



RMBS

November 2023

Volume 55 Issue 11

Subalpine fir - Mike Britten Artist of the Year 2023

## President's Message

by Paul Koening

pjkoening@gmail.com

### Serving with a Smile

It's still fall... I think... but the recent freeze has had me running around to make sure all my bonsai were healed in and ready for the extreme drop in temperatures. As a nurseryman and landscaper there is always another season around the corner that keeps you chasing your tail, but they always have a way of surprising you with changed timing and all the variables that make our seasons unpredictable.

While scurrying around my yard, I could feel my vision narrow and the hours pass far too quickly. It was a sprint to accomplish what was needed, but this is my hobby right? It took a few attempts to force myself to relax a bit, but once I did, I was

enjoying the work as opposed to just needing to complete it. This change in my approach speaks to an underlying effort I have been making all year. It is far too easy to get caught up in what we are doing and miss any fun that might have happened along the way. While we all have a lot going on to keep up with in our own personal lives, it is critical that we also take time to enjoy ourselves. I suspect that may be at the heart of why many of us were originally pulled towards the hobby of bonsai. Bonsai represents a calming art that brings peace of mind, and a sense of being present in the moment.

Then you take the plunge and end up with many bonsai and the risk is that they become a chore instead of the escape originally intended. Some of this is inevitable, and crazily what drives some of us to keep going, but we should also strive to make sure we take deep breaths and pause to enjoy the

beauty we help to create. It drives me crazy to see weeds sprouting in my bonsai, but I rarely take time to only weed my bonsai. It always seems to be when I slow down to enjoy my trees and seek out new design options, that I also find my hands pulling weed, while also smiling and conversing with my bonsai. I love weeding my bonsai! For me it represents time I can spend with my trees where I can enjoy their current status, dream about their futures, and allow my hands to provide care that does not take a lot of thought.

In that same vein, we too often get caught up in our day-to-day operations that we forget to enjoy the day itself or all the people we had the opportunity to share the day with. Finding balance in our lives is a bit of a never-ending goal that takes regular re-prioritizing, but as my friendly neighbor reminds me, "it's not that you don't have time to clean, it's that you don't have time to not clean." In other words, we need to ensure that we make time for all the chores in life to be able to fully enjoy the rest of everything life has to offer. I will add that chores can also be fun when given the right attitude and group of people to share them with.

Take for example the Japanese after a sporting event. They have become known for remaining at the stadium after the event regardless of their team winning or losing and cleaning up after themselves and everyone else. While this phenomenon has been reported on by media around the world, it is not reported on in Japan. Why not? Are they not proud of their humble service? No, they are not taking these actions for accolades, they are taking on these chores with a smile because they have been raised with this mentality. It is best to leave any location better than it was and ready for the next person regardless of who that might be. It's a small way to pay it forward to the next group. I would argue that their actions immediately pay it forward as the sports stadium staff have their jobs eased. This results in smiling staff that continue to spread the joy that smiling faces always do. What a wonderful gift to have the opportunity to give! Collecting a bag

of trash after a sporting event is so simple, but the effects generated by all the good will and smiles spread is priceless! So, if you find yourself scurrying about, like myself, with a narrowed focus and furrowed brow. Stop, take in the view, take some slow deep breaths, and find some joy before you continue with a maybe slightly slower pace, but hopefully with a wide smile ready to pass some good feelings on!

Now that I have you all smiling ;) I hope that you will join us for the monthly meeting on **November 7th** at Denver Botanic Gardens, in the Strum auditorium. Henry Basile will be presenting, and he is the former "First Curator's Apprentice" at the National Bonsai Collection in Washington, DC. Then in **December on the first Sunday which is the 3<sup>rd</sup> we will have our holiday party at the Dakota Lodge in the Ken Caryl Valley, Littleton.** The address will be emailed out to members. There will be a sign up at the next meeting for side dishes and volunteers, and I also welcome you to email me at [pjkoenning@gmail.com](mailto:pjkoenning@gmail.com) with dishes you would like to share or volunteer slots you would like to fill at the party. We already have a turkey and ham, baked beans, carrots with potatoes and a few others being offered by board members, and I hope you will all dazzle us with your favorite side dishes or dessert to make for a great event. To foster some of that Japanese service with a smile attitude we are also asking that attendees sign up to help set up, serve food, or clean up. This will ensure that we all have time to smile and enjoy the holiday party this year, and I cannot wait to see all your smiling faces as we enjoy each other's favorite holiday foods. We are also seeking old or new bonsai tools, books, pots, etc. to be able to auction to members just beginning their journey. In case the people and food are not enough to get your smiles-a-beaming there is sure to be a good laugh or too watching me attempt to be a decent auctioneer. Thank you for all of your efforts to help RMBS this year, and I look forward to ringing in the holidays with you soon!

Paul Koenning



## Emerging Artists, 2023

Congratulations to the three RMBS members who were awarded the Emerging Artists 2023.

Correction to October 2023 newsletter:

The Colorado Blue Spruce pictured below was identified as belonging to Pauline Ayers-Menk, one of the Emerging Artists for this year. This tree actually is Normando Rodriguez's tree.



*Vietnamese Blue Bell- Christina Cordova Seaman*



*Correct photo- Colorado Blue Spruce- Pauline Ayers-Menk*



*Colorado Blue Spruce – Matt Wright*

## Winter Protection for My Bonsai—An Experiment

by Rich Katz

October 21, 2023

When I moved from a Chicago suburb to Denver in May, 2020, I immediately noticed a significant difference in the climate—and so did my trees. They—and I!—complained that it was too hot, too sunny, and too dry, and two of my deciduous trees gave up the bonsai ghost in the first six weeks I was here. So I abandoned my plan to keep the trees in full sun, which was their accustomed environment in Chicago, moved them to the north side of my house, and watered them almost daily—and sometimes twice daily. Most of the trees survived that first summer. But then, I had to face the onslaught of our first winter in this high desert climate.

The trees spent the winter of 2020 in the garage, which I was able to keep at about 35 degrees most of the time thanks to a gas heater in the garage, but I was always nervous about the warmer days when the temperature in that enclosed space would climb well into the 50's and 60's during periods of extensive sunshine. I knew something had to be done to maintain a cold temperature with minimal swings.

Preparing for the winter of 2021-22, I constructed a rectangular 3' x 8' frame of 2 x 6's and created a hoop house using 1" PVC piping to create arches that supported a double layer of white landscaping cloth. (See Figure 11 for how to affix the PVC arches to the inside of the frame.) It worked well enough that winter, but because it was in the shade of the north side of the garage, I was concerned about the temperature getting close to the danger zone on the coldest days and nights. I returned to the drawing board.

I consulted with RMBS President Paul Koenning, who had recently discussed winter care during a lecture at one of our club meetings. He had experimented with electric heating cables in the soil last winter, but he acknowledged they did little good, and he surmised they were spaced too far apart. So, I decided to push his experiment a little further.

After a day or two of online research this fall, I found the name of a manufacturer of various heating cables designed for different purposes in a variety of industrial environments. (BriskHeat at [www.briskheat.com](http://www.briskheat.com).) I quickly learned that single-wire cables used for keeping ice off the roof of a house were not hardy enough for use in the ground and could deteriorate after a year or two. I also learned that what I needed was a waterproof, two-wire cable that was self-modulating based on the ambient temperature of the matrix in which it was buried. In my case, that would be sand. The particular cable that was recommended is called "SpeedTrace Extreme", and my plan was to use a Ranco ETC temperature controller that I've had for several years to control the self-modulating on/off function of the heat cables in the relevant temperature range. (If you buy this controller, order it pre-wired, and buy the heat shrink tubing to protect the temperature sensor from moisture. If it's bought as a package, the company will ship the unit to you with the tubing already applied—a good deal. <https://www.rancoetc.com/ranco-etc-111000-000-prewired-digital-temperature-controller>; \$110.74) Armed with this information, knowledge of Paul's experience, and the Ranco, I got to work.

The raised bed I built in 2021 is 3' x 8', which equates to 24 ft<sup>2</sup>. I calculated that I could install an 18' cable zig-zag style in each half of the bed, which meant that I could space each vertical "run" approximately 4 to 6 inches apart, and still allow for the short



length of cable needed for each “U-turn.” I ordered two such cables for a total length of 36’.

I worked out a design so that both cables could be powered from a single duplex outlet on the exterior wall of my garage, conveniently located exactly back-to-back with a duplex on the inside wall of the garage. I made sure that the breaker on this circuit could handle the combined wattage of the cables working at maximum power on the coldest of nights. The exterior electrical box has a tight-fitting cover and is deep enough to house the grounded GFCI duplex outlet. I oriented the box so that the Ranco power cable enters from the bottom. The Ranco unit itself will be further weatherproofed and mounted inside the hoop house, with the digital temperature read-out facing the door so I can periodically check the temperature of the soil inside, at the spot where the temperature sensor is buried. (See the wiring diagram, Figure 6.)

The landscaping around our house is completely xeriscape, and I wasn’t about to remove all those rocks from inside the base of the wood frame. So, I lined the inside with landscape cloth, and I poured a layer of approximately 3” of Aspen Mountain All-Purpose Sand on top of the cloth (Lowe’s; approximately \$4.50 per 0.5 ft<sup>3</sup> bag).

I then fixed the zig-zag position of each heat cable in the sand using 9” plastic tent stakes (REI; \$0.95 each), making sure that the electrical plugs at the ends of the heat cables were able to reach the end of the Ranco heater control cable. Although the manufacturer says that it’s OK for the cable to come into contact with metal, I opted for REI’s plastic stakes just to be on the safe side. I needed a heavy-duty, outdoor approved Y-connector to connect two heat cables to the single plug at the end of the Ranco control cable. Then I poured another 3 to 4 inches of sand on top of the cables to achieve a total depth of 6-7 inches.

After all of that, I was on Easy Street. I bought a length of Ranco’s heat shrink tubing to protect the

tip of the temperature sensor (<https://www.rancoetc.com/thermal-well-for-aquariums-38-clear-pvc-heat-shrink-tubing>; \$2.25 each), and applied it to the last 7 inches of the distal end of the temperature sensor; put all electrical connections in plastic insulators to protect them against weather; placed my trees in the hoop house, “settling” them a little more deeply in the sand but not touching any portion of the heat cables; put the temperature sensor into the root-ball of one of my cherished bonsai; set the Ranco unit to power up the heat cables when the soil temperature drops to 23-degrees and to turn off when the soil temperature rises above 30-degrees; and installed the PVC arches of the hoop house. I’ll close the cloth covering when the outside temperature starts to drop significantly. Large-size binder clips (Office Max, Target) work perfectly to clip the cloth to the PVC arches: they’re cheap, last for many years outdoors, and allow easy access for watering the trees.

A final note: This is my first winter using this system. I can’t guarantee that it will be successful, so think carefully before you copy it. I’ll follow up in the May newsletter to let you know how my trees did. Don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any suggestions or ideas for improvement in the design, especially if you think the setpoint and differential on my Ranco unit should be changed. FYI, the elevation in my Denver neighborhood is about 5,500 ft., so adjust your temperature settings to your own micro-climate.



Figure 1 Ranco ETC



Figure 2. Speed Trace Extreme

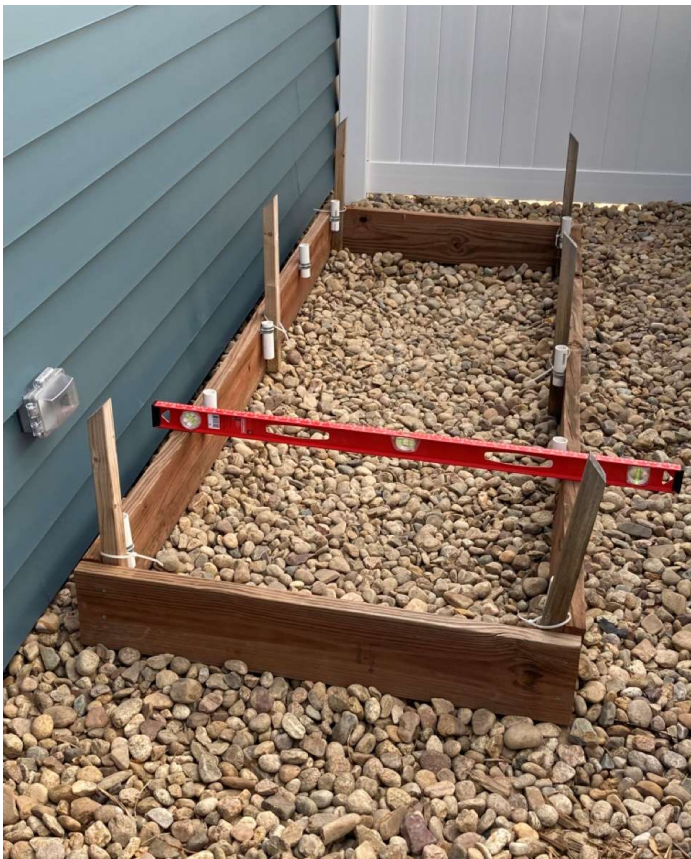


Figure 3. Leveling the frame

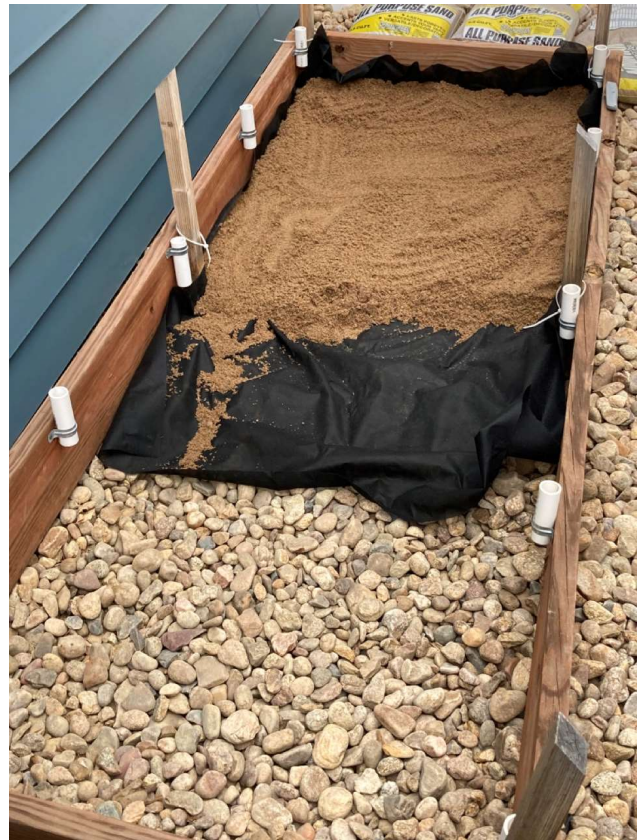


Fig 4. Liner and Sand





Fig 5. First Layer of Sand

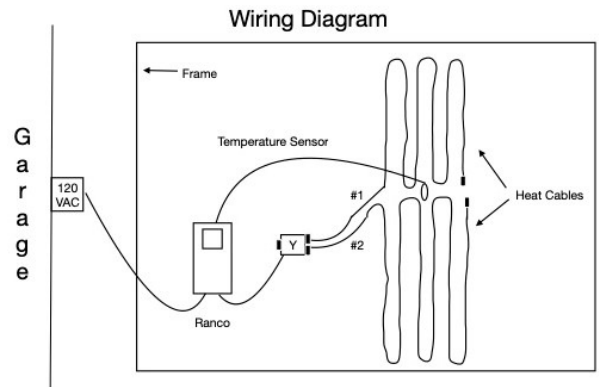


Fig 6. Wiring Diagram



Figure 7 Cables set with tent stakes.

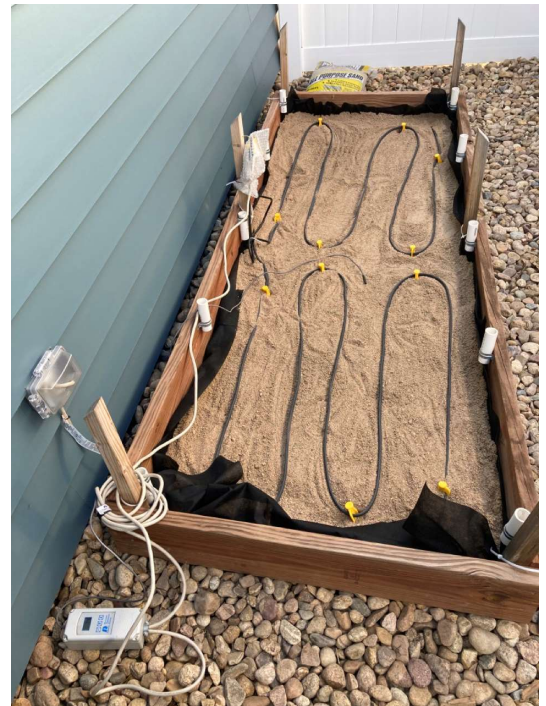


Figure 8 Ready for second layer of sand





Fig 9. Y-connector with control cable coming from right, two heat cables

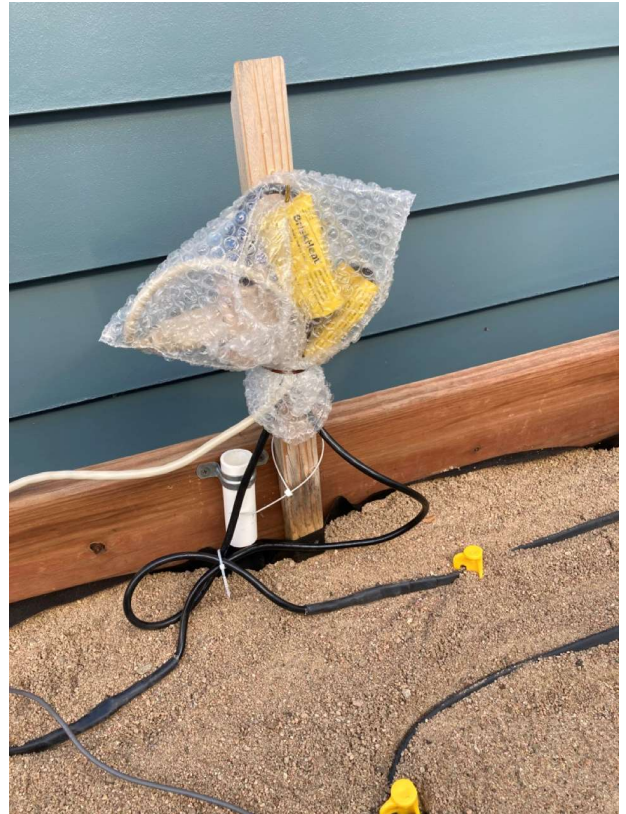


Fig 10. Moisture protection for interior electrical connections



Figure 11. PVC arches in place



Figure 12 Do not put Ranco outside the hoop house.



Figure 12. Temperature sensor inside heat shrink tube



## RESOURCES FOR MEMBERS

[Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society | Facebook](#) Post and view photos from RMBS members, post questions, comment

[Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society Forum](#) RMBS website forum has articles of interest

[Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society \(@rocky\\_mountain\\_bonsai\\_society\) • Instagram photos and videos](#) View or post photos

[Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society - YouTube](#) RMBS meetings recorded appear here, other videos of interest including RMBS show

Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society Dues info.

Annual membership renewals are due July 1. Individual membership is \$50 per year, a family membership is \$75 per year.

**Please create an account on the [RMbonsai.org website](#) under membership.** Once you have entered your contact information you will be directed to the payment page where you can enter credit card information or use PayPal. Your account will then be active and will be the method for renewal next year.

If you have already paid your dues you will not be able to create an account on the website yet so don't worry about trying to do that yet.

[Rmbonsai.org](#) RMBS website – headers: News & Events, Galleries, Join, Blog, Forum, Education

Create account for membership renewal

Other resources

[Colorado Bonsai Ltd. First Branch Bonsai RMBS Facebook Page](#)

For those of you who want to pay by check - please send a check to:

Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society

c/o Membership Renewal PO BOX 2095 Littleton, CO. 80161 This is our new mailing address.

Please be sure to include your phone # & **email address** with your check so we've up to date contact info for you.

We also have the ability to take credit card payments live at our meetings. We have discontinued Venmo for on line payment.

## 2023 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Date and Location	Agenda or Program	Workshop
<b><u>ANNUAL SHOW</u></b>		
<b><u>November Monthly Meeting</u></b> Tuesday, November 7 Denver Botanic Gardens – Strum Auditorium	<b><u>HENRY BASILE</u></b> FORMER “FIRST CURATOR’S APPRENTICE” AT THE NATIONAL BONSAI COLLECTION IN WASHINGTON DC	
<b><u>December Monthly Meeting</u></b> <b><u>December 3 10:30 AM</u></b> Holiday party and auction See announcement below	<b><u>LUNCHEON, RAFFLE, AUCTION</u></b>	

### Rocky Mountain Bonsai Societies’ Holiday Celebration

Come join the fun and celebrate another wonderful year of bonsai!

This year the Party will be held on Sunday December 3<sup>rd</sup> from 9:00am until 12:30pm. Setup will begin at 9am, the party will start around 10:30am, and cleanup will start at 12:30pm. The party has moved locations to the Dakota Lodge located in the Ken Caryl Valley at, **14422 W. Ken Caryl Ave, Littleton, CO 80127**. The Dakota Lodge is located next to the equestrian center.

Do you have a favorite side dish you would like to share? We need salads, appetizers, side dishes, rolls, and deserts. President Paul Koenning will be smoking a turkey, and Membership Chair Patrick Allen will be providing a ham for the membership. We do ask that all attendees help with setup, food service, and teardown. We welcome volunteers signing up for one of the three ahead of time. There will be a sign up at the November meeting, or you are welcome to email Paul Koenning, [pjkoenning@gmail.com](mailto:pjkoenning@gmail.com), to sign up as well.

Come join in the holiday fun, fantastic food, and wonderful company!

#### Meeting Schedule for 2024.

The RMBS board of directors and the Program Chair Darrell Whitley are presently scheduling speakers and presentations for 2024. Currently there is discussions with Denver Botanic Gardens about our proposed meeting dates that hopefully will be resolved shortly. Our updated schedules will be posted on the [RMBonsai.org](http://RMBonsai.org) website, and we will send out a notice regarding our January meeting as soon as we have secured a firm date.





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