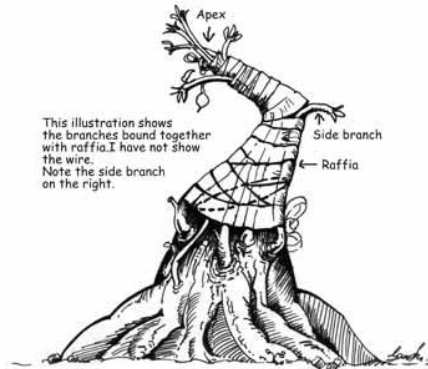


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### *The Ficus. Branch welding*



This issue we will have a look at a really cool technique that can be used for figs and some other tree species to a lesser degree.

Multiple smaller branches of a fig can be bound together to form a thicker branch. It is a really simple technique, and works just about every time.

There are a couple of tricks though which improve results.

Remove all of the leaves of the branches to be used but retain the terminal buds (the end points of each branch).

Identify the surfaces of the branches that will butt up against each other. Gently scrape the bark off these surfaces to reveal the bright green cambium below.

Using raffia as a bandage, group your branches and wrap the raffia firmly around the length of the group. With careful planning you may be able to allow one or two of the small branches to poke out of the raffia bandage at certain places to form the side branches.

Now wrap wire around the raffia and bend the whole lot into the desired position. Make sure there are at least one or two buds at the end of the new branch.

These will continue to grow. The inner surfaces of each of the small branches will react to the mild damage and begin to grow together. You can aid this repair process by squashing rooting hormone into these joins before bandaging, but I seldom go that far.

In time, 6 months or so, the small branches will compress together and you should be able to remove the wire and bandage. When you do this, do it slowly. If you see that the branches have not welded completely then wire it up again and leave it for a bit longer.

You may find that one or two of the branches have died, but enough should have survived to suit your style. Feel free to repeat this more than once if necessary. You can continue adding branches until you have sculptured a lovely shape for your tree.

This is also a very handy technique for replacing a branch which may have died or broken by wind etc.

A brief word of warning, bugs and insects love to nest in the spaces around the joins, so keep an eye out for them and treat them when they appear.