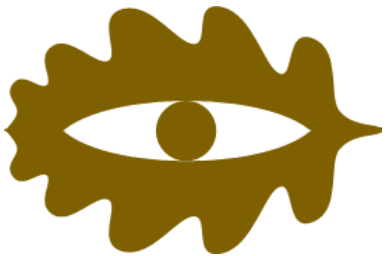


Bonsai On A Budget

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Oct 2024



Nemeta Bonsai
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Learning Outcomes - Day 2

- ▶ Be aware of the history and culture of bonsai
- ▶ Understand (at a high level) how a bonsai is produced
- ▶ Understand (at a high level) what distinguishes good and bad bonsai
- ▶ Know how to maintain a bonsai on a day-to-day basis
- ▶ Experience the key activities of re-potting, pruning and wiring
- ▶ Be aware of inexpensive options for further learning and practice

Practical component

- ▶ Potting the prepared tree
- ▶ Pruning for bulk, congestion and taper
- ▶ Wiring for shape

Bonsai: Art & Science

Good bonsai practice is:

- ▶ Authentic - makes you think “tree”
- ▶ Dramatic - makes you think “TREE”
- ▶ Pragmatic - doesn't make you think “*dead tree*”...



Authenticity & Drama

Thinking Like A Tree (That's Seen Some S**t)

Drama & Perspective

What makes a tree stand out?



- ▶ Well-defined “front”
 - ▶ Style is firmly established
 - ▶ Sense of strength or movement captured
 - ▶ Clear view of lower trunk
 - ▶ No crossed branches
 - ▶ Tree’s “centre of mass” is in middle of pot
- ▶ Taper (again!)
 - ▶ Taper appears stronger from viewpoint at base of tree
- ▶ Pot: picture-frame for tree
 - ▶ “Heavy” earthenware vs “light” glazed
 - ▶ Depth \approx trunk thickness; width \approx 2/3 canopy height (tall tree) or width (wide tree)
 - ▶ Style: heavy vs light, plain vs ornate
- ▶ Use of negative space
 - ▶ ...Often justified as effect of wind-flow or trunk death
- ▶ Scaled-down decorations
 - ▶ Moss “grass”, accent plants, rocks (“suiseki”)

Flaws

What gives the game away?

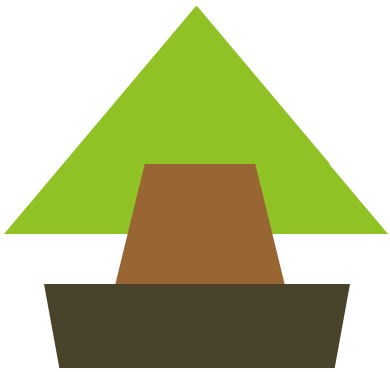


- ▶ “Weak” branches
 - ▶ Suckers
 - ▶ Congested nodes
 - ▶ Under-slung / elbow branches
 - ▶ Lack of clear “leader” (dominant trunk / branch)
- ▶ Obvious tool marks
 - ▶ ...Including wire scarring
- ▶ Excessive symmetry
 - ▶ ...Especially handlebar branches
 - ▶ Asymmetry is a common theme in Japanese gardening!
- ▶ “Reverse taper”
- ▶ Unusual “habit” for species / genus
 - ▶ Google for pictures of wild tree to get ideas!
 - ▶ This rule is frequently ignored: e.g. small shrubs portrayed as large trees, boringly-shaped species made interesting, unrealistic pads
- ▶ Dead leaves and (unwanted) deadwood

Bonsai Styles

The most common four of... *thirty?* Really?!?

Formal Upright



- ▶ Strong, proud, “yang”
- ▶ Pot: unglazed earthenware; simple shape; bulging
- ▶ Can be hard to develop taper

Cascade



- ▶ Flowing, falling
- ▶ Pot: deep to make space
- ▶ “Half-cascade” runs to base of pot; “cascade” goes below that

Informal Upright



- ▶ Relaxed, elegant, “yin”
- ▶ Pot: glazed; fluting; flowery
- ▶ Broad range of possible shapes
- ▶ Basically the default style!

Literati



- ▶ Solitary, melancholy, bleak
- ▶ Trunk: bare, ruptured, calligraphic
- ▶ Pot: small to emphasise plant’s extravagant loneliness
- ▶ Style derived from woodcuts in classic Chinese drawing guide

Pragmatism 2

Making Life In Miniature

Bonsai Lifecycle

Sources

Slow

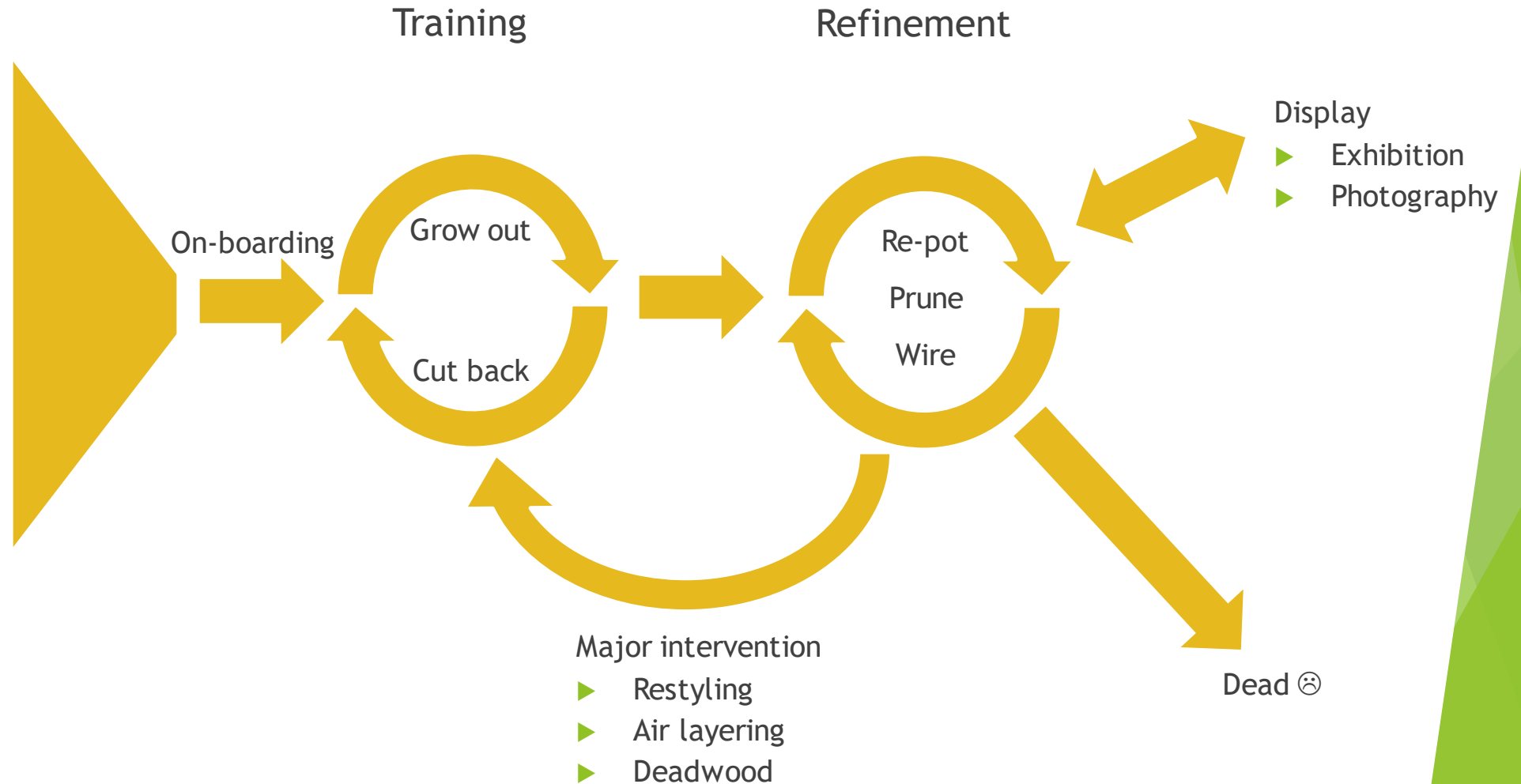
- ▶ Seeds
- ▶ Cuttings

Fast

- ▶ Garden centre seedlings
- ▶ Scavenging

Ready

- ▶ “Nonsai”
- ▶ Garden centre mature trees
- ▶ Yamadori



Pruning Broadleaf Trees

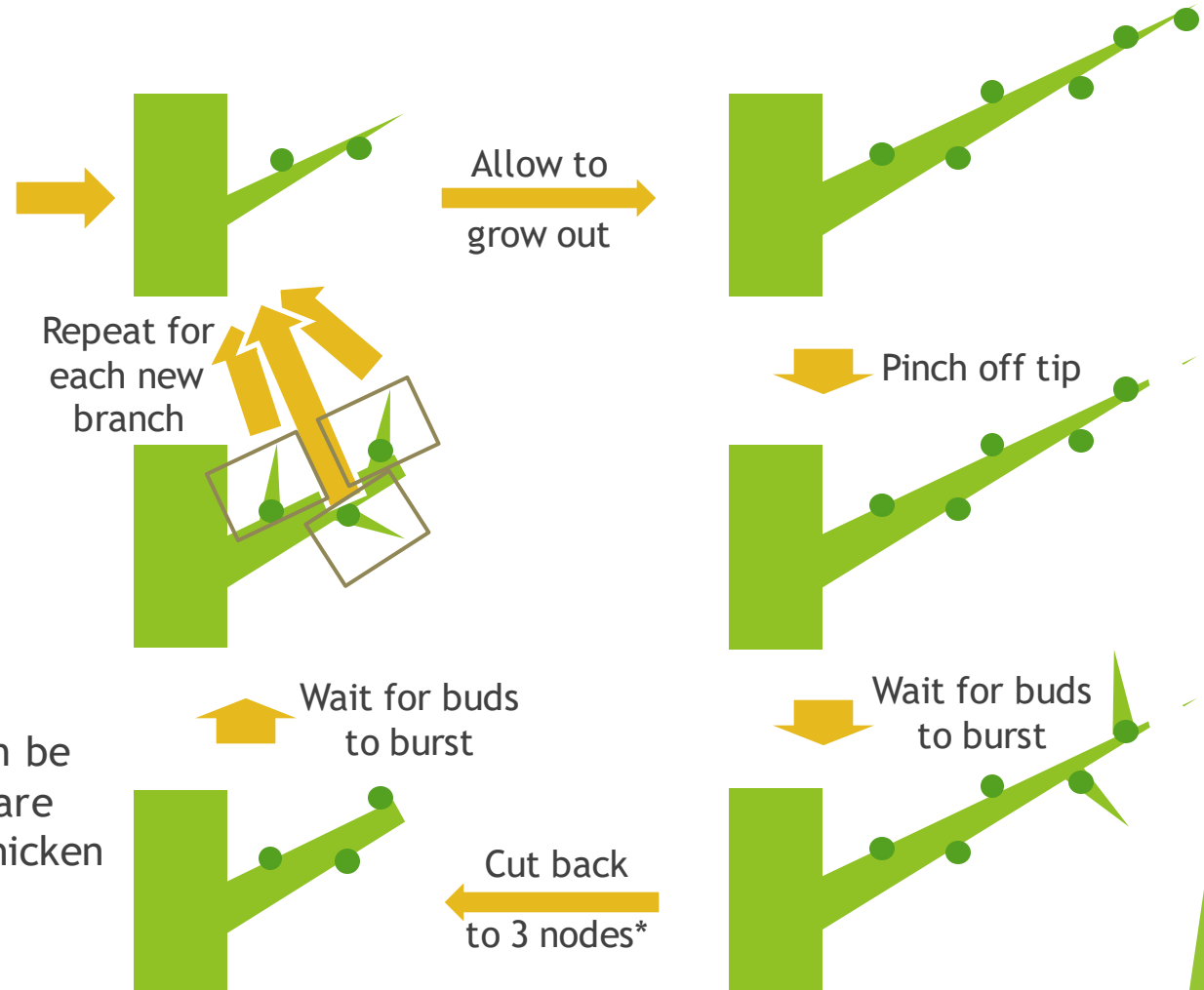
Playing On Easy Mode

► Context

- Can handle loss of mass
- Back-buds readily
- Leaves may be alternating or opposite

► Philosophy

- Minimal wasted growth
- Each branch should have “two heirs and a spare” (at least)
- The spare is a “sacrificial” branch: it can be removed later, once the chosen “heirs” are established, or allowed to grow out to thicken the parent branch



* Or 2 nodes (4 buds) for opposite leaves

Pruning Conifers

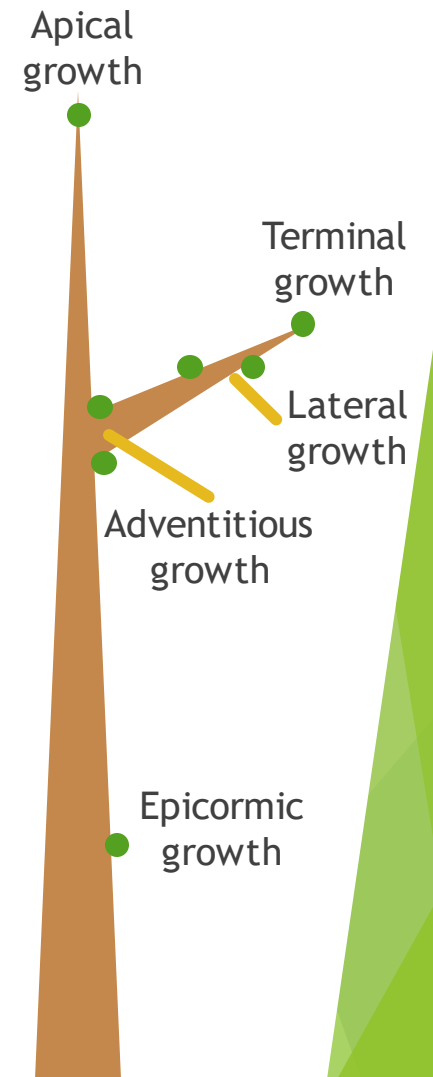
Getting trickier

Needle-bearing (e.g. pine)

- ▶ Context:
 - ▶ No epicormic growth
 - ▶ Often weak adventitious growth
- ▶ Philosophy
 - ▶ Green growth should form pads / clouds or layers
 - ▶ Leave lower branches as sacrificial branches to thicken up the trunk
 - ▶ Control apical growth carefully to stop premature die-off of lower branches (“energy balancing”)
 - ▶ Cutting back tips (removing current-year terminal growth) is called “de-candling”

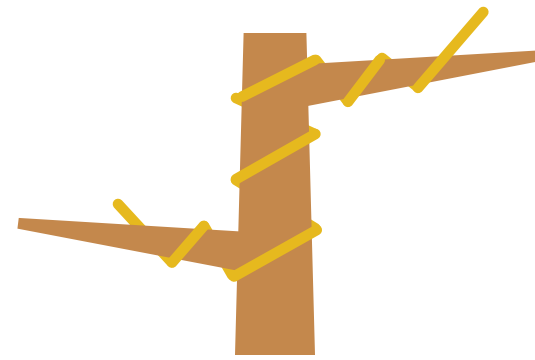
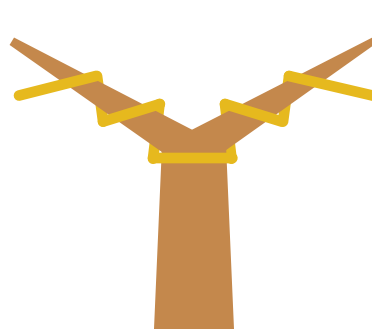
Scaly-spiny (e.g. juniper)

- ▶ Context:
 - ▶ No epicormic growth
 - ▶ Lateral growth is already present!
- ▶ Philosophy
 - ▶ Green growth should form pads / clouds or layers
 - ▶ Per branch:
 - (1) remove tip entirely;
 - (2) remove growth nearest trunk;
 - (3) thin out growth in 2nd quarter;
 - (4) shape-prune growth in 3rd quarter
 - ▶ ...Then repeat (fractally!) for each branch in 2nd quarter



Wiring

The Rules



1. If it's daft and it works, it's not daft
 - ▶ We use anodised aluminium wire because it is an easy and attractive way of imitating the effect of gravity on a larger tree
 - ▶ Weights, strings, corks, rubber bands, etc are all completely valid alternatives
2. Use the thinnest gauge of wire that will still bend the branch
 - ▶ E.g. if either 2mm and 1.5mm would work, but 1mm wouldn't, use 1.5mm
3. Always wire two branches together!
 - ▶ ...Or wire a branch to the trunk, or the trunk to the root ball / pot; just don't try to wire a single branch on its own
4. Wire at 45° to the branch / trunk
 - ▶ Rule of thumb: the wire needs to be the length of branch / trunk to be wired $\times 1.5$
5. The wire is a *cage* not a *corset*
 - ▶ I.e. use as little pressure as possible: the less it digs in on Day 1, the longer you have before it leaves wire-marks on the bark
 - ▶ It's OK to leave an "open coil" spiral at the end to gently control green growth
6. Leave wire on for one growth season
 - ▶ Usually 6 months - covering either Spring or Lammas growth - except for some mountain pines which only have one growth flush per year
 - ▶ If the branch hasn't "set" after one flush, you just have to reapply the wire

Stress Management

...No, I meant for the *tree*

Sources of water stress

- ▶ Root pruning
- ▶ Under-watering
- ▶ Over-watering / poor drainage → root rot
- ▶ Over-fertilising
- ▶ Summer

Sources of wood stress

- ▶ Heavy removal of green growth
- ▶ Branch removal past the “collar”
- ▶ Some kinds of deadwood work
- ▶ Insect attacks

- ▶ It's best to space stresses out over as much time as possible - e.g. 1 major stress per tree per growth season
- ▶ Water stress and wood stress are not (necessarily) additive: if you prune the foliage *and* the root ball, there is less demand for water so less work for the remaining root surface area

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, in various shades of green, creating a modern and dynamic feel. The shapes are layered, with some appearing more prominent than others, and they extend from the edges of the frame towards the center.

Next Steps

Becoming a Bonsai Practitioner

Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice, practice, practice, practice... you get the picture

1. Keep your tree alive and bonsai-ish
 - ▶ Remember: WATERING!!!
 - ▶ Remove wire in ~6 months
2. Find rogue seedlings to “adopt”, and transfer them to pots
 - ▶ ...*Without* killing them, I mean
 - ▶ Once you’re sure they won’t die, prune them and gradually move them to smaller / shallower pots
3. Start to build a bonsai toolkit
 - ▶ Start with cheap / improvised tools: chopsticks, pliers, wire-cutters, tamper, nail scissors
 - ▶ Consider buying: root shears, straight-edged branch cutter
4. Build a collection of pots for all bonsai styles and phases of development
 - ▶ Make your own - e.g. with crockery and a diamond tile hole saw
5. Contemplate trees in nature
 - ▶ What principles do they reflect, and how did they get that way??

Learn From Others

Apart from yours truly

1. Buy a book

- ▶ I like the DK Bonsai book: <https://www.dk.com/uk/book/9781409344087-bonsai/>

2. UK Bonsai Association: <https://www.ukbonsaiassoc.org>

3. Local clubs

- ▶ Currently none in central London, but several out in the suburbs
- ▶ The UKBA site has a very complete list (albeit not the easiest to search)

4. Bonsai shows and car boot sales

- ▶ Again: the UKBA has a calendar
- ▶ Again: none in central London, but some in Twickenham, Bracknell, Kent...

5. Youtube

- ▶ Channels: Mă-Kè Bonsai, Herons Bonsai, Bonsaify, Notion Bonsai, Bonsai Empire, ...

6. Drop me an email! alex@nemeta.co.uk

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Thanks For Attending!

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades, primarily on the left and right sides, with a white central area containing the text.

Appendices

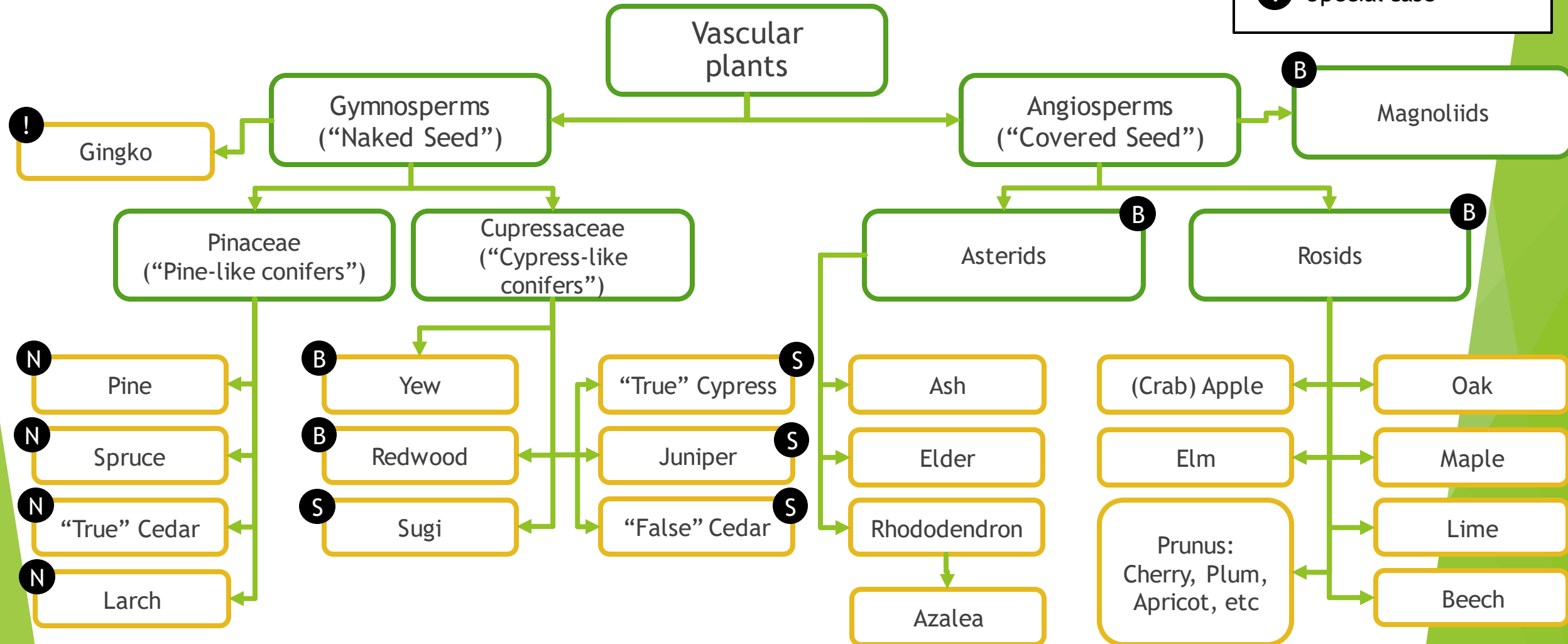
Miscellaneous Technical Notes

Woody Plants: A Family Tree

Evolution From A Bonsai Pruner's Perspective

Prune as:

- B** Broadleaf
- N** Needlely conifer
- S** Spiky / scaly conifer
- !** Special case



Repotting step-by-step

Regular repotting - often back into the same pot! - helps limit tree size via “root-to-shoot ratio”

1. Prepare pot

- ▶ Pick a (tentative) pot
- ▶ Scrub clean
- ▶ Staple mesh over holes
- ▶ Add guy wires

2. Prepare tree

- ▶ Remove from pot
- ▶ Clean off soil surface
- ▶ Dig down to expose nebari
- ▶ Dig up / in to define root-ball

- ▶ Untangle lateral roots where poss. (esp. girdling roots)
- ▶ Clear any growth from lower trunk
- ▶ Spray with water if starting to dry!

3. Insert tree into pot

- ▶ Add shallow layer of soil to base
- ▶ Place root ball in pot and pack soil around
- ▶ Compress soil to “brownie” hardness
- ▶ Pull guy wires over root ball, twist pairs together tightly, and trim to 3-4 twists
- ▶ Cover with dried, grated, rehydrated sphagnum and compress surface
- ▶ Sprinkle with grated acrocarpous (upward-growing) moss

