



Derived from the Greek word "topos" meaning place, and the Latin word "topiarius" which was used to signify an ornamental gardener, topiary may stretch back as far as 60 A.D. when ships and hunting scenes sculpted out of yew adorned Roman gardens. The "training or pruning of plant material into unnatural, geometric, or fantastic shapes" has been well known in Britain since the Middle Ages and became quite fashionable in formal gardens.

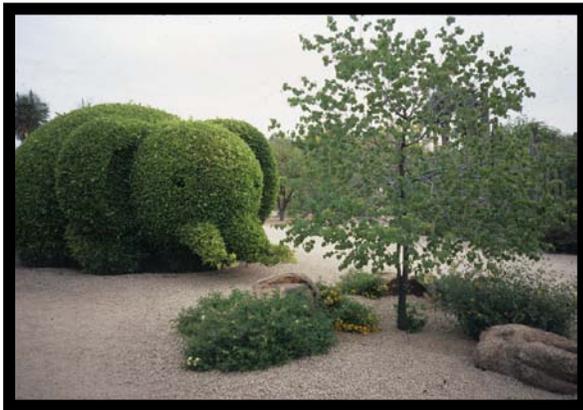


CA379 Herbert Family Home, Piedmont, CA. Frances B. Wolfe, photog. 1999.

## A Brief History of Topiary

In 1719 Alexander Pope wrote a very critical and satiric essay on the practice, stating that topiary was a "monument to perverted taste" and mocking the women who wanted "their own effigies in myrtle, or their husband's in hornbeam." Topiaries nearly vanished from the gardens of the aristocracy, but the tradition continued in smaller cottage gardens and they eventually made their way to the United States.

Today, topiaries exist in all shapes and forms in American gardens and are comprised of a number of different plant materials. Boxwood is commonly used in the south while yew, spruce, and ilex are generally found in cooler climates. No longer limited to formal gardens, topiaries are particularly whimsical when shaped into animals.



AZ023 Bentley Garden, Paradise Valley, AZ. Nancy Swanson, photog. 2008.



CT346 Topiary Fancies. Greenwich, CT. Nanette Burrows, photo. 2006.

In terms of design, topiaries can generally be divided into two broad categories – those shaped with the help of frames and support, and those without. For simple designs, flexible plants such as ivy can be bent and interwoven over an empty frame to achieve the desired look. Another popular method is growing the plant within a frame, filling out the shape as it matures, with the gardener pruning the topiary as it emerges. All of the methods require time and patience from the gardener but the resulting decoration is well worth the effort.