



AL NELSON DEMO SSK

by Mary Tatro

Being a student of John Naka for 23 years impressed Al Nelson with ideas for bonsai trees that have the appearance of being untouched by man. A slab is more natural than a bonsai pot. In his September demonstration for San-Sui Kai, Al Nelson shared his experience of creating group plantings using a slate slab.

He fashioned a slab from slate collected at a stone yard, which he chipped away to form a welcoming “bay” at the front, drilled with a diamond drill under water for tying holes, and polyurethane glued with chipped slate pieces to form a wall to better hold the soil.

He recommends a muck method that combines akadama, dirt and light perlite mixed with antibiotic hormones for planting the foemina tree. He elected a jinned top and a good root ball planted with a slight tilt to the front. New Zealand sphagnum moss atop the muck instantly hydrates the mixture and promotes top roots and waters well. Shredding some green moss into the New Zealand sphagnum enables spores to grow a green carpet over time and keep the soil in.

He chose foemina for the demonstration planting. Other successful group plantings he likes are small-leaved ficus, shimpaku, oak or cypress.

He prepared the foemina in advance to tell a story of snow, fire and lightening: branches downward, then up at the ends. Viewed from above, the tree has a star shape with all of its branches exposed to the sun. He shared a method for dramatically bending the branches downward with a smooth line by sawing cuts in three places from the bottom of the branch, sealing with healing compound and wiring loosely. Watch the wiring carefully.

Al Nelson cautions that wire bites into the tree and makes scarring. He prefers directional pruning, the use of fishing weights to lower the limbs, or wire through a tube pulled downward to a chain secured to the base.





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AL NELSON'S OAK



This month is spring in reverse. The weather is variable. If the weather turns hot be ready to water more but not as much as spring because leaves are going into dormancy. Many deciduous trees are browning or dropping leaves. Conifers will also be slowing so water less. Too much water may promote root rot.

Go over your trees for wires that are cutting in and remove them. Branches can be wired but are BRITTLE at this time. Use good wiring technique with proper sized wire and branch bending from the wire and not the wood.

This is a time to give junipers a strong cut back and thinning (fall cleanout). Pinch back as much as possible to promote a COMPACT well ramified bonsai.

Pines need to have last years needles plucked. Old needles (discolored) should be removed. New or fresh needles should remain until December or January. Leaving these new healthy needles on through the fall should keep the tree at its best. Cutting long needles shorter will allow sunlight to penetrate into the interior of the trees, and help to build stronger growth on the weak and stunted interior candles and twigs. Finish pruning the unwanted new growth leaving one, two, or three new candles on the tips of each branch or twig that was pruned earlier this summer. How many candles you leave is determined by your design goals for the tree and whether the new growth is on the

outer limits of the tree or in the interior.

Branches and twigs on deciduous (maples elms)



trees may be cut back as leaves are lost but wait until the leaves drop. Flowering trees such as quince crabapple or bougainvillea could be cut back severely. Bougainvillea can be cut below the first leaf. Remove all fruit and seedpods. Tropical species such as ficus and bougainvillea should be placed in protected areas in case of cold snaps. Elms and maples should be placed in shade to promote dormancy. Remove their leaves if still present at the end of October.

Fertilize with low nitrogen for dormancy using a 0-10-10 or just bone meal. Too much nitrogen will stimulate growth of leaves that will freeze off.

GSBF

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His recommendations for care include keeping the planting in the shade for six to eight weeks, then semi-shade with shade cloth over the base. Water through the shade cloth. It absorbs heat and protects the moss. He suggests Cloud Cover after pinching to prevent burn, and protect from wind and sun.

When working on the tree, scratch off old soil and add new soil then new moss to the top. Akadama retains nutrients, but you must repot before it goes to muck. In the top dressing, use fine akadama with worm castings. Keep the foliage plucked. Fine spray daily, and once a week, HB 101 spray -- two drops in a gallon of water. Fertilize April thru October. (The tree doesn't take in fertilizer unless it is 50 or above.) Use ultrafine for pests.

Al Nelson provides detailed information about tips and products. Use galvanized screen over drilled holes -- not plastic because too much soil gets through. Choose slate because flagstone doesn't hold up well. If choosing oak, it needs loads of root room and a large surface. Collect moss using wet newspaper with worm castings in a flat covered by 50 percent shade cloth or a thick translucent plastic. Accent plants work well in the muck.

Some further tips are to use walnut oil to clean your bonsai pots. It takes the white stuff off. Home Depot has outdoor turntables for \$3. A good rust inhibitor is Walmart WD40. Use his stronger rooting hormone. Soak cutting one week, dip in root hormone, soak the growing pot, keep moist in shade with a heat pad if it's cold, or do it in Spring. He uses colored ribbons for each year when repotting. Repot oak in cold January. Use a big Pot and depth is critical. Remove old dirt from the roots. Wash out with a hose. Cushion the root ties. Use slab broken parts to make a pot.



AL NELSON AND JOHN HOLMES

Refreshments Sonja, Al Loman, Steve