



Dorie's SHOHIN BONSAI TIPS Choices...

By Doris W. Froning

When we start in bonsai we want to do every style (more than once). We want every species (even though we know the plants won't grow in our area). More, more, more is the theme. Eventually we calm down a bit and realize it is quality not quantity we seek. It is fun trying all the styles and all the species. We learn from all the trying and we settle down and stick to the styles we most prefer, whether it is the informal upright or a cascade or the formal style.

My favorite is the informal upright style with its slightly curved trunk and well groomed branches in a really good pot appeals to my feeling of what a bonsai should be. My least favorite is cascade style

bonsai. I have seen many cascade style bonsai but I have only one in my collection.

In looking at bonsai exhibits some of us go "ga ga" over a little cascade style while others are entranced by a beautiful formal upright style or a forest planting. As in art, some of us like Picasso and others can't stand Picasso but swoon over a Rembrandt. The same holds true in bonsai. We don't always agree with the best in show but we pick our favorite according to the styles or species we prefer. It would be a dull world if we all picked the same bonsai. So, vive le difference!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doris W. Froning

Mrs. Froning is an authority on shohin bonsai and maintains her collection in Wilmington, Delaware. She often exhibits her masterpiece specimens and presents programs throughout the country. The popular newsletter, *Mame Bonsai Growers of America*, was published by Mrs. Froning for several decades. She is a regular contributor to *International BONSAI*.



Chojubai dwarf flowering quince, Chaenomeles japonica 'Chojubai Red'.

Japanese black pine, Pinus thunbergii, displayed with a wild flower accessory.



Shohin bonsai display at the 2004 Grandview Bonsai Exhibition in Kyoto, Japan featuring Japanese five-needle pine, Dwarf star jasmine, Chojubai dwarf flowering quince, Japanese deciduous holly, Shimpaku juniper and Japanese black pine.



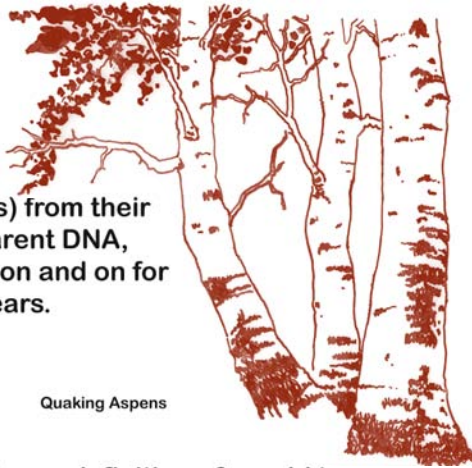
WM. N. VALAVANIS PHOTOS



Nature's Clone

Every bonsai artist has been asked, "how old is that tree?" Although bonsai artists know it's really the illusion of age that we seek, it's still hard not to be interested in a tree's actual age.

If we just look at a tree's DNA, the Quaking Aspen is probably the oldest tree in the world with some living for 8,000 years or more! No, not a specific individual trunk, but since aspens send up suckers (ramets) from their roots that are identical to the parent DNA, these clones, if you will, can go on and on for hundreds, even thousands of years.



Quaking Aspens



Quaking Aspen Ramets

If your definition of an old tree, however, is the age of the actual tree you're looking at, then the Bristlecone Pine takes the honors at about 4,844 years.

Clone – a genetically identical individual produced by asexual reproduction

c 2005 John Wiessinger

Clones, and debates about them, have been in the news quite a bit in the last few years but nature has been quietly making its own clones for a long time – Dolly the sheep is not the first.

As the poster points out, the winner of the age category is a bit misleading – after all, what is an individual? Although the original trunk is long gone from the "record breaking aspens", successive ramets are still growing after 8,000 years. The DNA of all the sprouts is identical to the original tree, so technically, the oldest tree is the Quaking Aspen.

In the East, where there is adequate moisture for seed germination, aspens regularly reproduce by seed. This reproduction by seed means there is a mixing of genes and DNA changes from one generation to the next. However, in the West, where it is much drier and most reproduction is by ramets, many acres may be comprised of "a single individual", all with the same DNA. Aspen ramets are sent up following disturbances that affect mature trees. Fire is the main disturbance, however, logging and avalanches may trigger clone development also. A mature root system can produce from 400,000 to 1 million clones per acre! These clones are capable of growing a meter or more a year and can easily out-compete other forest species that must regenerate from seed. The shady soil beneath aspens provides just the right environment for more long-lived trees to get started and eventually, they shade out the aspens. Although the individual vegetative sprouts are short-lived, a continuous series of ramets may be many thousands of years old and cover many, many acres of ground!

Although aspens are not popular with bonsai artists, you may look at this tree a little differently in the future. Maybe there's something to admire in an aspen after all!

Information on Quaking Aspens: <http://bss.sfsu.edu/geog/bholzman/courses/fall99/projects/aspens.htm>

<http://www.botanik.uni-bonn.de/conifers/topics/oldest.htm>

- *Pinus longaeva* (Bristlecone Pine) 4,844 years
- *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (Giant Sequoia) 3,266 years

- *Fitzroya cupressoides* (Patagonia cypress) 3,622 years
- *Pinus ponderosa* (Ponderosa Pine) 843 years

ABOUT THE AUTHOR— John Wiessinger is an artist and naturalist living in Ithaca, New York and a member of the Finger Lakes Bonsai Society. As an educator he is interested in helping us better understand our natural world and how it affects bonsai. Additional information on his Electronic Naturalistic series can be located at www.enaturalist.org

Japanese five-needle pine, Pinus parviflora, probably trained from a specimen growing in the wild.



One of several tables featuring shohin bonsai in the collection of Harvey Carapella. A wide selection of different species and bonsai styles comprises this fine collection. Note the three tiers of wooden boards used to display each bonsai to its finest form.

