

Little trees and big ideas

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U3A Matters: Dianna Baillie



LITTLE WONDER: Bonsai expert Doug Harris, a horticulturist with Liverpool Council, was a guest speaker at the Bonsai Buddies meeting on May 16. [052917bonsai](https://www.facebook.com/052917bonsai)

BONSAI is the meeting of horticulture and art. We copy what we see in nature.

As we are working to create an image of an old tree in miniature, it helps to start with species that have naturally small leaves, flowers and fruit.

While it is possible to reduce the size of leaves, fruit and flowers tend to remain their natural size. For example, we would choose to work with a

crabapple over a regular apple.

This is the third year Bonsai Buddies has been offered through Bathurst U3A. During this time we have clocked up some miles. We do like a good road trip. We have visited the market day organised by AusBonsai at Auburn and then nipped across to Ray Nesci's Bonsai Nursery.

Closer to home, we have held meetings at the Beekeepers and Mayfield cafes, not only for the food and coffee, but also because they have nurseries.

We have visited Churches and Riverside nurseries for material to turn into little trees. Members are encouraged to visit bonsai shows and Goulburn Bonsai Club.

The arboretum in Canberra is highly recommended for inspiration.

We source our trees on these outings as this gives us more advanced material to work with than growing from seed. We have learnt techniques including air and ground-layering to get advanced cuttings. Another great source for collecting is our own, or friends' gardens.

The younger the stock, the more difficult it is to create an image of an old tree. And that is important. Not how old the tree is, but how old it looks.

Once we bring our trees home, we set to work. Specialised tools do exist, but we can work with what we already own as gardeners. We need to be able to prune our trees.

We prune the top to keep the tree small and the roots to keep it healthy. Wire is applied so that we can place branches where we want them. Bonsai pots are selected to complete the image in the same way as the right frame sets off a painting.

Generally, trees are kept outside, although Bathurst winters pose frost risks, so we need to provide shelter. Proper watering techniques are crucial to the health of the bonsai.

If the tree dries out, it is likely to die, and even with good drainage, too much moisture can lead to roots rotting. Fertilising depends on your bonsai's stage.

You don't want to encourage excessive growth, but you do need to supply everything your plant needs to remain healthy. It can't send out roots searching for nutrients. And, of course, sunshine is needed during the growing season.

We were lucky to have a guest presenter on May 16. Doug Harris is a horticulturist with Liverpool Council, a member of Illawarra Bonsai Club and an experienced demonstrator.

For us, Doug demonstrated the planting of a group setting and then worked on participants' trees. With good humour, Doug explained what needs to happen now and in the future with each plant. A fun, educational time was had by all.

Why are we called Buddies? In recognition of the fact that we learn from each other. Some have greater horticulture knowledge, some a more artistic eye. Everyone's individual strengths benefit the whole group, and our bonsai.

Long-term friendships have been forged through participation in Bonsai Buddies.

For more information about the more than 40 Bathurst U3A programs, visit bathurstu3a.com or contact the secretary Sue Lasky on 6331 6968.