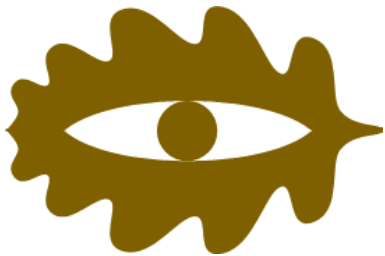


An Evening of Bonsai

Session B: Bonsai Aesthetics

Alex Labram

July 2024



Nemeta Bonsai
nemeta.co.uk



Learning Outcomes

- ▶ 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

- ▶ Exposing the nebari
- ▶ Pruning for bulk, congestion and taper

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades of green, creating a modern and dynamic look. The shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the slide, framing the central text area.

Review

First Week Highlights

I Had One Once, But It Died

What a bonsai needs to survive

- ▶ Environment
 - ▶ Indoor vs Outdoor
- ▶ Watering!!!!
 - ▶ Single biggest killer of bonsai
 - ▶ “Root hairs” die easily in drought
 - ▶ Over-watering is also dangerous!
- ▶ Light
- ▶ Heat
 - ▶ Dormancy
- ▶ Airflow
- ▶ Pest Control
 - ▶ Animals: spider mites, scale bugs, aphids, caterpillars, vine weevil, squirrels
 - ▶ Plants etc: pearlwort, liverwort, wood sorrel, pennywort, nostoc
 - ▶ Caution: environmental issues!
- ▶ Fertiliser
 - ▶ “Balanced”: roughly even NPK
 - ▶ Organic => micronutrients
 - ▶ Caution: environmental & ethical issues!
- ▶ Bonsai are far harder to keep alive than most common pot plants!

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*”...

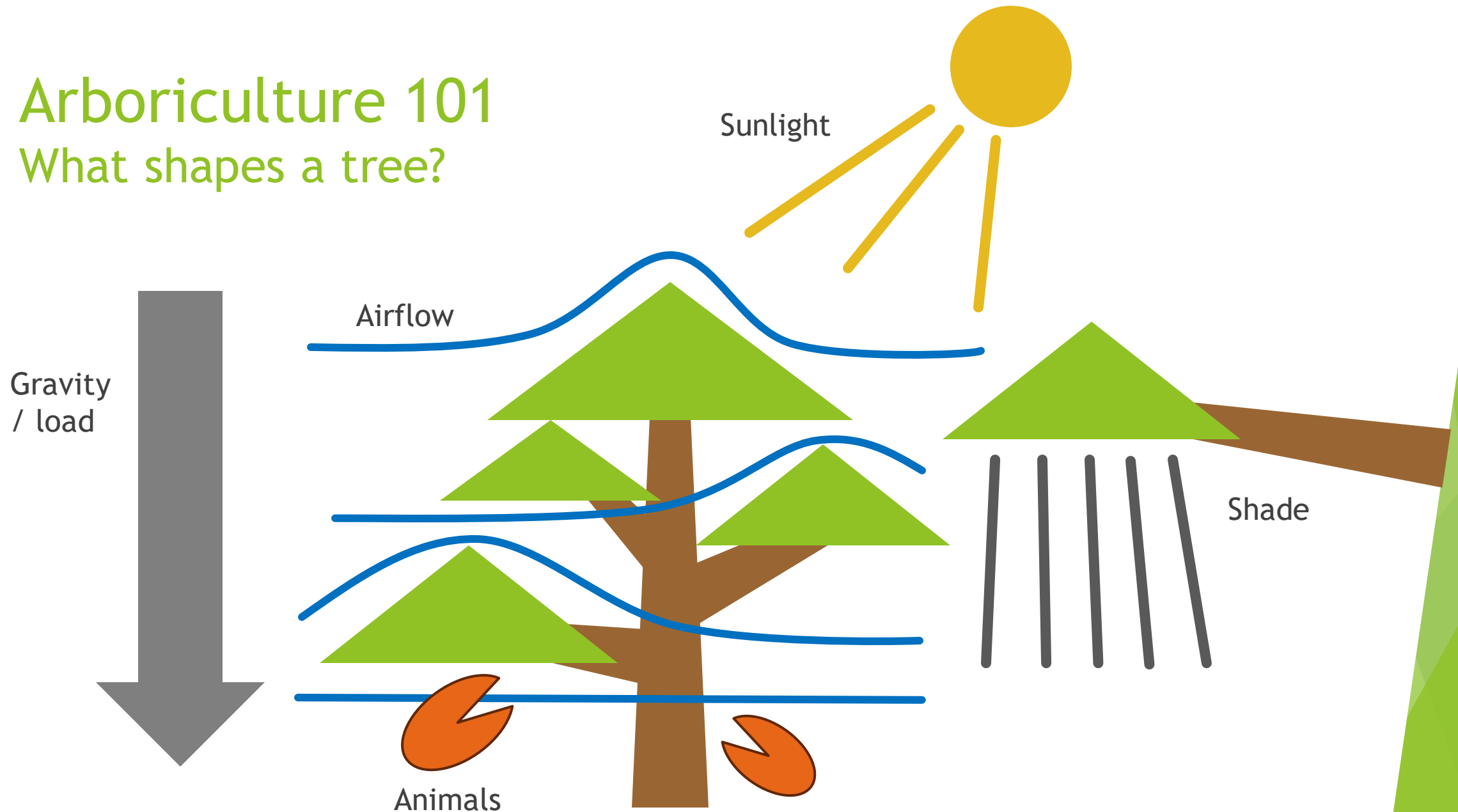


Authenticity & Drama

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

Arboriculture 101

What shapes a tree?



Authenticity & Age

What makes a tree look mature?



► Taper

- “Nebari” (根張り) = root flare
- Trunk & branch flare: base to apex / tip
- Trunk-to-branch ratio

► Canopy shape

- Rounded triangle
- Composed of rounded-triangle “pads” (for species that back-bud less readily)

► Trunk & branch behaviour

- Short inter-node distance
- “Ramification”: fractal splitting of branches
- “Square-cube law”: big tree = proportionally heavier load = more curvature
- “Ruptures”: jagged direction changes

► Texture

- Bark
- Dead-wood: advanced bonsai topic!

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?

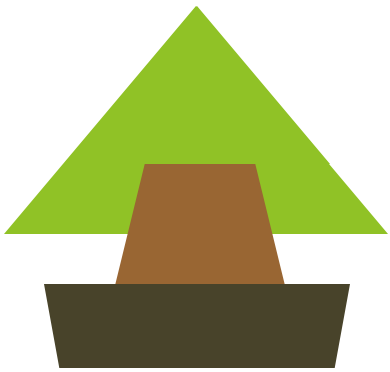


- ▶ “Weak” branches
 - ▶ Suckers
 - ▶ Congested nodes
 - ▶ Under-slung / elbow branches
 - ▶ Lack of clear “leader” (dominant trunk / branch)
- ▶ Obvious tool marks
 - ▶ ...Including wire scarring
- ▶ Excessive symmetry
 - ▶ ...Especially handlebar branches
 - ▶ Asymmetry is a common theme in Japanese 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

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, in various shades of green, creating a modern and dynamic design.

Thanks For Attending!