

PBA NEWSLETTER

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TREE OF THE MONTH

Larix

by Harvey Everett

(Larch, Tamarack, Hackmatack)

The Larix is a genus of pine family and is seldom seen as a bonsai. Nevertheless it has many favorable characteristics which contribute to its attractiveness as a bonsai. The roots are heavy and lateral, the bark becomes heavy and scaly, the branches are horizontal, the leaves are short needles, the cones are small, leaves change color in the autumn, and cuts heal rapidly.

Then what are the problems? The larch is not a favored garden plant so most nurseries avoid them. Being deciduous it is not a classical conifer. Propagation by cuttings is difficult. Collected trees are likely to be very tall, having fast growth. They do not bud back readily. They need continuous moist soil. They prosper in the cool and mountainous regions. So the larch becomes a bonsai challenge.

Larch can be identified by the rosette-shaped clusters of soft needles on very short lateral spurs and by vigorous shoots or terminal branchlets of tender needles which are not rosette clusters. Cedrus are sometimes mistaken for Larix. Larch along with Bald Cypress are deciduous; the true cedars are evergreen. During summer the leaves are pale green and turn yellow in October. The leaves drop in late Autumn, and the winter terminal twigs are slender, smooth, pale orange-brown, with spurs ready for spring growth of the rosette clusters of needles.

There are about twelve recognized Larix varieties. Four of these are probably seen as bonsai:

- L. laricina (American Larch, also Tamarack, or Hackmatack) is found from western Maryland to Hudson Bay
- L. decidua (European Larch) is found in the Alps and Central Europe
- L. leptolepis (Japanese Larch) is found in the mountains of central Honshu
- L. occidentalis (Western Larch) is found in Oregon

The American, European, and Japanese larches have needles from $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 1" long; the western larch from 1" to $1\frac{1}{2}$ ". The larch needles are flat, except for the Western's which are triangular. The Japanese larch needle is broader than the others. Larch needles are generally light green in color except for the American which is light bluish-green. Grown trees have very little trunk taper, often 60 feet or more in height, and two foot diameter. They are pyramidal shape. Larches are found in moist mountainous areas, and are intolerant of shade. They may be found with smaller pines. Where growth is marginal American larch may be found stunted with branches flattened to the ground. The forest vegetarians like to feed on the tender terminal growth.

The larch is suitable for formal, informal, slanting upright, for jin, root over rock, and a variety of forest styles. The bark of young trees is smooth which later becomes scaly and deeply furrowed only after considerable top growth and age. The mature heavy bark is preferred for single tree plantings. The less mature scaly bark is quite suitable for forest plantings. Again, the pyramidal shape represents larch in nature.

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A larch should have a complete root system within the pot dimensions when it is potted. A soil mixture which retains moisture is highly recommended. Larch prefer acid soils ranging from pH of 3.7 to 4.5. The soil should never be allowed to get bone dry, even during winter. In hot weather the writer keeps larch pots over water in a ribbed tray.

The terminal growth can be pinched back during the growing season leaving one or two side buds which will be next year's spurs. When it becomes necessary to reduce the length of branches, select the desired spur for new terminal growth. Wire any time but take care with the new soft buds.

As indicated previously, the cut wounds heal over very rapidly. A flush cut is preferred to a stub. A slant cut on a branch will heal when there is new growth beyond the cut.

Propagation by seed is recommended. Cuttings don't seem to strike. Grafting should be workable with good methods. Since nature does it, ground layering should be successful. Yoshimura recommends air-layering.

Collect larch in early spring before buds break, or early winter after needles drop. Collecting during the growing season is marginal depending on the extent of the collected root system. Larch roots may travel a long distance to get the moisture required for survival. Protect the collected root system with moist peat or forest humus. Protect the collected tree from direct sunlight for several months. It will take a full growing season to get a healthy root system. The larch is relatively free from insects and diseases.

You will find the larch a refreshing change from other conifers. It heralds spring with the awakening buds which sprout the yellow-green rosettes of needles. Through summer you will enjoy the lush growth of the pendulous terminal branchlets. (You have the option to delay trimming them.) In autumn the color of the leaves turn to bright yellow and old gold. And during the winter you will have the tannish-orange or red branchlet tips on rugged branches and a rugged trunk.

John Naka's JAPAN & ORIENT BONSAI TOUR

John Naka has concocted a BONSAI-STUDY tour which includes nine full days of bonsai seminars with John and Bonsai masters of Japan. The tour runs from November 10 through November 24, leaving from Los Angeles. An optional Orient tour is available which will visit Bangkok, Bali, and Hong Kong and return on December 2.

Cost:

Japan Tour	\$1,495	Japan/Orient Tour	\$2,295
Seminar Expenses	200	Seminar Expenses	200
	<u>\$1,695</u>		<u>\$2,495</u>
Single Room add	\$ 215	Single Room add	\$ 330

Cost includes roundtrip economy class air fare Los Angeles-Tokyo-Los Angeles, hotel accomodation, some meals, etc. A deposit of \$100 per person is required with reservations, the balance being due 45 days before departure. For further information contact: Kokusai International Travel, 321 East 2nd Street, Los Angeles, California 90012, (213) 626-5284.

Snips and Slips

DOWN TO EARTH

On my recent trip to California I found the bonsai people I talked to and visited used pumice as a part of their soil mixture. This was plain old industrial pumice, sifted and sized. It was mixed with decomposed granite (we'd use Turface or TerraGreen here) and whatever organic material they'd want to use for a particular kind of tree. The advantage of pumice over Vermiculite or Perlite is that the pumice is harder, with sharper corners. Does anyone know of a local source for industrial pumice?

--- Mary Holmes

REDWOOD REJUVENATED

Most everyone has heard-of, had or seen the redwood burls sold in the San Francisco area. Redwood burls are actually masses of dormant buds which form a "lump" on the tree. The smaller ones are sliced off and packaged in sealed plastic. When they are placed in water they sprout and look pretty for a while, but eventually die because they never root. Right? Wrong! They can be made to root, though the success rate is only 50-50. Redwoods in the wild propagate more from stumps of old redwood trees and from their roots than they do from seed. I saw several such redwood bonsai which were rooted from burls or from hunks of wood which had been picked up in the woods. (Going to your local lumber company and purchasing a piece of redwood lumber won't do it because that wood has all been kiln dried.)

The best burls to use are flat rather than high and rounded. Take the burl and, on the cut side, scrape the wood off along the outer edge until you come to live wood. (A wood-working tool is best for this operation since it is designed for carving wood.) Apply Rootone to the area, then pot into a container with drainage just as if it were a rooted tree. Soil mixture should be heavily organic, just like the soil the big trees grow in, and kept well watered. The burl will sprout anyway, so it will be quite a while before you know if the experiment has taken. Even if it hasn't, you will have the enjoyment of a redwood "grove" for a while.

--- Mary Holmes

FOLIAGE FOILED

Certain types of junipers produce two types of foliage - juvenile (needle-like) and mature (scale-like). Some of those often used in bonsai are: Prostrata, San Jose, Hollywood, Virginiana, etc. Bonsai experts say that the mature foliage is to be preferred, especially in a tree which is show quality. I have always had trouble keeping the mature foliage on my junipers from reverting to the juvenile foliage and I recently found out why. It seems that severe pruning or pinching will cause this reversion. The moral of the story is, I guess, if you have a tree which is basically trained, do your pinching a little at a time over a long period of time (the Japanese never prune their junipers all at once). If you have a tree which needs drastic work be prepared to wait a year or two for the mature foliage to reassert itself.

--- Mary Holmes

CLUB CALENDAR

- ✓ March 10 Saturday Azaleas and their culture. 10 a.m. Gulf Branch Nature Center. Program and slides by Arthur W. Frazier. NORTHERN VIRGINIA BONSAI SOCIETY
- March 14 Wednesday Slide program and lab workshop on propagation. 8 p.m. St. Margaret's Church (see last month's Newsletter for directions). Dr. Hank Metzger of the University of Maryland Department of Horticulture is featured speaker. Members will participate in seed propagation and propagation by cuttings of Ficus nerifolia. ANNAPOLIS
- March 17 Saturday Identification of bonsai-type material. 2 p.m. National Arboretum. Pete Mazzeo of the National Arboretum staff will conduct program on identification of bonsai-type material in preparation for a collecting trip in April. WASHINGTON
- ✓ March 25 Sunday Collecting trip. 2 p.m. Collecting trip to property of Chuck Bird in southern Prince Georges County. Hornbeam and mountain laurel among types of trees available. Call Chuck Bird at (301) 292-3167. NORTHERN VIRGINIA BONSAI SOCIETY
- March 31 Saturday Collecting trip. 9:30 a.m. Collecting trip to Laurel, Maryland. Exit off Route 95 onto Route 216 East, Toward Laurel. Turn left on All Saints Road (a short distance) just past gas station on right. Park on shoulder of road. Bring collecting tools and lunch. For further information call Fred Mies (301) 299-6195. BROOKSIDE GARDENS BONSAI CLUB
- April 7 Saturday Collecting trip. 10 a.m. at the home of Lynette Nielson, Corsica Street, Centerville, Maryland. ANNAPOLIS
- April 20 Friday Workshop and annual meeting. 7:30 p.m. Brookside Gardens, Head House. Bring plants to work on. "Older" members will be there to assist. BROOKSIDE

IF YOUR CLUB'S ACTIVITIES ARE NOT LISTED IN THE CLUB CALENDAR IT'S BECAUSE THE EDITOR DID NOT RECEIVE THE INFORMATION FROM YOUR CLUB'S REPRESENTATIVE.



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