



www.saba.org.za

Reg No: 2022/271010/08

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SABA Quarterly Newsletter - March 2025

Dear SABA members

As always , we ended 2024 on a high! The African Bonsai Convention (ABC6) was a great success , even though we did not have the attendance numbers we have been used to in the past. The trees certainly were the stars of the weekend , having 230+ trees on show with 50 acknowledged by the judges and eventually 30 receiving certificates.

Please visit the ABA website for all the great photos of the trees, winners, Demonstrations and New Talent competition. <https://www.africanbonsai.org/>

This year we have also started with great news, in that after 2 years of paperwork, we have finally obtained approval and received our Tax exemption as a NPC. We are now able to register with the Department of Social Development online, which will aid us in future requests for funding. We will be approaching the Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture with regards to promoting Bonsai in South Africa once our online approval has been approved.

We have already been busy behind the scenes with the requests that were made at the AGM end of last year.

1. Tree Size classification for all major and mini conventions. By Andre Swart and Hennie Nel
2. A Strategy letter to increase membership in Bonsai clubs. By Heinrich Kohne
3. Compiling CV's on South African Bonsai Artists willing to demonstrate and present overseas. By the Artists themselves.
4. Club membership updates on the website.
5. Online monthly zoom meetings that are available to all.
6. Lifetime achievement awards- a new systematic approach to be formulated by Carl Morrow.

These are just some of the agenda's that have come to light at our monthly online EXCO meetings.

1. Classification of Bonsai Tree sizes

Bonsai Height Size Classification

There is no definitive authority on how bonsai is classified by size, but the bonsai community adheres to traditional practices. As bonsai is an ancient art form, some old terms lack current translations. Nevertheless, these terms are still widely used within the bonsai community out of respect for tradition. Here is a guideline to size classification for each bonsai tree category.

Height Size Classification

< 1 Inch (2.5 cm) Keishi Bonsai

< 3" (7.5 cm) Shito Bonsai

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< 6" (15 cm) Mame Bonsai

< 8" (20 cm) Shohin Bonsai

< 16" (40.5 cm) Kifu Sho Bonsai

< 24" (61 cm) Chu Bonsai

< 40" (101.5 cm) Dai Bonsai

Miniature bonsai.

A few years back Hennie Nel (well known for his excellent Shohin) wrote to the UK bonsai society and received the following information and compared it to what Cape Bonsai Kai (CBK) were using for the past 50 years.(CBK have always considered themselves as a competition/judging oriented kai)

Miniature Bonsai are divided into categories as follows: (table from the Nippon society at the request of the UK bonsai society)

- Komono: one handed- 15-25 cm (CBK 20cm-30cm)
- Shohin: one handed -13-20cm (CBK10cm-20cm)
- Mame: palm size - 5-15cm (CBK 5cm-10cm)
- Shito: fingertip size -5-10cm (CBK < 5cm)
- Keshitsubo: poppy-size 3-8cm (In view of above not used)

Keishi is the smallest classification of bonsai, meaning "Thumb Size." Bonsai of this size are extremely rare and nearly impossible to maintain in the long term.

Shito bonsai are impressive, but they are typically only kept for short durations, primarily for displays at shows. Afterward, they are usually repotted and grown into a more sustainable-sized tree.

Mame bonsai, on the other hand, are not as small as Keishi but can still be categorized as miniature bonsai. Note that not all tiny bonsai are Mame; the true Mame bonsai typically is < 15 cm. .

Shohin Bonsai (< 20 cm) are the most popular bonsai size classification.

Anything over 30cm is not considered Miniature bonsai, so there is confusion sometimes that all miniature bonsai is referred to as Shohin, leaving out the Komono. Hennie Nel states that there are no absolute rules about the heights BUT it must be determined by the organisers upfront.

Shohin Display (Hennie Nel)

- An area of a metre x a metre is allocated to an exhibitor preferably with a blank wall/ board behind
- Only Shohin (<20cm) are used for the Shohin display.

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- Shohin stands are generally designed for a 3/5/7 bonsai display. (Accent plants included or not)
- There can be a ONE stand display, with a Shohin. However, this is often, more than 20cm, otherwise it looks lost in the space allocated) but needs to be determined upfront. (should it be part of the Komono display competition)

The actual bonsai trees:

- Measure from the rim of the pot to the top. (how to cope with flowers - included in measurement)
- Cascade measured from apex (top) to end of cascade.

The other larger bonsai trees :

Kifu Sho Bonsai (medium) – Up to 40.5 cm, are slightly larger than Komono and can have a greater impact.

Chu Bonsai (medium large) – Up to 61 cm , are two-handed bonsai trees or in the Western world , refers to medium sized.

Dai Bonsai (large) – Up to 101.5 cm , are four-handed bonsai trees are also known as Omono bonsai or Very Large bonsai in the West.

I am sure there will be many different opinions, but I also recommend we follow the CBK guidelines as spelled out by Hennie Nel , which are very easy to recognize and categorize.

Andre Swart

(with acknowledgment of Hennie Nel)

26.11. 2024

SABA Guidelines for size classification

To not complicate the height/size classification of bonsai displayed at SABA conventions we compiled the categories below to be used in future conventions:

It was concluded that only 5 sizes will be used for SABA conventions:

1. 0-15cm (Mame)
2. 15-20cm (Small Shohin)
3. 20-46cm (Medium)
4. 46cm- 1m (Large)
5. 1m and above (Imperial)

Measurements are from the top of pot to the top of the apex. The above will be applicable to all mini/national conventions. SABA Judging will NOT categorise styles.

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2. Ways of increasing club memberships

Background

In 2019 the total affiliated clubs within SABA were 28 with a total membership of 814. Currently it is 18 clubs and a total membership of 464.

One of the main mandates of SABA is to promote bonsai within the borders of the RSA, effectively assist member clubs in their endeavour to attract membership. This has become an increasing concern, and various factors contribute to the current situation. Not only the pesky effect of Covid but also socio-economic factors thus seriously jeopardising the business proposal SABA could offer the clubs. The yet unknown financial consequences of low attendee numbers of ABC6 might prove it difficult to sell future conventions to clubs where both the club and SABA might share in any financial gain.

Increasing membership is a grassroots endeavour that should be driven by the clubs; however, SABA should formalise various strategies/plans which the club themselves could adopt that suite them best.

Opportunities:

- Festivals
- Agriculture Shows
- Cultural Shows
- Farmers Markets
- Related shows – Koi Shows, Ikebana?
- Botanical Garden Activities
- Nurseries – Spring/ Autumn Shows
- Church/school Bazaar
- Mall exhibitions
- Cultural Organisation i.e. Voortrekkers/ Scouts
- Home School Groups
- School/ University/ Tech – related subjects i.e. Horticulture/ Botany?
- Media – Facebook, Instagram.
 - Community radio and print

Club Structure:

- Have a designated person to receive and welcome new visitors/members.
- Tutor group – new members
- Regular beginner courses
- Have method in place where personal information gathered at venues from interest parties could be processed and used on e-mail list/ WhatsApp group and contact regularly regarding club activities.

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(personal experience have proof this rather unsatisfactory activity in the short term yet something that we have to persist)

This should serve as a working document as there should be a handful more suggestions to add.

Acknowledgment- Heinrich Kohne- December 2024.

3. Chosen demonstrator for the WBFF 10 convention

Earlier this year ABA asked us to compile a list of proficient Bonsai Demonstrators for future WBFF conventions. We received 10 Cv's of which 2 were forwarded to WBFF for their selection for WBFF10.

The below communication was received confirming that Hannes Fritz was chosen to demonstrate at the World Bonsai Convention 10 in Malaysia.

We congratulate him and are honored to have him represent our country.



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WORLD BONSAI CONVENTION 10. KUALA LAMPUR. MALAYSIA 2026

One of the objectives of WBFF is to establish an international World Bonsai Convention, sponsored and promoted by WBFF once every four (4) years.

The next WBC10 will be held in Kuala Lumpur, on 28-31 Aug 2026

ABA was requested by WBFF Chairman, to recommend demonstrators from the Region.

ABA Regions were requested to put forward, two nominations from their country, with the demonstrators complete CVs, which were forwarded to the WBC10 Committee, as the African region's nominees.

The WBC10 Committee have responded, and invited Hannes Fritz as the African Demonstrator to WBC10

Congratulation to Hannes Fritz and thank you to those who participated.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Cain
President African Bonsai Association.

4. Club membership updates for the website.

We are asking all the clubs to please check that your details are correct on the website. This is also your place to communicate and we also encourage you to advise us about what you would like SABA to add to the website. Please encourage and promote the site amongst your members. We endeavor to update links and current articles of interest monthly. Please remember your annual membership fees are now due- follow the prompts on the site.

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5. Monthly Zoom meetings

During the Covid pandemic, we have put in significant effort to maintain connections with Bonsai enthusiasts across the country. My mission has been to keep this fascinating art alive among its practitioners via the Zoom platform. With the financial support of the Kat Rivier Kai Bonsai Club, we contribute to the dissemination of Bonsai knowledge on a monthly basis through talks and educational demonstrations aimed at the entire Bonsai community.

We share our individual experiences and engage in constructive discussions with like-minded individuals, not only from South Africa but also from abroad. The forum is dedicated to practicing Bonsai as an art form and learning about the growing requirements and maintenance of various species and styles. Here, you can ask burning questions or seek critiques of your prized Bonsai from masters across the country.

Through this exposure, we can all learn and celebrate the beauty and tradition of Bonsai, strengthening interpersonal ties and promoting this Japanese art within an African context. Your fellow Bonsai enthusiasts will greatly appreciate your interest and participation.

Please note that there is an annual membership fee. The sessions are recorded and will be available for you to view at your convenience after each talk.

To join us, please send your details to admin@katrivierkai.co.za or Whats App Andre Swart on 0848004000.

6. Lifetime achievement awards

We are also busy working on a document detailing guidelines for the nomination of the Lifetime Achievement Award and will be distributing this for input once we have a concept document in place.

Next SABA convention

Many clubs have been asking us for details regarding where and when the next convention will be held. BRAT- (Bonsai Regional Association of Transvaal), will be hosting the mini convention in the last quarter of 2025. They will advise on the date and venue for the event after their quarterly Bonsai open day on the 29th of March. We will communicate the details once BRAT has confirmed.

This is all the News I have for you for now, quite a bit to digest. Please let us know if there are interesting events happening with-in your Clubs and Regions, we are only too happy to share this with the rest of the SA Bonsai fraternity.

Kind Regards,

Dawn Collier

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