

## Deciduous Trees

By Charlie Mosse, February 2022

Deciduous tree repotting, pruning, trimming and wiring window is closing fast. Due to our mild climate the trees do not stay dormant as long as they do in cooler areas. The nights and days have been cool but not cold. When this happens in January, we see flowering trees like apricot and plum in bloom, and non-flowering trees already showing a bit of bud color if in the sun but probably not yet if kept in the cool of the shade. My wife's Elm forest has buds already beginning to swell. Maples in general, Zelkova, Hackberry, Hornbeam, Porcelain Berry and Beauty Berry are still dormant but not for long. The temps look mild for February with sunny days. The clock is ticking.

Note: Shade is a way to slow the early growth activity. The elms at my house that are in the shade house are not showing signs of bud swell yet, the forest that is in ½ day sun and growing in a low profile tray, has swollen buds as of the end of January. The forest has more soil surface area exposed to the sun which warms the soil enough, day after day, to activate the tree earlier than the ones in the shade. Last year the forest was in a shady area and did not show bud swell until early February. Keeping deciduous trees in the cooler shade in the fall helps a bit to encourage dormancy and helps to prolong dormancy. This can work but, it does help more if the days and nights are cool enough.

Here is a link to Jonas DuPuich's comments on confused trees. This article references the fall, but the same can be applied to spring:

<https://bonsaitonight.com/2020/10/23/what-to-do-if-your-trees-think-its-spring/>

It is still a good time to repot. Deciduous trees already in bud swell and even with some of the buds opening and showing green or flower petal color can still be repotted. Deciduous trees store a lot of energy in their tissues in the fall, and around here, into early winter. Even leaves with fall color are transferring food for storage. If a tree is not healthy then wait to repot or, prune less of the roots than you normally would.

Before repotting is done, the tree is pruned and trimmed. All twigging and small branches are trimmed back to 2-3 buds, usually 2 buds unless the length is needed. Any growth from underneath a branch or from on top of a branch is also removed. Pruning larger branches, sacrifice branches and no longer needed structural branches can be done now. With leaves off the tree, wiring can easily be done. If you have any questions, bring your tree to a meeting, or take several photos and post on the SDBC FaceBook page.

If you are repotting a bit late, taking some additional precautions after repotting will help the tree through the re-rooting process. When the roots are exposed, keep moist with a spray bottle. After potting, misting the stems/buds/leaves with good water or, misting with good water+Superthrive, will keep the tree hydrated and provide some nutrient. This does help a tree in stress and is a very good idea especially if the weather becomes unexpectedly warm. Placing a repotted tree in some shade is the usual precaution. If it does get unseasonably warm, placing a newly potted tree in a bit more shade than normal is beneficial. If it is windy, place the tree on the ground with some protection from the wind. Wind can desiccate a tree faster than an unseasonably warm day.

When a deciduous tree starts to grow out of dormancy, it is best to move the tree(s) into full sun to promote shorter internodes and smaller leaves. Leave the trees in the full sun until the weather gets too hot for the particular species of trees you are growing. This will be learned with experience. Trident maples can tolerate almost as much sun as Elms but fare better with some mid-day relief. Japanese Maples, Zelkova, and Hornbeam do need some shade during the middle of the day. Progressively move the sun sensitive trees into more shade starting about April. Avoid full shade as this will stretch internodes if the tree is still actively growing. It is a balancing act between keeping the internodes short, leaves small and preventing the leaves prematurely burning.

Most of the deciduous species do not tolerate our mineralized (alkaline) water or the pH, nor do they like the drier climate in general. One needs to expect burned leaf edges and general yellowing.

Later in the season, roughly mid-summer, one can defoliate, partially defoliate or do a leaf size reduction. The latter is where a leaf is simply cut to smaller size to reduce the leaf area but retain some degree of photosynthesis. Any defoliation or leaf reduction does stress the tree so before you do so, ask one of our experienced members for advice. The benefit is that the new leaves will be smaller and hopefully the internodes will still be short, if not shorter. This is very desirable for deciduous trees and some broad leafed evergreens. Below is a link to Bonsai Tonight on the defoliation of deciduous trees.

<https://bonsaitonight.com/?s=defoliation>

The sun sensitive trees like the Japanese Maple, Zelkova, Hackberry and Hornbeam, and most evergreen plants are good candidates for defoliation or leaf size reduction. After the work is done, let the plant grow out first by utilizing the stored energy from the hardening off of the spring growth. After about a month or so after the defoliation or leaf reduction, then apply a regular dose of fertilizer. The last application of fertilizer, low nitrogen is best, will be done in early fall. This prepares the tree for storing energy for the winter and preparing it for spring growth the next year.

The above fertilizer regimen is better for trees that are being refined, that is that the primary branches and secondary branches are established and one is trying to grow finer twigging to fill in the tree. If the tree is being developed, then a regular fertilizer regimen is better since it will promote stronger growth that will increase the diameter of the trunk and primary branches. Deciduous trees do respond very quickly to fertilizer, so it is better to under fertilize a bit.

Other good resources are: Bonsaify by Eric Schrader, Bonsai Tonight by Jonas DuPuich and Bonsai Mirai by Ryan Neil. They have a lot of information and photo sequences or video about growing deciduous trees.

<https://www.bonsaify.com/>

<https://www.bonsaify.com/blogs/phutu-blog>, .....News and blog articles are found here. Very informative.

<https://bonsaitonight.com/recent/> Blog index of many very good articles are found here as are many podcasts. You will find good blog posts about deciduous trees along with photo sequences.

<https://bonsaimirai.com/> This blog is different from the others but nonetheless very informative. One needs to subscribe/join Mirai to listen to the Mirai Live videos but are worth it with excellent videos about deciduous trees.

It will be very helpful to bring in any tree(s) you need assistance with to the monthly meeting and speak with one of our many experienced members. Or you can post photos and your questions on the SDBC Facebook page which will benefit other members, or email the SDBC with your questions and photos.