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Shrub Topiaries

The art of topiary has been practiced for centuries. It comes in many shapes and styles from table-top houseplant topiaries kept indoors to elaborate shrub topiaries in the landscape. Sometimes topiaries sculpted from shrubs depict animals, people or other recognizable objects, sometimes they are more abstract with globes, boxes, and pyramids. Shrub Topiaries take some time to develop but often make the biggest visual impact.



Objectives

- Sculpt a piece of art of a growing shrub
- Develop pruning techniques while caring for a topiary
- Create a landscape landmark for your home, school, or community.

Materials

- Topiary frame
- Shrubs
- Pruners

Time Required

Design and planning can take from one to several hours. Creating the initial work requires similar time. Care and sculpting can be a weekly or monthly task depending on your shape and plant material.

Directions

Shrub topiaries can take three to ten years to produce. Usually a frame is placed over the plant to guide plant growth and pruning. In small topiaries like a chest-high globe, may only require one plant. A life-size elephant on the other hand may require at least four plants planted at each foot. In either case, the plants are trained to grow up and into the frame through careful pruning, shaping, and

weaving. It's best to choose plants that tolerate pruning well and naturally full. It's best to choose very young plants that will grow and mature around your frame.

1. Select a site and think about what shape you'd like your topiary to take
2. Select a frame to use and determine what type and the quantity of plant materials you'll need.
3. Prepare your site for planting by clearing and turning the soil and adding any amendments needed.
4. Plant a shrub at each place the frame will come into contact with the soil. For instance, if you have a four-legged cat frame, place a plant where each of the four legs will be.
5. Place the frame over the plants.
6. Water well and mulch around the shrubs.
7. The type of frame/shape you've chosen will determine how often pruning will be needed. Clip, prune, tuck, and ties as needed to maintain shape and encourage the plants to fill in the frame.
8. Provide adequate water and nutrition so shrubs will establish well.

Recommended Plants

Dense and full shrubs like small-leaved evergreens work the best.

Boxwood (*Buxus* spp.) has shiny, small, dark green leaves. It is a bit slow growing, which means you won't have to prune and trim quite as often.

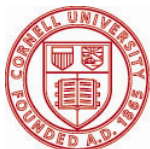
Yews (*Taxus* spp.) have glossy, dark green needles and after repeated clippings develop really dense growth.

Holly (*Ilex* spp.) is not as commonly used as boxwood or yews but its multi-pointed shiny leaves can be very attractive.

Going further...

There are many different shapes to sculpt into topiaries. Check out a few of these for inspiration:

[Tear Drop Shaped Shrubs](#)



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