

# A BONSAI WORKTABLE

## HYDRAULIC LIFT TABLE FOR BONSAI

By Julian R. Adams

**B**onsai sometimes is said to be an expensive hobby. Depending on one's financial position this statement can be more accurate than one might like. As with most other things in life, it is usually best to minimize cost when possible to have the resources available when an expensive need arises.

My training as an engineer has amplified my genetic tendency to find the most cost effective solution to any problem. My family would describe this as being cheap. They are no doubt correct, but I do find satisfaction in putting the bulk of my bonsai resources into the tree and the pot (the visible end product) rather than into the various items needed to produce and maintain the bonsai. A combination of advancing age, a large number of trees, and too many large (and heavy) bonsai has compelled me to look for a bonsai work table to ease the physical strain in the bonsai studio. A primary consideration is the ability to raise and lower the tree so that it can be worked on from a seated position.

There are several possible aids on the market, but none seemed to exactly fit my needs. In Japan, turntables mounted on the base of hydraulic barber chairs are commonly used in working bonsai studios.

Exploration of making such a thing out of components available in the US led to the conclusion that, although possible, the result would be more expensive and less functional than desired. I concluded that the most cost effective solution would likely lie in finding a device which is already widely used in other pursuits and is manufactured in quantity.

My search led to several blind alleys and a number of impossibly expensive solutions before the answer to my problem was found.

### Hydraulic Lift Table

Hydraulic lift tables are commonly used in many materials handling

situations in manufacturing and commerce. Most are "overqualified" for bonsai use but I was finally able to find one that is nearly perfect for use in a bonsai studio. The winning device is a hydraulically operated lift (or scissor) table manufactured in China.

The rectangular steel table top is about 19 x 31 inches and easily can be raised by the use of an integral hydraulic cylinder and foot operated pump. Some models are lowered by a foot operated valve and some by a hand valve. Both are easy to use. The

table top can be raised from 10 to 31 inches above the floor. The 21 inch range of height adjustment makes it easy to position the tree at the proper height for comfortable access to the part of the tree upon which one is working. This feature is a great help to one's back and eyes.

The all steel construction is sturdy and heavy. The weight of the table is about 110 pounds. The lifting capacity is 660 pounds which is more than enough to take care of my heaviest bonsai. I appreciate the ability to



AUTHOR SUPPLIED PHOTOS

raise the bonsai to a comfortable height before it is picked up and returned to the display bench. No more bending!!! This is a great back strain saver. The tables are mounted on five inch wheels. Two are fixed in position. The other two swivel and have brakes allowing the table to be positioned with stability where one wants. If the configuration of the studio and display benches allow, it is possible to use the table as a cart to move the tree between the bench and the work area in the studio. This is a life saver when my spouse is not feeling up to carrying my trees for me.

A sturdy handle for moving the table is included. For some large trees, the handle can be an obstruction. One can use the table for most studio situations with the handle removed. When used for transporting trees between the garden and the studio it is advisable to use the handle for safety's sake. Other than the possibility of escape on sloping ground, the only apparent hazard in the use of the lift table is the possibility of lowering the table onto things that may be under the table. Hands, feet, and other items of value should be

kept clear of the scissor mechanism and the table top when it is being raised or lowered.

To protect the painted finish of the table top, I have fastened a plywood covering to the top with duct tape. This gives protection for the top and a less slick surface for tools and other items placed on it. When a turntable is needed, my home made turntable (made with an inexpensive six inch lazy susan bearing) sits nicely on the plywood covering with plenty of room at the side for tools, etc.

I have found several sources and two versions of this lift table. The least expensive costs \$100 to \$120. A higher quality version with better wheels and a better paint job costs \$180 to \$220. Prices vary by source and whether or not it is a sale item.

They are available from Northern Tool retail stores and at a lower price from the Northern Tool online catalog. Shipping via UPS is pricey due to the weight so there may be an advantage to a local purchase. The best prices of all are at those traveling tool sales outfits that set up in a community for a three day sale every six months or so. If you buy one, inspect for condi-

tion and operation immediately so that you can get a working replacement while the seller is still in town. Quality control is poor and shipping damage is a frequent problem.

I have two in use and wonder how I ever did the bonsai work without them. If all your trees are mame or shohin size, this table is of little value. If your trees are larger, take a look. You may find that one of these inexpensive lift tables can facilitate your involvement with bonsai.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Julian R. Adams**

Julian Adams is a bonsai author, instructor and exhibitor from Lynchburg, Virginia. He is the proprietor of Adams Motors Company and Adam's Bonsai, a retail bonsai business.

Mr. Adams experiments with various propagation and growing techniques and his engineering background has led him to new innovations in cultivating and training bonsai. This background has also provided him with a solid background for designing and constructing his bonsai garden and other innovations.

Annealed copper wire is one of his specialties and Mr. Adams supplies many nurseries with the traditional training wire. Mr. Adams has authored several articles in past issues.

*Julian Adams working on a bonsai in his new studio. The hydraulic lift table adjusts to different heights to accommodate all bonsai sizes.*

