leaching of nutrients from the soil probably means a dose of liquid fertilizer would not go astray. If your privets and olives are still sending out plenty of new growth I'm sure they will appreciate the fertilizer.

Continue to prune your trees to shape, however, early flowering trees should not be pruned as the buds will have started to set. Major pruning should be avoided until the weather cools down a bit, but now is a good time to apply lime sulphur to any 'jins' and 'sharis'. The lime sulphur is yellow when it goes on but dries to a bright white colour. It is used as both a preservative and for aesthetic purposes. Remember to protect the soil and pots from 'splashing'. I always use the lime sulphur straight.

Thrips can be a problem at this time of year and tend to live on the underside of leaves. Remove affected leaves and spray tree with 'Confider' ensuring the underside of leaves are sprayed as well.

# JOBS FOR MARCH

We are now into Autumn which is my favourite season because it is so much more stable, weather wise, without the extreme heat of summer (hopefully).

Autumn is the second best time for your repotting schedule and is an ideal time for Privets, Olives, Junipers and fruit trees, however if you are repotting Pines, don't be as drastic with root pruning or branch pruning as you would in Spring, as their root system may not recover quickly enough prior to the onset of winter. I must say that I have heard that enthusiasts suffer more losses of Pines at this time than in spring, so unless you are in a desperate hurry, I would leave them till later in the year.

Now is also a good time to consider repotting your Aussie Natives. It is important to remember that the time to repot Natives is during a dormant period prior to one of the many growth spurts that occur during the year.

Your deciduous trees should be left until 'bud swell', just coming into spring.

Continue to 'pinch prune' foliage to maintain shape, however, it is probably a bit late to 'defoliate' or perform major restructuring as there may not be enough time to regain vigour prior to winter.

Liquid fertilizing should be maintained to ensure trees go into winter in a strong condition. I always use 'Bloom Booster' by 'Manutec' as my liquid fertilizer at this time of year as it is high in Potassium and Phosphorous and lower in Nitrogen but **DON'T** use this product on Aussie Natives(Instant Death).

Natives are very Potassium sensitive! but the Potassium seems to reduce the amount of dieback that may occur in Elms during winter.

Privets and Olives will continue to grow with great vigour during this period

# **JOBS FOR APRIL**

We're now into the second month of autumn and your deciduous trees will soon be showing colour.

Remember it is the combination of warm sunny days and cold nights that creates the colour at this time of year, so move your deciduous trees into an open position away from the protected area that they have been in throughout summer.

If your trees fail to colour it is probably because the leaves suffered heat burn through either hot winds or exposure to the hot afternoon summer sun. Some bonsai enthusiasts 'defoliate' their deciduous trees in December/January which removes the burnt leaves, helps to reduce leaf size, increases branch ramification and ensures better Autumn colour.

Any trees that coloured very early or dropped its leaves are probably telling you that they are in need of repotting. (Maybe it missed being repotted last year). All deciduous trees should be repotted yearly at 'bud swell' which generally occurs late winter / early spring.

Continue to fertilize until winter to ensure your trees are healthy going into the dormant period or 'die-back' may occur. I use a product like 'BLOOM BOOSTER' by Manutec (higher potassium and phosphorous and lower nitrogen). You should just about be finished repotting your evergreens as they require enough time to re-establish new roots prior to the onset of winter.

There is still plenty of growth on your Aussie Natives so continue to pinch prune to maintain a compact shape.

Now is the ideal time to prune and wire your Black Pines which can be cut back pretty hard every couple of years in Autumn, taking off most of this year's growth, back to only a couple of pairs of needles. Next years buds should grow from these needles.

# **JOBS FOR MAY**

As the cooler weather is now with us, your trees subsequently require less watering, especially your deciduous trees.

If you continue to re-water already wet trees they will become waterlogged and may develop root-rot and more serious fungal problems. You can definitely do more harm than good by over watering at this time of year.

Remember the best method is to scrape away some of the decorative gravel with your finger, if its dry underneath, water, if it is not then don't.

The native trees in your collection are probably still growing quite well, so they may require more regular watering.

As the frosts aren't too far away, it's probably time to protect your figs by moving them to a more sheltered spot.

Black Pines and Junipers definitely don't like wet feet over the cooler months so move them to the sunniest spot in the garden.

All fruit, berries and remaining leaves on deciduous trees should be removed from late May to June to avoid weakening the tree through Winter.

Fertilizing can cease now until early Spring as trees are dormant through winter.

I hope everyone fertilized Elms with a low nitrogen fertilizer prior to leaf drop as it certainly reduces risk of losing branches through die-back (if you didn't and the leaves are still on, its possibly not too late).

It's not a bad idea to spray all your deciduous trees with a 3% lime sulphur to 97% water mix once they have dropped all their leaves, to protect from mildew and fungal problems.

This can be repeated again Mid Winter.

# JOBS FOR JUNE

There's not too much happening with the growth of our trees over the next couple of months, but before you start thinking you'll have time to put your feet up, here are a few jobs that might need attention.

After removing the last of any dead leaves from your deciduous trees, these lovely naked silhouettes unfortunately highlight areas that may require rectification or restyling. Now is a great time for this, but remember to have your trees on the dry side before wiring as trees are slightly more brittle at this time.

Don't forget when restyling deciduous trees to remove all of the shoots growing vertically from your branches (broom and canopy style excluded) and trim back your horizontal branches to create "V" shape branch pads.

Ideally, any repotting of deciduous trees should be done at "budswell" (a term describing a time at which buds have enlarged and are just about to open but are not yet showing any green shoots) but if you have a large amount of repotting to be done, some early shooting varieties and winter flowering trees can be repotted in late June/July. Chinese Elms, Pomegranates, Mulberry, Flowering Cherry etc. are trees that fall into this category.

Some conifers seem to get a bronze/brown tinge to their foliage depending on how cold it is in your area and you will certainly notice colour changes to the foliage of your Azaleas, Buxus, Cotoneaster etc. The older leaves on your Figs and Privets can sometimes 'yellow off' and fall at this time, but all of the abovementioned changes are quite normal.

Frosts can cause problems to your figs, so it is a good idea to protect them by placing them under a large tree or gazebo during the frost times, and whilst on figs, keep an eye out for 'Black Spot' on the leaves. This can be treated with 'Baycor'.

Watering can be a problem at this time of year due to the cold nights. As such, morning watering allows time for excess water to drain thoroughly before the cold night temperatures freeze the roots or even crack your pots.

Your deciduous trees require much less water than they did in the growing season, so be sure to wait until the surface is beginning to dry out before rewatering. Overwatering could easily cause root rot which will lead to fungal problems. Keep a watchful eye for insects, pests and mildew. Maples, Crepe Myrtle, Oaks and Olives are susceptible to mildew which can be treated with a 3% lime sulphur solution and can be used 2-3 times through winter.



# **JOB S FOR JULY**

Now that we are in the middle of winter we are watering much less frequently, especially our deciduous trees, however, if the winds should pick up, they can dry the trees very quickly.

If you have a lot of trees, you may have been repotting a lot of deciduous trees over the past couple of weeks. Remember that 'bud swell' is the best time for repotting, this usually occurs late August to early September. Look out for curl grubs around the root system whilst repotting. These grubs are the larvae of the 'black beetle', and are white like a witchity grub and eat all the fine feeder roots of the tree.

To eliminate these grubs you can use 'Lawn Beetle Killer', however, if you don't like using chemicals, submerge the tree in water for an hour to drown them.

At the time of repotting dunk your tree to ensure that it is thoroughly watered and at that time it is a good idea to reduce stress of the tree by watering with 'Seasol' or 'Super Thrive'.

Don't forget July is a great time to trim and wire your deciduous trees, taking care, as branches are brittle at this time of year.

If you have spring flowering trees, don't trim these as you might severely reduce your flowering!

July is a good time to spray all your deciduous trees and your benches with a 3% Lime Sulphur to 97% water solution which is a great fungicide. You will definitely see an improvement in your spring foliage if you use it.

Trident Maples have a vast root system and should be repotted every year or they don't look as good next year.

# **JOBS FOR AUGUST**

Don't get caught out by unseasonably hot temperatures we often receive in mid July?

As we all know, the ideal time to repot deciduous trees is at budswell, just prior to the leaves opening. My elms don't quite know if it is winter or spring with many of them still clinging on to last years' growth and just as many already bursting into Spring growth.

With the number of trees that I have, I was lucky that I repotted all of my Elms early, but I'm sure that if members follow the calendar rather than the climate, it is easy to get caught out.

From mid August to mid September is an ideal time to repot Privet, Olive, Pyracantha, Cotoneaster, Buxus, Camelia and most Aussie Natives prior to the appearance of their new growth and all conifers can be repotted from late August to early Summer.

Avoid repotting wet trees as you increase the chances of fungal attack. Any bamboo or blood grass (accents plants etc.) should be cut back to ground level and placed in a sunny position and fertilized to ensure a new fresh look.

By late August you can probably prune your early shooting deciduous trees to develop multiple branches rather than elongated growth, unless, however, you are trying to thicken a branch or trunk.

Some trees that have been placed in full sun over winter may need to be relocated back into a sheltered position and it is most important to reassess your watering regime after the more relaxed schedule throughout winter.

# **JOBS FOR SEPTEMBER**

I would envisage that everyone has completed their repotting of deciduous trees by now, however, if you haven't and the trees have already burst into new leaf, you should either wait until the new growth hardens or wait until next year before repotting.

Remember that the best time to repot flowering trees is after flowering and Aussie Natives are best repotted prior to a growth spurt, when the tree is dormant.

Spring is a great time to repot most of your collection but it is recommended that figs prefer it a little bit warmer, however, I pot them up at all but mid-winter without losses.

Everyone has their own favourite potting mix and the additives to this mix vary just as much. I use 'Osmocote Plus' (9 month slow release with trace elements) in my pot when I repot. Other people use 'Blood and Bone', 'Alroc', 'Dynamic Lifter', 'Zeolite' etc. in their mix.

The reason I don't put Osmocote directly into my mix prior to potting is that if I happen not to use the full amount straight away, I consider that the Osmocote starts to release its fertilizer into the mix.

Remember that 'Natives' don't like phosphorous so I use 'Osmocote for Natives' instead of 'Osmocote Plus'.

Due to the warmer weather we are probably increasing the regularity of our watering, especially the trees that have not been repotted this year, as they will dry out quicker due to being more root bound.

The more we water, the more we leech out nutrients from the soil, so fertilizing with a liquid fertilizer such as 'Charlie Carp' etc. on a fortnightly basis is a good idea, but there is no need to fertilize your newly potted trees for 6-8 weeks after repotting. I use 'Seasol' or 'Bloom Booster' but the experts use 'Charlie Carp'. I have heard reports recently that Seasol and other seaweed based products have a detrimental effect on Banksias so be warned that tree losses have occurred.

**\*\* Never use fertilizer at a stronger rate than recommended or it will burn the roots and kill your tree.**

Most varieties of Elms are in full leaf so the need to trim is important to maintain shape, reduce internode length and increase ramification. Use sharp scissors to cut in between pairs of leaves.

The more you trim the better, otherwise new growth gets very leggy and internode length increases enormously.

My Maples are a bit slow as yet but trimming is very important. When two (2) new leaves appear, pinch out the new bud between these leaves for the same reasons as outlined above for elms.

Remember to check any wire on trees, especially on new timber as it grows very quickly at this time.

# **JOBS FOR OCTOBER**

We are now well and truly into Spring and the warmer weather is certainly making trees grow quickly. Remember that the best way to keep the trees compact and improve ramification (branch network) is to continually prune.

Most of the new growth, heads to the top of the tree so prune this area harder than the weaker branches.

**AZALEAS** - always remove any spent flowers as soon as possible and in order to prevent Lace Bug it is a good idea to spray monthly from now till December with Malathion, on the underside of leaves. Any Azaleas should be repotted immediately after flowering.

**NOW** the weather has warmed up you can safely start working on your figs. Remove any large leaves and remember to pinch out the unopened leaf between two new leaves to maintain a compact growth habit.

If your figs have become a bit leggy over winter, cut them back as hard as you like as they shoot back on old wood.

Any leaves with black spots should be removed as soon as possible, with remaining leaves sprayed with 'Baycor" and/or 'Pest Oil'.

With all the new growth on your plants and the more frequent watering, don't forget to fertilize regularly.

A fortnightly hit with fish emulsion or Seasol etc. is a good idea at this time of year. If you want to 'push' growth along on young plants, use a product with high nitrogen rates, however, on more mature stock that you wish to maintain without making leaves bigger, I use 'Bloom Booster' by Manutec. This product is higher in Potassium and Phosphorus but lower in Nitrogen.

**IMPORTANT** - Aussie Natives don't like Phosphorus, so use products especially designed for Natives. Seasol, Fish Emulsion, Blood and Bone etc. are fine however some say that Banksia and Seasol don't work together.

Always fertilize after watering so as not to burn the roots.

Except for figs that grow right through summer, I would discontinue fertilizing other trees at the end of Spring until Autumn.

# JOBS FOR NOVEMBER

It seems that pruning is the theme for this month.

Remember not to use scissors on the foliage of conifers, as they will brown off. Just pinch out the unwanted growth and only use scissors to cut branches back to length.

Azaleas and any flowering trees that have finished flowering should have been repotted and continue to prune these to shape for the next couple of months using scissors to cut between leaves.

Any buds that are still shooting on pines should all be removed except the two side ones and once the buds develop into 'candles' of approximately one inch (25mm) length, pinch them back to half inch (12mm). This process will keep the internode length to a minimum.

When two new leaves appear on your Figs or Maples, remove the pointed unopened leaf 'axil' between them by pinching, this will keep your trees nice and compact.

Any figs with large leaves can be defoliated any time from now until January, (my preference being Christmas time) by removing all leaves. This is done by cutting the leaf stem (petiole) in half.

Dormant buds lay in the junction of the petiole and branch and when new leaves emerge they are considerably smaller than the removed ones.

Try to keep on top of your maple pruning, as neglect at this time of year will harm your branch ramification and internode length.

As it is show time, ensure that weeds are removed from pots, any dead needles or leaves are cleaned up and pots are given a quick wipe with cooking or baby oil. A sprinkle of fresh gravel will make them look fresher as well, especially with some new moss. It is important that every tree is shown at its best regardless of whether it is a masterpiece or just an average tree in training.

# JOBS FOR DECEMBER

With the onset of summer and that dreaded heat, now is the time to be thinking about precautionary measures to ensure our trees survive this harsh time of year

Any trees that dry out quickly require some extra watering attention during this time. Bonsai that are slightly root-bound, ones in shallow pots or planted on rock, Azaleas, Crab Apples and some Aussie Natives tend to dry out a fair bit quicker than other varieties, so keep an eye on them on the hot days.

If you have not moved your Japanese Maples and other soft leaved plants into a more protected area, now is the time! Very hot sun and westerly winds will cause leaf burn which will also affect Autumn colour.

Minis can be placed into a tray of wet gravel or fine sand (buried up to half way) on very hot days to prevent them drying out.

Enthusiasts can sometimes get caught out by an unexpected 40 degree day causing some minis to end up in bonsai-heaven.

Trees that you prune harshly should be placed in a shaded area to protect from the scorching sun.

Continue to liquid fertilize fortnightly until early summer, especially figs which grow right through summer.

Don't prune Crepe Myrtle from now as they are summer flowering and you will seriously affect the amount of flowers, however, continue to pinch out the new growth in figs and remove any large leaves.

Trident Maples and Elms should be pruned by allowing four (4) leaves to grow and then reducing to two (2).

Any seeds produced on Taiwan Maples, Tea Tree and Bottle Brush should be removed to save draining the tree of energy.