

MILTON-ULLADULLA ORCHID SOCIETY INC.,

FRANK CONDELLO'S TALK ON HOW HE GROWS BONSAI

Frank has been growing bonsai for 35-40 years and has a Nursery at Yatte Yattah, North of Milton. Prior to starting up his Nursery he was a mad collector of Australian Native Orchids and in those days belonged to a local Southern Shire Orchid Society who specialised in Australian Native orchids.

Later on he had a calling to grow bonsai and decided to go with that idea. He said he bought every wrong plant and every wrong pot for all the wrong reasons to begin with making a lot of mistakes but soon learnt through all these experiences and has a well-known, successful Nursery.

What is a bonsai? It's a plant in a pot. A form of 'living art' which you never finish shaping. The shape and style of the plant must be considered and the plant put into the right container. It has to complement the size of the tree. When you look at the composition you don't want the pot to take away from the look of the plant. For instance, some people love blue pots but this colour definitely takes the look away from the plant so Frank does not recommend using that colour pot.

Frank pointed to a fig tree that was 40 years old and each year in October/November he completely defoliates the tree and when the new leaves regrow, because it's re-growing on old wood it won't grow as big as the original. It will have nice, small leaves and look beautiful. Frank then commenced to report a large elm tree which he said looked a bit sad and needed repotting. To revitalise them they need repotting approximately every 12-18 months. Pruning roots and clipping top of tree and then reset in fresh Debco bonsai mix which he recommended. They will then send out new roots which will supply the top of the tree. It really is as simple as that according to Frank.

Frank pointed out that bonsai has to live outside where trees live. Bonsai need more water during Spring and Summer and may need watering daily during very hot days. Don't blast them especially new small plants which is best to gently mist them or give them a gentle watering. Position plants in morning sun until about 1-2pm then under the shade of trees. In Autumn/Winter they will give you beautiful colour display. Maples especially need the right outside position because if they are too protected they will not get their colour display but leaves will go brown and fall off. It is the chill in Autumn/Winter that sends the plant into their colour display. With deciduous trees, this is also a good time to prune off any branches that doesn't suit the design you have in mind. Frank then demonstrated how to repot one of his trees. He pruned off all the old roots, clipping back to the new ones. The leaves got a trim also. The tree went back into the same pot and was positioned to one side which suited the shape Frank had trained it. He uses a special wire (not copper) to keep the plant positioned in pot. Fresh bonsai mix was filled in. He recommended you not use the pruning scissors (very expensive) for the roots as they will get damaged by grit, old mix etc., Use an ordinary pair of scissors and keep the correct, more expensive one for clipping the leaves.

There is always a back and front to the plant so step back and make sure you are looking into the composition where you are actually looking into the open side of the plant. After your plant is nicely repotted, to make sure the roots get water, immerse it in a container of water for 20 minutes or so, according to size of pot, lift it out and put back on the bench. This way the entire root ball is watered. Every couple of months fill a wheelbarrow with water and a little Aquasol or Seasol or any

liquid fertiliser you like to use, sit the pot in this so that the side of the pot sits just above the water level until it stops bubbling. Your tree should be kept slightly moist and should never dry out.

Environment is very important, your plants have to experience the seasons of the outside. If they are put on a veranda or suchlike they will grow up and out reaching for the light.

These are notes I took down at Frank's talk. A more comprehensive leaflet may be in our Library if needed.

Sylvia Hawkins

President