

## Demonstration by Ivan Lukrich – Japanese Maple Grove Planting

On February 23, 2023, a Redwood Empire Bonsai Society (REBS) general meeting and demonstration were held at the Rohnert Park Community Center, Rohnert Park, California. Ivan Lukrich performed a demonstration on how to create a Japanese maple grove planting. Ivan is a senior member of REBS and certified bonsai instructor.

Ivan started his demonstration by describing the Japanese maple trees used for the grove planting. All were started from seeds obtained from the same parent Japanese maple tree. Ivan's neighbor has a mature Japanese maple in the landscape which produces the seeds. Ivan propagates the seeds in various sizes of plastic nursery containers. He uses a soil mix which includes perlite, pumice and potting soil or lava rock. Over the growing years, 12 to 15 years, Ivan prunes the roots and branches to maintain small trees. He will transplant the saplings or young trees into larger pots, placing two or three per pot. Three young trees are positioned in a triangle for aesthetic value.

It is noteworthy to mention that all the seeds come from the same parent. You want your tiny grove or forest to have the same leaf size and shape, as well as color in the growing and fall seasons.

Ivan described the pruning technique of clip and grow for causing the desired movement in the trunks of the young trees, see photograph below. In pruning, he will remove the larger branches and retain the smaller ones.

Ivan said this is the time of year to create a grove planting when the trees are dormant.



Japanese maple trees, 12 to 15 years old, grown from seed.

Ivan chose a cream color, ceramic bonsai pot for planting the Japanese maple trees. The pot is shallow and large enough to accommodate all eight trees. Before working on the trees, Ivan placed plastic screens on all the holes in the bonsai pot. He then wired the pot with long tie down wires. Ivan used copper wire for the tie down wires. Other options are aluminum wire or #17 gauge jewelers' stainless steel wire. The tie down wires are used to anchor all the trees in the bonsai pot to prevent any unwanted movement to the growth of new feeder roots. The movement can damage the young roots and cause root rot.

The next step involved working with the demonstration trees, prepping them for placement in the bonsai pot. Ivan worked on three trees grown in a triangle shape in their pot prior to coming to the demonstration. He fitted the three trees to the bonsai pot and determined additional work was needed for a proper fit. He used a tree pruning saw to cut away a layer, roughly one to two inches of the bottom of the combined root ball.

Then using a scissors for root cutting, Ivan cut away large and loose roots to ensure a flat surface. Tap root and large downward growing roots were cut with a bonsai root cutter. These roots are unwanted and unnecessary when using the tie down wires in the bonsai pot. Ivan fitted the three trees to the bonsai pot. He described others might prefer a level soil surface for the bonsai pot. Ivan preferred to have a slight mound of soil surrounding the tree trunks. There are pros and cons to watering a flat surface and mound, and it depends largely on the aesthetic appearance.

Ivan proceeded to address the other trees still in their nursery containers. He removed these trees from the containers, the two containers each had two trees growing side by side. Again, Ivan used a pruning saw to cut away a large amount of the root balls. He used a root scissors to cut large and loose roots and create a flat bottom surface. Ivan temporarily placed all the trees into the bonsai pot. He arranged the trees in various positions and let the audience offer suggestions as to what looked to be the best front view. After deciding on a front view with the largest and tallest tree positioned in the back of the tiny forest, Ivan was ready to plant his trees.

First, a mound of bonsai soil mix (pumice, lava rock and Akadama) was positioned in the center of the oval bonsai pot. Seven of the demonstration trees were placed on the bonsai soil and pressed into the mound, moving back and forth to squeeze out any air pockets between the root surface and soil mix. (Note: Ivan removed one small unwanted demonstration tree. He pointed out tree plantings usually are odd numbers, 3, 5, 7. However, after five or 11, counting trees is no longer meaningful.)

Secondly, some more bonsai soil was added to fill in around the root balls and further secure the positioning of trees.

Finally, the tie down wires were fastened around the root balls to secure all the trees from any unwanted movement in the bonsai pot.

Ivan said he might use some bonsai wire to tie in the trees at their branch level, but he felt confident all the trees were securely positioned with just the tie down wires. Additional bonsai soil was added to the pot. Using a single restaurant chopstick, Ivan eliminated air pockets in the soil. The technique is to insert the chopstick in the side of the pot, pressing down until the chopstick reaches the pot bottom. Then lift the chopstick upward slightly and moving in tiny circles, which causes the soil to move into the air pockets. This action is done until all movement of soil stops.

The last step is watering the freshly planted forest. This is a critical step in caring for the bonsai planting. Water should be allowed to flow thoroughly into the soil mix. Dust particles will discolor the water draining from the bottom of the bonsai pot. Only when the water clears up can the watering be considered thorough enough. Be careful not to wash away the soil mix by using a gentle spray of water.

Upon conclusion of the demonstration, the Japanese maple grove planting was raffled. REBS member Jim Gallagher won the grove planting. Congratulations, Jim.



A chopstick is a useful tool for loosening roots from the soil.





Ivan is about to divide the root ball to fit in the bonsai pot.



Ivan is showing how the tap root and large downward growing roots are removed from the root ball.



The bottom of the root ball must be flat and cleaned of large and loose roots.





Ivan has positioned the trees in the oval bonsai pot. He is using a chopstick to remove air pockets in the soil.





Ivan is reading the winning raffle ticket. REBS member Jim Gallagher is the lucky winner.

Prepared by George Haas