

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 81

Creating a Basic Outdoor Topiary

Topiary Definition

Topiary is the art of training and maintaining plants to grow in desired shapes and forms. Once reserved for weddings, banquets and other elaborate events, this craft is now widely used throughout modern landscapes. The ornamental appeal of topiary makes for a great decoration or focal point in any landscape design.

Topiary Shapes

Because many plant varieties can sustain heavy pruning, topiaries take on a variety of sizes, shapes, and forms. While basic single-layered shapes include spheres, ovals, cubes, and pyramids, more extravagant, multi-tiered designs such as spirals, corkscrews and animal silhouettes are quite common among enthusiasts.

Plant Suggestions

Much needs to be considered when creating a topiary. A smaller topiary will benefit from a finer-textured plant to achieve the full effect. Because of their size, bigger topiaries can afford to have larger, rough-textured leaves.

Topiaries don't happen overnight. It's best to let the plant establish itself in the soil for a year or two before beginning shaping.

Because poor growing conditions can highly affect a topiary's appearance, your topiary must be placed in a proper medium with good soil conditions. For your topiary to retain attractive leaves, it must also receive a proper amount of sunlight.

Many plants are suitable for shaping into topiaries. Boxwoods, yews, junipers and

hollies, for example, are popular because of their durability and their dense growth after pruning or light shearing. Some gardeners prefer flowering plants, various vines and rapidly growing ivy.

Creation

The strongest topiaries are built using wood and wire. Begin by creating a solid wood frame. This frame will eventually lead to the overall shape and size of the topiary. Place the frame over the desired plant. Use wire to wrap around the frame for training the plant. Over time, all plant growth outside the frame will need to be clipped, and the topiary will begin to take shape.

Maintenance

All topiaries differ in the amount of work required to maintain them. A straight-sided shape, such as a pyramid, can be trimmed with minimal effort. However, multiple levels and curves will require more work with the pruning shears.

Topiaries also need proper fertilization and care to ensure high-quality growth. The type and amount of fertilizer used will depend on the specific needs of each species.

Consistent watering is also mandatory as topiaries can become unsightly when plants suffer from drought. Symptoms of drought stress include discolouration, wilting, and leaf drop. As with any plant, keeping a close eye on the growth and environment surrounding it is essential.

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