



**A E S T H E T I C  
P R U N E R S  
A S S O C I A T I O N**

## OCTOBER 2021 NEWSLETTER



Photo: Eric King in Japanese maple taken by James Giotta (both APA Certified Aesthetic Pruners)

Send us your pruning photo and we may use it in the next newsletter!

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## President's Message

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Welcome APA Members to the second edition of the new APA Newsletter! We are really cookin' now.

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate Denise Mason on passing her CAP exam and becoming APA CAP #61! Denise lives in Palo Alto and is accepting new clients, so send some referrals her way!

This edition of the newsletter includes an article by CAP Allison Levin answering her query "Is Aesthetic Pruning Universal?". We also have more words of wisdom from fellow pruners, as well as APA news and events.

You might want to check out the link to the upcoming NAJGA conference in San Diego where you will find that there are 6 APA members on the conference schedule. All are speaking on various Japanese garden related topics. The members are: Bill Castellon, Grant Foerster, Emily Fronckowiak, Nicki LaPlante, Maryann Lewis, and David Rettig.

Please send any feedback or ideas you may have for this newsletter to: [apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org](mailto:apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org).

Dina Blackwell, APA President

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## Guest Article

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## "Is Aesthetic Pruning Universal?"

by APA CAP Allison Levin

Recently, an APA member asked whether the pruning that he had been taught met the APA's Craft Standards. His teacher was a skilled arborist, but they lived 1,000 miles from the headquarters of the APA, far from most other APA members. Maybe it was a different style of pruning?

In other words, did Dennis Makishima invent Aesthetic Pruning? It's true that many aesthetic pruners consider AP to be synonymous with the "Makishima School of Pruning\*" (\*coined, I believe, by my friend Chris Ingram.) Dennis, of course, was the founder of the Merritt College Pruning Club, which gave rise to the APA. So maybe he *did* create the craft?

When I asked Dennis, he said he doesn't want Aesthetic Pruning to be considered the Makishima School of Pruning. "Good pruning is universal," he told me. Who can argue with that? Still, becoming a successful professional involves more than good cuts.

I guess the question might be, *What is Aesthetic Pruning?* In 2006 many of us attended a forum where Dennis asked us to help him define what Aesthetic Pruning is. I still have the postcard that features the definition (by the way, Promotions Committee, this definition would look really good on a t-shirt!) that 'we' arrived at:

"Aesthetic Pruning embraces the creative interpretation of small trees & shrubs in the urban context. The living art form combines the artistic skill of the pruner, the essence of a tree, the science of horticulture & needs of clients & surroundings. - Dennis Makishima"

Of course, when I say this definition was what the forum participants came up with, what I really mean is, this is the definition that Dennis thoughtfully proposed. No matter how hard we tried, we couldn't think of a thing that his definition was missing.

The APA's craft standards spring directly from Dennis's definition. Aesthetic Pruning encourages us to join an artistically trained eye with the techniques of horticulture. The concept of the essence of a tree helps the viewer (the client) better appreciate/value the tree's beauty. Finally, acknowledging the urban context helps us to improve the client's relationship with their tree. (Aesthetic Pruners do family therapy for trees!)

So what's my conclusion? I guess I'd say that good pruning may be universal, but the vision of Aesthetic Pruning - proper cuts blended with artistic literacy for a social context - is a cut above. (Sorry, I couldn't resist!) That said, I expect that fine pruners around the world share many of these ideas. I hope that the APA's craft standards are educational, inspiring, and open to new ideas of our members.

I invite others to share whether Aesthetic Pruning is different in other communities. Please join me on the [APA forum](#) to continue this discussion!

*Allison Levin is a certified aesthetic pruner living in the Bay Area. After studying with Michael Alliger at Merritt College, she mentored with Dennis Makishima. Allison helped launch the APA and served as Chair of the Craft Standards committee. Today Allison teaches the Hands-on Pruning Class in the San Francisco Bay area. For fun, she studies raptors and goes backpacking with friends.*

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## Upcoming Events

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### CAP Mentoring with Dina Blackwell & Eric King

Zoom meeting, Saturday, 10/30/21, 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm PDT

[sign up](#)



## APA Tree Talk

Training a Young Pine, Part 3

with APA CAP Bill Castellon

Continue on Bill's journey of pruning the same young pines over several seasons 'almost time-lapse'.

Sunday, November 14th, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm PST

[sign up!](#)

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## APA Tree Walk

Please join Diana Chamberlain and Dina Blackwell on an APA Tree Walk in the Berkeley Hills. We will look at trees in gardens while walking in a specified neighborhood. 15 APA members maximum. Saturday December 4th, 10am - Noon. Please be vaccinated, wear a mask, and bring snacks and water. Please contact Dina if you are interested: [apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org](mailto:apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org)

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## APA Annual Meeting and Open Board Positions

Please save the date. The Annual Meeting will be on

**Sunday, January 30th 2022**

on Zoom. Three board member positions will be up for elections: Secretary and Treasurer (must be APA CAP members), and Board Member at Large #2 (must be APA CAP or Associate members).

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## Upcoming Events by Others

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If you would like to submit an event for the next newsletter please email us at [apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org](mailto:apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org)

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## North American Japanese Garden Association (NAJGA)

International Japanese Garden Conference  
*Adaptability and Resilience: Sustainability in Japanese Gardens*

The Japanese Friendship Garden, San Diego, CA  
November 3-7, 2021

[www.najga.org](http://www.najga.org)

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## International Society of Arboriculture (ISA)

ISA 2021 Virtual Conference

More than 40 on-demand sessions led  
by industry leaders from around the globe, sharing their thoughts  
and views about the research, practice, and technology in arboriculture.

December 13-16, 2021

[www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com)

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## APA Member-Only Videos

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Members can access video links to past APA Talks such as: Tree Talks, APA Annual Meeting talks, and Pruning Intensive talks. Links are available on the APA member page of the website. **You must be logged in to your account to see the "Members" page.**



## APA Tree Talk

### The Aesthetic Pruner's Role in Firescaping

with APA Member Katherine Randolph





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# APA Tree Talk

## The Art of Pruning California Natives

with APA CAP Jocelyn Cohen

[Link to all our APA member videos](#)

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### "Pruning Wisdom" from Members

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**"What is your general approach to fall and winter pruning and how is that affected by the current climate situation in your area?"**



Walt Fujii

Before pruning any tree or shrub I first assess its overall condition and site placement. The plant (tree or shrub) dictates my approach. Whenever possible, I tend to be aggressive in order to achieve a highly defined winter silhouette. However, this year more than at any other time that I can recall, I am observing very little to no new shoot extension on many of the trees on the properties I visited. In fact, I see few examples of highly vigorous growth on many trees in the east bay and mid-peninsula.

That said, those gardens where I observed trees that were properly mulched and irrigated tended to display a better sense of well-being than those landscapes without adequate mulch and irrigation.

As a pruner (treeworker) and consultant, my customary recommendations for tree care include a one inch layer of quality compost covered with two inches of coarse mulch such as clean wood chips. One may skip the compost but do install the mulch. Where possible spread mulch out to the dripline and keep it eight to 24 inches away from the root collar, trunk size dependent. Replenish mulch at least once year to maintain a mulch depth of two to three inches.

With respect to site conditions, I've encouraged the watering of trees and especially oaks during a dry winter. Lately, I've encouraged occasional summer watering of oaks and other large mature trees.

When necessary I provide instructions and a diagram for a soaker hose installation and a diagram for a soil berm around a tree to contain irrigation water. The berm diagram depicts the basin area divided into quadrants for large trees to evenly distribute the applied water to a minimum depth of 18 inches.

Most importantly, I encourage clients to use a small spade (ideally a soil sampler) to dig out a small sample of soil. When possible I like to demonstrate how to check for soil moisture and show what is meant by dry, moist and saturated soil.

To apply water without sampling the soil is akin to driving with one's eyes shut. One must actually see and feel soil moisture at least 18 inches below the soil surface to know that a sufficient amount of water was applied. I have instructions for the proper use of a moisture meter but that's another story.

In conclusion, my approach to pruning has not changed. However I am adjusting my pruning style to what is reasonably possible given the present circumstances.

Thank you for your indulgence.

*Walt Fujii is an APA CAP and a Consulting Arborist who lives in Hayward, CA.*



Eric King

Autumn for me is a last chance to prune deciduous trees where I can still see how the leaves are interacting with each other. As the days get shorter and the sun is less intense, I'm starting to feel bolder about opening up the canopies of sensitive plants like Maples and Dogwoods. Most of the broadleaf evergreens like Camellias, Podocarpus, Bottlebrush, etc. are fair game for me throughout the year.

Even when the Camellias have set their buds or are in full bloom, using only thinning and releadering cuts leaves plenty of blooms behind that can now be shown off by the new form and spaces.

September through early October are the last times I will prune stone fruits like Apricots and Cherries, trees that are susceptible to Eutypa fungus dieback. This wasn't so much of a problem four or five years ago and I was much more cavalier about pruning in the winter then. But when you start to see whole branches of a tree die back and you know you were the person who caused it, you get a lot more cautious a lot more quickly.

Winter in the Bay Area is a time to make bold moves. It's a time when the trees are dormant and can handle larger cuts. I schedule my first time visits with larger Maples during this time.

I'm hoping to get rained on a lot this winter. So many of the trees I've seen are showing signs of water stress from the drought we've been experiencing in the West. While a heavy rain might send me packing, I usually enjoy putting on my rain suit and galoshes, listening to the pitter-patter of raindrops on the hood of my jacket.

If it's going to be a fairly steady rain I try to switch my schedule around so I'm not doing any larger work or even getting on my ladder if possible. Looking down at what I'm working on is peaceful and fun. Looking up means my safety glasses get beaded up with water and my arms get soaked from rain getting through the cuffs of my sleeves.

*Eric King is an APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner working in the San Francisco Bay Area. Eric teaches pruning, mentors prospective APA CAP's, and is on the APA board as Secretary.*



Nicole LaPlante

Preparing the gardens for winter rest can get a bit hectic, but it's also a quiet practice for me as a Garden Builder/Aesthetic Pruner/Owner of Land Art Fine Gardening in Peru, NY. The air is damp and heavy, so sounds stay muffled and close. The relationship between plant and gardener becomes more intimate as perennials bid farewell for the season. I tidy up after them, like a host cleaning up after party guests have departed.

As a native of northern NY, I've seen the effects of climate change on our area. Forty years ago, we would have snowstorms that I could practically schedule into my calendar: within days of Halloween; the week before Thanksgiving; December 10 (my birthday!); and approximately every three weeks through the winter, with a final storm on April 1. The joke was on anyone that thought they could put their snowblower away! Storms would bring 4-6" of snow; just enough to have a snow day at school, but not so much that it caused a state of emergency.

Climatically, winter has evolved into less frequent, but more extreme precipitation events. We have been getting less snow and bigger snowfalls when we do receive the inundation. Powder Day isn't really what one can call it, since we don't get champagne powder like the West; our snow is wet and heavy.

With the above extremes in anticipated winter precipitation, a few goals are in my pruning mind. The first goal is to keep trees and shrubs thinned enough to let snow and freezing rain pass through the canopy, as much as possible. Wet, heavy snow tends to accumulate on Pine pads, plus really test the tenacity of deciduous stems. Keeping branches cleaned and at a moderate density helps to mitigate the risk of branch breakage. Freezing rain can create thick coatings on tree and shrub branches. The significant increase in weight per limb can really test the tensile strength of our poor plants. With snow, one must be attentive and brush the load off, as soon and as delicately as possible. With ice, the challenge is much more difficult: one must be still and wait for the ice to melt. If one goes outside and attempts to peel the ice layer away, the bark may get peeled off in the process, creating additional damage. Propping the branches up can inadvertently cause breakage, exactly what the person was trying to mitigate! It can be so stressful to see our plants bow so deeply, but Nature designed them to rebound without our intervention.

In consideration of heavy snowfalls, one must also make way for the frantic snow plows and snow blowers. Making sure to prune so that paths have plenty of clearance, like 3' away(!), is necessary on sites where the snow removal is hired out. Homeowners that take care of their own snow removal appreciate extra clearance, too, if possible, so that they don't end up cutting a snow tunnel for themselves. Luckily, they always take extra care not to throw snow onto their woody plants.

A third fall management item taken into consideration is that, without moderate, steady accumulation of snow, which acts as insulation, alternative measures need to be implemented to protect tender and marginally-hardy plants. I help some of my clients with extra-deep mulching of Hydrangea; constructing wire pens around the plant and filling with fallen leaves. Another plant that has needed winter protection is a south-facing specimen Scots Pine that I foster. It was suffering from desiccation due to dry winter winds and lack of (frozen) groundwater availability. Installation of temporary, four-sided, burlap screens (NOT direct wrapping of the plant) has helped to mitigate winter sun and wind damage. Adequate irrigation through the growing season has helped decrease the impact of harsh winter conditions on the tree's hydration. It actually took about three winters to finally get these protections dialed in to a point where the tree is emerging from winter dormancy in really good health.

Fall pruning, in general, includes evergreen cleaning and thinning, which I look

forward to after the high demands of shearing and deciduous plant growth management. I wish you all a lovely autumn as you tuck your plants in for their winter rest, too!

*Nicole LaPlante is an APA CAP, working in Upstate NY, Western VT, Central NH, and Cape Cod, MA.*



Maryann Lewis

It is always nice to have the first rain of fall to clear away the summer dust. Portland is summer dry and by the time September rolls around everyone is ready to welcome the rain back and begin the race to prune and plant before fall showers become constant winter rain.

My general approach to pruning in the fall is to get as much done as possible before the ground turns too soggy and the days get too short. Fall feels like the beginning of the pruning calendar to me. It is a chance to assess, plan, reduce, thin and prepare plants for their spring push. The usual suspects are thinning pines and other conifer work. The unusual suspects are camellias and rhododendrons for reducing the amount of spring flowers. Yep, there are too many flowers in Portland! I hold off on pruning maples in order to avoid *Pseudomonas syringae* until the temperature cools down in winter.

To say winter in Portland is wet would be an understatement. The first winter I lived here was in 1997 and I clearly remember telling my sister that it just isn't right for it to rain from the ground up! (It was raining so hard the ground splash reached up to my waist!) and even though we are a temperate climate, we still get the occasional snow and usually one good ice storm. My approach to winter pruning is to keep my schedule light so rescheduling isn't a chore and to focus on structural work or any conifer work that didn't get thinned in the fall. It is also a great time to rejuvenate any cane growers. White pines get a lot of attention and I study the past year's schedule, looking for ways to be more efficient and wondering what tweaks I can make to my business. When the weather report predicts 1/2" of rain, my approach is to stay home and make cookies. We eat a lot of cookies in the winter.

One of the things I love about Portland is I get a true sense of all four seasons. Yet I am continually amazed by the extreme weather events I have experienced over the last 6 years. Record snows, record floods, record fire smoke, record heat (116 degrees), and record ice storms.

For the most part, I am done predicting what the year will bring. I leave back up branches on my trees for when ice does some pruning for me and a lot more leaves to help during the heat. If it is a dry spring, I make sure to provide supplemental water before the summer hits, and I recommend planting any new tree on a significant mound so when it does flood in fall/winter/spring there is a chance for water to drain away from the trunk. I have joined the wood chip bandwagon and apply everywhere in abundance. I try to keep up on new (and old) information in an effort to be prepared for whatever comes next.

Happy fall and may your fallen leaves be crunchy and winter wind cold!

*Maryann Lewis is an APA CAP and past APA President, working in Portland, OR*

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## **Welcome New APA Members!**

as of 10/8/2021

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### Associate Members

Alexander Llamas,  
Concord, CA

Stacy Mason, San  
Anselmo, CA

Linda Solinsky, Novato,  
CA

### Affiliate Members

Rachael Bouch, Pinole,  
CA

Nina Rizzo, Oakland, CA

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## APA Professional Forum Notes

### Highlights from the Forum

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In searching the Forum for posts about Maples, we saw a discussion entitled "What is your favorite Japanese Maple?" This discussion offered many very beautiful and interesting maple species. We'd like to see more, so let's continue - what is YOUR favorite Japanese Maple? Post to the discussion [here!](#)



### You Could Win an APA Tote Bag!

We draw a name from all of the forum users during the previous quarter. This quarter's winner is:

### **Greg Kitajima!**

Using the APA Forum is an informative and exclusive benefit of membership. Log into your account on the APA website to read, post, or reply to any comment or topic.

Subscribe to the Forum to receive notice of new topics, and search through past topics by typing key words into the search bar at the top of the APA Home page - all Forum posts will show a speech bubble next to the search results.

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## APA News

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**The APA Sachiko Umehara Memorial Scholarship** will begin accepting applications through the Peralta Colleges Foundation website in **October 2021**. <https://peraltafoundation.org/scholarships/> &nbsp; Students receiving the scholarship will be awarded \$500 to go toward horticulture and pruning classes at Merritt College. If you would like to donate to the fund there is a link on the APA homepage.

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### **Attention all APA CAPS!**

We are seeking APA CAPs to proctor the CAP exam, which means you! It doesn't take a lot of your time and you will be helping a pruner reach their aspiration to be certified!

What this entails:

2 hours to review the testee's portfolio

4 hours to proctor the exam

Please contact Randall Lee, the Craft Standards chair, to volunteer at [randallalee@yahoo.com](mailto:randallalee@yahoo.com)

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**APA Trademark update:** Good news! The APA trademark **APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner®** is now registered with the US Patent and Trademark office. We now own our trademark! For all of you CAPS, you can now add the ® to your business cards or anywhere else that you are using the trademark (although it's not strictly necessary for you to do so).

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### **APA Online Store is Open for Business!**

Check it out by following the link below. If you have any ideas for APA merchandise please contact the APA Promotions Chair, Melissa Hyams at [melissashyams@gmail.com](mailto:melissashyams@gmail.com)

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### **APA Picnic on 8/15/21**

We had a great time at the APA picnic in August. The sunny, relaxed gathering was organized by APA Vice President Melissa Hyams and was held at the Redwood Bowl in Redwood Regional Park in Oakland. It was nice to catch up and to see each other in person! We are hoping to do more events like this.

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## Western Region ACS Conference:

The Western Region of the American Conifer Society held its annual conference from August 20-22, 2021 in the Willamette Valley, Oregon this year. Five APA members attended (Maryann Lewis, Sara Malone, Jane Chua-Couzens, Michael Weber, and Denise Mason).

The keynote speaker was author John Albers. We toured 3 private conifer gardens and had a behind-the-scenes tour of Russell's Nursery where they field-grow many types of conifers and Japanese maples. They propagate on site and while we toured their greenhouses, they described the trials and tribulations and what works for them, which was quite interesting.

Photo: Jane at one of the private gardens. [American Conifer Society \(ACS\)](https://www.americanconifersociety.org/).

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**CAP Mentoring** - Eric King and Dina Blackwell have set up a mentoring group for APA members who are interested in pursuing certification. To join please contact them at [apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org](mailto:apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org). The next meeting is on Saturday, 10/30 at 3:00 PDT on Zoom.

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**New CAP** - Denise Mason passed the CAP exam on August 2, 2021. Congratulations Denise, Certified Aesthetic Pruner™ #061!

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## Committee Chair Reports

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### **Craft Standards Committee - Interim Chair Randall Lee:**

The Craft Standards Committee, consisting of Dina Blackwell, Grant Foerster, Walt Fuji, Maryann Lewis, Judy Thomas and Randall Lee, is meeting monthly. As part of our national outgrowth we are working on updating the 3 part CAP test so that it will be available nation wide. This will involve making changes to the written, oral and hands on portions of the test.

Presently we have edited the database of CAP test questions. We have edited the three written tests and are reviewing them before submitting them for board approval. Our goal is to have a new CAP test approved, tested and ready to be used by the first quarter of 2022. We will next work on the oral and hands on sections of the test.

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### **Education Committee - Chair Diana Chamberlain:**

The Education Committee meets monthly and is currently researching places for Tree Walks and speakers for Tree Talks and New Professionals meetings. On the committee are: Jane Chua-Couzens, Judy Thomas, Evelyn Borchert, Joe Ehrmann, Lara Miranda, Dina Blackwell, and Grant Foerster.

Do you have any topics for Tree Talks or New Professionals? Or any questions that you would like answered at New Professionals talks? Please email Diana Chamberlain at [chamberlaindianaalice@gmail.com](mailto:chamberlaindianaalice@gmail.com).

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### **Finance Committee - Chair Barbara Eaton, APA Treasurer:**

Committee members: Dina Blackwell, APA President; Melissa Hyams, APA Vice President; Randall Lee, APA Board Member; Shivawn Layne, Accountant; Helga Mahlmann, former Accountant.

At the Finance Committee's recent meeting on 9/30/2021, we reviewed some adjustments and updates to the 2020/2021 financials. During the APA's second quarter period (4/1-6/30/21), there were fewer Tree Talks and fewer membership renewals coming due than there were during the first quarter, so our income was less in the second quarter. However, we also had fewer expenses – the main expenses being insurance, website related fees, plants for the CAP test, and Tree Talk speaker fees – so we still had a positive net income. The Finance Committee meets quarterly, and our next meeting will be in mid to late December.

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### **National Growth and Outreach - Chair Maryann Lewis:**

Meets to work on creating APA chapters in other areas and how they can be developed and supported. The committee discusses topics such as general promotional material, outreach, website ideas to reach a broader audience, and a nationally available APA Certification exam.

Spring and summer is a busy time around the nation so the committee will get back into the swing of things this winter. Committee members include: Jeff Harris, Dierdre Davis Eickhoff, Emily Fronckowiak, Nicole LaPlante, Matt Luks-Jurutka, Grant Foerster, Diana Chamberlain and Dina Blackwell.

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### **Newsletter Committee - Chair Dina Blackwell:**

Members of the committee are Denise Mason and Lara Miranda. Have any ideas for us? Email us at [apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org](mailto:apa@aestheticprunersassociation.org)

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### **Promotions Committee - Chair Melissa Hyams:**

Our committee includes Dina Blackwell, Barb Eaton, Ann Owen, Michael Weber, Lara Miranda and Jane Chua-Couzens. The APA promotions committee has created an online shop where you can purchase APA merchandise. Presently available is a sturdy and stylish canvas tote bag. Barb Eaton is working on a design for t-shirts. Any suggestions for merchandise you'd like to have made available can be sent to Melissa ([melissashyams@gmail.com](mailto:melissashyams@gmail.com)).

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### **Website Committee- Chair Denise Mason:**

The Website Committee (Dina Blackwell, Barb Eaton, and Denise Mason) meets quarterly. If you'd like to help/contribute to the website, please contact Denise ([mason.denise1@gmail.com](mailto:mason.denise1@gmail.com)).

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**[www.aestheticprunersassociation.org](http://www.aestheticprunersassociation.org)**

**[Become a member!](#)**

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