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The
Satsuki Azalea
Society.



Newsletter

ISSUE 21

Editors ramblings....

So, it's almost that time of year again. The annual Show & AGM I mean. I know from experience that not many members will attend the AGM (I think the average over the last three years would be about six!) but it is your chance to have your say about how the club is being run. Anyway, if you can't make it, it would still be useful to have your comments about the Society. Is there anything you like or dislike? Is there anything you would like the Society to do differently? Is there any point in having an Annual Show? (See page 2)

I hope you do manage to make the show, it would be nice to put faces to all your names.

Ray Beddow.
Editor.

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1.

The 2002 Annual Show & A.G.M.

As you should know by now, this years Annual Show is being run in conjunction with the Wessex Bonsai Society Exhibition & Competition in Bournemouth.

You will find enclosed with this edition a leaflet which tells you everything you need to know except the time of our A.G.M. which will be at 12:00 noon or there about.

You may remember my request in the last issue for people who were willing to show trees to contact me. The response was exactly what I was expecting – nothing!

After a few frantic phone calls I managed to get the usual exhibitors to agree to show but surely this is missing the point of a club show. To rely on the same people to show the same trees (no matter how good they are) year after year is not, in my opinion, what a club show should be about. Over the last few years there has been an obvious decline in the attendance's at, and the enthusiasm for bonsai shows. In my own local Society we gave up on Annual Shows a couple of years ago because of a complete lack of interest from the members to either help organize, enter or even turn up so I know from personal experience what problems are involved.

Because of the nature of this Society, and the way we are spread all over the country, I wonder if it is really a viable idea to even attempt to hold an Annual Show? Because this years is running alongside a mainstream bonsai show I guess its not too bad but I would have serious doubts about ever holding a stand alone Satsuki Show again. Having said that we are open to offers for next year as nothing has been arranged as yet.

The subject of shows is one I'm sure will crop up at the AGM but if any of you that can't make it and would like to let your feeling known then please contact me.

2.

Web sites.

One of our members, *Penny Millson* recently sent me a copy of an article by *Jim Robinson* she found on the web. The article is about growing all types of Azalea as bonsai and covers subjects such as soil mixes, light & temperature, transplanting & pruning, fertilizers and pests & diseases. This is quite a lengthy and informative article so for those of you that do not have access to the internet I would like to reproduce a few paragraphs verbatim that I found interesting.

On the subject of potting mixes Jim states:

“Mycorrhiza are essential soil plants for the survival of azaleas. As with some conifers, the roots of azaleas do not have microscopic root hairs and depend on mycorrhizal fungi for the adsorption of water and nutrients. Soggy soils, soils that do not drain well or lack oxygen and over watering can kill these fungi, and hence the azalea themselves”.

This is one that never occurred to me. I’m sure Alex will put me right if I’m wrong but I can’t remember ever reading about mycorrhiza in relation to azaleas before. The mycorrhiza in the soil of my pines is fairly obvious but I have to say that I have never seen any when repotting azaleas. Does this mean I don’t have any or is it just a different form to that of pines that is less obvious? If anyone has more info on this I’d love to hear from you.

The next transcript seems to bear out Alex’s article and Simon Thompson’s confirmation in the last issue that Spring repotting is to be preferred.

“Azaleas can be transplanted anytime from late summer after the buds are fully formed until late spring. Some references suggest that after blooming is the best time, but transplanting can be done even when the is in full bloom. I prefer to transplant my azaleas in midwinter or early spring. I prefer this as many Satsuki’s bloom in May or June and the hot weather at this time of year makes transplanting dangerous, in my view. Some bonsai books recommend that the roots be washed completely when transplanting, leaving no old soil on the plant. I have done this, with both success and failures. I am convinced that soil must be removed up to the underside of the trunk, even if it takes a Dremel tool to cut away the old soil. Packed soil has no aeration and can support no feeder roots or mycorrhiza”.

I agree with the idea of removing the old soil but I’m not too sure about the use of a Dremel! I prefer to use a high pressure hose (not a power washer) on mine. When repotting pines it is recommend that the mycorrhiza be put back with the new soil mix but Jim makes no mention of this with the azaleas. Perhaps my theory that azalea mycorrhiza differs from that of pines by being so small that it is invisible to the naked eye.

The final section I thought might be of interest relates to feeding:

“Do not fertilize azaleas after buds have set in the fall and do not begin fertilization in the spring until the flowers have faded. This is the general information you will find in most publications. I have experimented with placing one rape seed cake on my azaleas when I bring them in for winter. I have never had bud drop from this and the leaves have stayed green and healthy”.

Like Jim I stop feeding in the autumn but I start in March/April depending on the weather, only stopping whilst plants are in flower. Perhaps I should say here that Jim Robinson lives in the Rocky Mountain Region of America where I guess that the winters are cold and the summers hot. If it takes until flowering time for the weather to warm up then that's possibly the reason for not feeding until after flower fall.

If you want to read the full article you can find it at www.ossie.com/bonsai/html/azaleas.html

Another Satsuki site that you might like to visit can be found at <http://www.bonsai-bci.com/species/satsuki-azalea.html> this is just a couple of pages of general information about Satsuki's but worth a read a memory jogger.

Satsuki from Seed.

As I have mentioned in the past, 90% of the Satsuki I grow are kept as potted trees rather than trained as Bonsai. For this reason I tend to be a bit less fussy when it comes to dead heading and deliberately leave on some fading flowers in the hope that they will produce viable seed.

As the Summer rolls by into Autumn and on into Winter, these developing seed heads are completely forgotten about until, come my Spring tidy up prior to returning plants to the open, they are once again found!

I normally sow my seeds fresh but I would guess that the seed heads could be collected and stored in a cool dry place. I prefer to sow mine straight away because the sooner they germinate the earlier they can be transplanted giving them chance to establish in time for the coming Winter.

I sow my seeds in 4" pots of a 50/50 mix of ericaceous compost and vermiculite but as Azalea seed is more than happy to germinate I would say any proprietary seed compost would do. In fact so readily does azalea seed germinate that self sown seedlings can often be found growing around the base of your trees *Picture 1.*



Picture 1.

Fig 1. Shows a pot full of young seedlings. Because Azalea seed is so small and you get so many from each seed head, it's very easy to over sow! The germination period is dependant on many factors, temperature, light etc. this picture was taken approx. two months after sowing but times do vary. I don't bother with propagators or bottom heat, all I do is leave the pots in the greenhouse. When about 1" (25mm) high I transplant them individually into seed trays filled with my same 50/50 mix. (actually, as you will see from the size of the hands in *picture 3* my eight year old son has taken it on himself to be head transplanter!)



Picture 2.

Pricked out seedlings ready for transplanting

7.



Picture 3.

The seed tray will be the seedlings home now until the following Spring. Once established a weak fertilizer can be used to strengthen and increase growth.

Come the following Spring the seedlings will be between 1" & 3" high. (*Picture 4*)



Picture 4.

8.

At this stage they can be individually potted on. *Picture 5* was taken last Summer and shows part of my collection of over 100, two year old, seed raised plants. Because all the pollination is performed by nature the resultant plant leaf size & flower type/colour will be a complete surprise. Last year three of these two year olds flowered and all three were different so you can imagine my excitement at the thought of what this years flowering season will bring.



Picture 5.

And finally.....

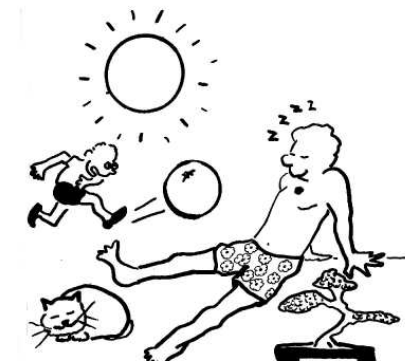
Thanks to Penny again for the following cartoons. (more to follow next issue)

See you at the show.

Ed.



It is not always a good idea to replot in spring....



... but summer repotting can also be a problem!