

PBA NEWSLETTER

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TREE OF THE MONTH ELAEGNUS

by Joyce Pelletier

original
mis-numbered
V7 N11

At this time of year, it's worth a special trip to see the trees of the National Bonsai Collection, because the deciduous trees will be wearing their bright autumn foliage; the berrying and fruiting species will be at their lustrous, colorful best, heavy with fruit; and, surprisingly, one tree will be in flower -- the exotic Elaeagnus pungens! The "Thorny



THE ELEGANT ELEAGNUS
F.J.
from the Herboretum Collection

ORIGINAL SKETCH

by Mrs. Fern Jacobi

Elaeagnus," as it is commonly called, will indeed be covered with tiny, creamy, bell-shaped flowers at this unusual time of year (for Maryland flowering), and additionally, they are heavenly sweet-smelling and fragrant.

Elaeagnus (pronounced eel-ee-ag'nus) is a handsome genus of shrubs or trees of the family Elaeagnaceae, comprising perhaps 40 species of the north temperate zone, several being cultivated for their ornamental foliage and for their decorative or edible "berries." The berry is actually a dry nut surrounded by a brightly colored, fleshy receptacle. Elaeagnus are hardy and wind resistant, and one species, E. multiflora (Cherry Elaeagnus) is even smoke resistant. Propagation is easy by root cuttings, layering or grafting. Seeds should be stratified.

Most Elaeagnus originated in China, Korea, or Japan, but there is one North American species, E. commutata, commonly called the "Silverberry", which comes from the southern Great Plains. It likes dry, alkaline soil, and flowers and fruits in the spring and summer. Other Elaeagnus may like moist, acid soil, and flower at different times.

The leaves of Elaeagnus may be deciduous or evergreen, but they usually have distinct silvery flocking on one or both surfaces of the gray or green leaves caused by the presence of minute scales. Some varieties appear more golden.

One species of Elaeagnus, E. angustifolia, has fruit resembling an olive, and is consequently called the "Russian Olive," or the "Oleaster." It tends to be multi-trunked and interestingly twisted.

From the literature I have studied, Elaeagnus pungens appears to be the favorite choice of material (of this genus) to be styled into bonsai, with E. multiflora the next choice. Lynn R. Perry recommends wrapping the wires with paper during the rainy season to prevent bark damage, and she also gives a detailed maintenance schedule for E. pungens in her book, Bonsai: trees and shrubs.... There is also an interesting, brief article on the genus Elaeagnus, by Earl H. Donovan in the Bicentennial Edition of the International Bonsai Digest.

Checking with Robert Dreschler, Curator of the U.S. National Bonsai Collection, with regard to the beautiful specimen of Elaeagnus pungens which he cares for, I learned that the plant is very fast growing, needing lots of pruning all year. However, pruning is discontinued in mid-summer to permit flower buds to form for their normal autumn flowering. In previous years the tree was heavily flowered, but this year there are fewer buds. According to Mr. Dreschler, the only change in maintenance for this particular bonsai is that it is now kept in full sun, whereas formerly it was kept in part shade. It may be that this particular species likes and needs a little more shade. I'm sure Mr. Dreschler will keep us informed of his observations in the future.

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Berries on this bonsai are red, and last through the winter, and can still be seen in early spring when some of the evergreen leaves drop, to be replaced by fresh new growth.

The only insect problem which developed on this bonsai was "red spider mites," which were easily taken care of with an insecticide.

The flowers on this lovely tree are just beginning to open now -- why not take a trip down to the Arboretum to see it in bloom, and consider another species for your own personal bonsai collection.

---Joyce Pelletier

PART II

WINTER PROTECTION REVIEW BY YAMA KI BONSAI SOCIETY

The following article is reprinted from the YAMA KI Newsletter. It recounts the experiences and observations of several YAMA KI members in wintering over bonsai.

This past winter was exceptionally hard on bonsai in the Westchester-Connecticut area and many individuals reported tragic losses due to the extended freezing weather and exceptionally low temperatures. Several members responded to our invitation to tell about the wintering methods used and found successful. Our thanks to those who took the time to document the facts and share the information with others. Here is what they say:

o Toby Peller, Harrison, N.Y. - Beverly Colodny and I have used the following methods and, so far, have had very little disaster.

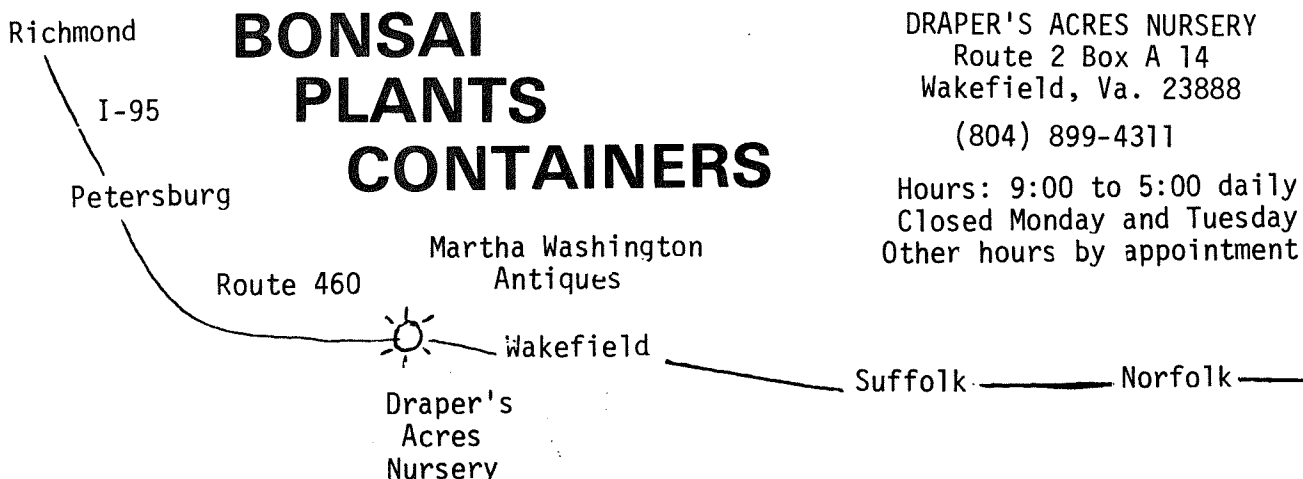
1. A cold basement room which maintains a temperature of 45° to 50° all winter and has three small windows, so it is not very light.

Be sure trees have undergone several days of freezing before tucking them in. We water every ten days to two weeks according to need - but this is a damp room, which might make a difference. We have had no new growth during the winter months, but trees seem to wake up about one month before those wintered outside, so we put them out a little later. In three years, we have had practically no tragedies and plants seem hardy and healthy.

2. A pit in the back yard - dug down to about four feet. About one foot of rock was placed at the bottom for drainage. Christmas tree vendors will gladly let you cart away left over Christmas trees on December 26th, and these are placed across the top of the pit. There is no need to water as rain and snow get through the boughs - but the trees are protected from the wind.

Drainage is most important so be sure that trees are not standing in water. This method has also been successful for us - and relieves us of any care during the winter - except in case of drought. Also great if one takes winter vacations.

3. I buried several plants in training pots into my vegetable bed. I covered them just to the rim of the clay pots. The plants survived very well - but the top of the training pots flaked and split. Next year I'll bury them one inch deeper and see the results.



o Charles H. Parks, Southport, Conn. - In answer to the request for information on bonsai wintering experiences, I would like to report on my conclusions based on three different methods of wintering. The three methods were not tried as individual experiments, but because my appetite for bonsai outgrew my wintering capacity.

My first try was going to be to bury them all in a garden plot on a sheltered hillside. An eighteen inch fence of burlap was erected all around to keep the wind out and to keep animals and people away. Any delicate pots were removed, otherwise everything was buried in the ground and then given a light covering of peat moss. After a good freeze, a thick layer of leaves was thrown over everything. After a while I went a little chicken on this and built a coldframe of cedar and covered it with a surplus aluminum door with plastic panels. This unit was placed along the northeast side of the house where it got some sun but was well sheltered from strong winds. The smaller and weaker numbers were placed in here. These two methods got everything through the first winter in good shape.

In my second year, matters got worse. My appetite grew and I was up to around one hundred bonsai. I had heard of wintering in an unheated garage. Since there was one right under our bedroom, this idea had appeal. For storage I used a standard redwood picnic table and its two benches. One bench was placed on top of the table at the back. Small bonsai were placed under this and tall ones on top. The other bench was placed on the floor as far under the table as it would go. Lower growing bonsai were placed on this. It was surprising how many could be stored using this arrangement. In the summer the picnic table and benches do double duty and are an excellent place to display bonsai.

In order to keep icy blasts from the bonsai and to maintain as even a temperature as possible, a barrier consisting of two wooden frames covered with vinyl sheeting was made. This was held in position by hooks so that plants could be inspected and watered. This also kept them in the dark. A couple of extra precautions were in order. When entering the garage, car motors were shut off as soon as possible. Each time a car was started, it was backed out immediately. This minimized the chances of carbon monoxide reaching the bonsai. The plastic enclosure was good protection, but it did take a while to get my wife used to the idea that prompt backing out was in order and that she should put on her gloves and arrange her things before starting the car, or else do these things in the driveway. In mild weather, the garage door was left open to let in as much fresh air as possible. The garage did get dry. It was necessary to spray and water the bonsai about every two weeks.

A comparison of the methods shows that all worked well. There was some selection in the beginning as to which bonsai went where. The ones already in the garden being fattened stayed there. The ones considered hardiest such as pines, juniper, spruce, maples and cypress were

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placed in the garden. Whether they were in the pots or not seemed to make no difference. They all came through fine. The burlap stopped drifting snow and kept people and animals away. The big danger is the drying wind. As the Laplanders say, "The wind is the killer."

The coldframe has a lot going for it. It does give better protection. Broken branches can be tragic. The presence of peat moss holds the moisture and keeps the temperature constant. The heat loss from the house kept everything from getting very cold. The soil temperature never went below 32°. One word of caution. Don't ever try to make a coldframe tight. The cracks between the boards should be at least one-fourth inch. I left an opening about two inches wide all along the top to help air circulation and to keep it from sweating. You are not going to keep it warm. It is a coldframe. In good weather, you can open it if you want to, but if you want to go away or forget it, it will take care of itself. Everything came through except one very sick pine.

The garage winter quarters required the most attention but did well for the most delicate plants. There was no pot loss and the moss seemed to like the system. A thermometer placed in one of the pots showed it never reached freezing but hovered around 35°. The garage itself stayed amazingly close to constant temperature in spite of door openings. The barrier gave good protection from sudden shocks. However, the bonsai must be watched and watered because the garage gets a dry cold. In the spring, I found two non-hardy plants, left in by mistake, in excellent shape. At the end of the winter, I gradually removed the barrier and left the door open to get them ready for the move outside. I did lose three azaleas but three others just like them came through just fine. I have no reason why.


I think the batting average under all systems was good. The roots never got too cold for hardy bonsai. The peat moss and leaves help to keep temperatures even and all protections keep out the "Killer Winds."

o Jerome Meyer, Port Chester, N.Y. - For bonsai which are not hardy to this temperature zone, I found my garage, with a supplemental heating arrangement, a successful environment for wintering. The 1976-77 winter was a good test. While outside temperatures were in the 5° to 10° range most of the season, not once did the temperature in my garage fall lower than 34°. This was checked daily with a high-low thermometer.

In prior years and milder winters, the night temperature always dropped to freezing and below without a supplemental heat source.

The species wintered in the setting described above were as follows: Juniperus prostrata which came from the Los Angeles area in California; Cedar elm (Ulmus crassifolia) which is native to the San Antonio area of Texas; Catlin elm (U. parviflora sempervirens 'Catlin') which is not hardy in this temperature zone although some have reported wintering them outdoors; Chinese cork bark elm (U. parviflora var. corticosa) which originated in Japan, but grown in Memphis, Tenn. While the Chinese and Cedar elms defoliated completely and the Catlin shed about half its leaves, the prostrata seemed to be perfectly at home. Other bonsai in my collection more natural to this climate were wintered in a burlap-protected lath house and still others (rock plantings, groups, Acer palmatum dissectum, spruces and some junipers) were wintered beneath the overhang of my house protected with a burlap windbreak. The only loss here was a large portion of an azalea root-over-rock style potted in 1967.

But the garage wintering worked out well. In order to be sure the temperature would stay above freezing, I constructed a wood tray



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five feet long, fourteen inches wide and two inches deep. On this, I spread a half-inch layer of coarse sand. On top of the sand, I zig-zagged a thirty foot loop of soil-heating cable drawing 200 watts. Over the cable I placed another half-inch of sand and on the top layer of sand rested our plastic flats filled with wet peat moss on which stood the bonsai pots. I used blocks of wood to elevate the pots above the wet peat moss surface in order to keep the pots from constant contact with water.

The purpose of the peat moss was to provide an aura of moisture in the immediate area of the trees. The peat moss dried quickly and was moistened weekly. The trees were watered slightly when the soil looked dry.

When it appeared as if the night temperature would drop, I plugged in the heating cable. Just enough heat was generated to keep the temperature at a constant level above freezing, even with night temperatures dropping to zero or below. There were times when the cable was plugged in around the clock, but daytime temperature in the garage was no problem due to its proximity to the house.

A little light came in through the single window opposite the benches where the bonsai were stored and even a little sun trickled in. The window was kept open about one inch for most of the winter to provide some air circulation. On mild days, the garage door was kept open to give the plants a breath of fresh air.

The only disadvantages in garage wintering are insufficient humidity and poor air movement. By storing the bonsai over peat moss, the dryness was overcome to a considerable degree. Also, when snow was tracked into the garage, this helped to moisturize the air and, when there was no snow, the garage floor was watered down occasionally as the peat moss was sprayed. The open window apparently provided sufficient air circulation. Of course, car motors should not be left running in the garage and the door should be left open a few minutes when coming in and leaving.

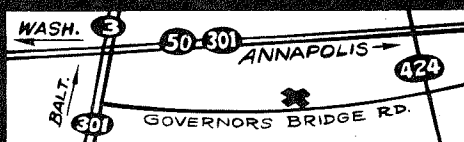
For bonsai which are not winter hardy in this area, I certainly recommend the combination of (1) an unheated garage, (2) plastic flats filled with wet peat moss, (3) a heating cable to ward off severe temperature declines, and (4) a slightly open window to allow some circulation of air.

o Mike Ackerman, Bronxville, N.Y. - "Dig we must" seems to be the rule for winter care - but if you have no land and live in an apartment with a terrace - you must change to "Build we must."

Last winter I had an 85% survival rate - losing some California stock that I presume couldn't take the winter here. The previous winter I had an 85% mortality rate. I almost had the feeling that only my pots could survive.

I built a frame of fourteen inch board, with three foot uprights in each corner. Two layers of burlap were wrapped around the uprights, making a four foot box - the bottom fourteen inches of board and the top three feet of a double wall of burlap. A removable burlap-covered top was also made. The bottom was plastic lined and about six inches of peat moss was placed over the bottom and wet down. The pots were placed as close as possible on the peat moss and covered with more peat moss.

The entire area was watered and then covered with the top. The frame was not water tight so there was drainage. Whenever it snowed, I removed the top and buried the plants in snow almost to their tops. I did not have to water until early spring. I expect to repeat this with the addition of a drain-heating wire which I will bury in the peat moss and use when needed.



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We can't all dig cold frames. Until I get a better system, I'll stick to this and hope that some of my trees will be in training more than four months.

NATIONAL ARBORETUM GUIDE TRAINING

A number of PBA members have begun training to be guides at the Arboretum. Some attend classes with the regular guides on Friday mornings, while others are attending Saturday classes conducted by Joyce Pelletier, especially for bonsaiists. Each group visits and explores different parts of the extensive grounds and gardens each week, discussing how the plants are used, how to identify them, etc. All agree that it is a lot of fun and very educational.

In August, several PBAers expressed interest in attending classes later. If still interested in this project, they should call Joyce Pelletier at (301) 262-8578.

CLUB CALENDAR

- ANNAPOLIS - November 10 (Thursday), 7:30 p.m. Annapolis Public Library, West Street, Annapolis. Talk on secondary plantings by Tory Pottberg. Bring trees for critique.
- December third annual Christmas party at a Japanese restaurant in Annapolis. Date to be established and provided in next news letter. All PBAers are invited. Details to be announced however call Vicki Ballantyne or Joyce Pelletier for reservations. Robert Drechsler will give a slide lecture.
- BALTIMORE - November 20 (Sunday), 3:00 p.m. Cylburn Park. Richard Metzler will give a lecture on indoor bonsai. Tree of the month is indoor bonsai. Bring any indoor bonsai for critique or to share.
- Combined year-end affair with the Annapolis Bonsai Club. Date and time to be announced.
- BROOKSIDE - November 4 (Friday), 7:30 p.m. Meet at John Hruha's house for jin carving workshop. Bring your tree.
- November 18 (Friday), 7:30 p.m. Bob Drechsler will give a slide program and talk on his trip to Japan. Bring trees for critique. Meet in the Brookside Garden Library.
- Party to be announced.
- KIYOMIZU - November 20 (Sunday), 2:00 p.m. Note date change from regular fourth Sunday. Slide tape lecture on tree styles and slides of the trees on display at IBC 77 in Chicago.
- NOVABONSOC - November 12 (Saturday), 10:00 a.m. Gulf Branch Nature Center. Meeting will cover soils, fertilization and wintering of bonsai. Bill Merritt will lead discussion to include concept of using different fertilizers at specified times during the year to promote various growth characteristics. Soil mixing will follow the discussion. Bring containers (plastic bags, cans, etc.) for soil which will be available at cost.
- December 10 (Saturday), 10:00 a.m. Gulf Branch Nature Center. Robert F. Drechsler, creator of National Bonsai Collection, National Arboretum will be guest speaker. Topics will include wintering the national collection. Also talk with slides on his recent trip to Japan to study bonsai with the masters.
- WASHINGTON November 19 (Saturday), 2:00 p.m. National Arboretum Super Saturday - Cliff Pottberg, Vicki Ballantyne and Arschel Morrell will demonstrate how each would style a San Jose juniper. Joyce Pelletier will do a running commentary. The public will be invited so club members please remember to be there at 1:30 p.m. with your bonsai in training.
- December 16 (Saturday), 2:00 p.m. National Arboretum Come find out how to use and care for your bonsai tools and how to build soil sifters. The sifters built at this meeting will be given to the arboretum.

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