

Williamsburg®

DECORATING TIPS

HOW TO MAKE A “FAUX” TOPIARY

Supplies and materials needed: ornamental pot, plastic liner, approximately 5 1/2-foot-long branch or sapling, 6-inch piece of small wooden dowel or long nail, electric drill with a bit the size of the nail or dowel, ready-to-mix cement, water, gravel, 1 block wet floral foam, chicken wire or garden netting, ice pick or other sharp implement, #16 gauge green floral wire, long unwired wooden floral picks, conditioned greens, accessories (here gilded pears and partridge), and Spanish moss or sheet moss.

This basic technique is extremely versatile. Although it can be made any time of the year using fresh or dried flowers, we concentrate on a form that is especially delightful to do for the holidays.

A “faux” topiary may be made in any size from the large 6-foot example detailed here to small sizes for a dining table or even tiny ones for place favors at a table. The process is similar for all.

Select an appropriate size pot for the topiary. If it is a pot you will use for other projects, find a plastic pot or liner that will fit snugly inside it. Cut a straight branch, or small tree trunk if making a large form, approximately 6 inches shorter than the total height you wish to make the topiary (see the drawing). Make a slight point at the top of the trunk and drill a hole through it approximately 2 1/2 inches from the top. Insert a 6-inch piece of wooden dowel or a long nail as shown.

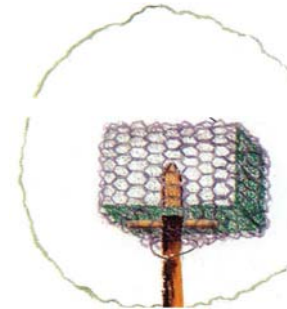


A “faux” topiary at the Williamsburg Inn is one of a large pair made with Alexandrian laurel, boxwood, and gilded pears and a partridge.

Set the branch into the liner. If you use a plastic pot with drainage holes, be sure to tape the holes. Mix the cement in a separate container and pour it into the liner at least one half the depth of the pot as shown. Be certain that the trunk is perfectly vertical. Allow the cement to set overnight or until dry.

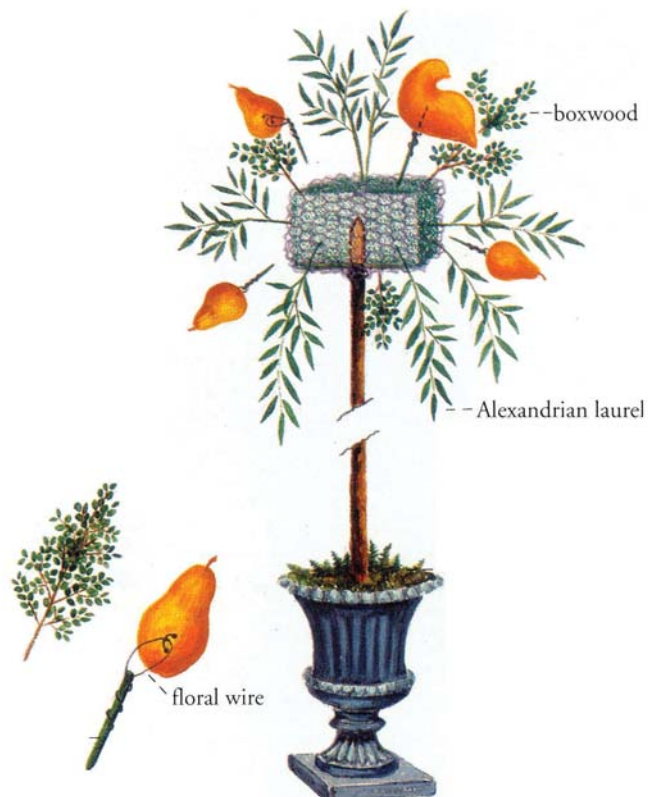
NOTE: Cement is best to use in a large topiary; plaster of paris in a small one. You will need sufficient weight at the bottom to balance the top of a large form.

When the cement is thoroughly dry, put the plastic liner with the cemented branch into the outer pot and fill the remaining space at the top of the liner with gravel as shown. If there is space between the liner and the ornamental container, fill the gap with mulch or other material to keep the topiary straight. Impale the wet floral foam on the trunk so that it rests on the dowel as shown. Wrap the floral foam with chicken wire or garden netting. Remove the leaves from the bottom 2 inches of the stems of 6- to 8-inch sprigs of boxwood. Fill in the floral foam with conditioned greens as shown so that a round shape is made. The pieces of boxwood are used to create the basic round shape. Longer pieces of Alexandrian laurel give depth and an airy, graceful look.



The accessories here are gilded pears and a partridge that have had holes made with an ice pick on the back and have been wired with floral wire as shown. This wire is wrapped around long wooden floral picks, which are inserted into the foam. The top of the liner may be covered with Spanish moss or sheet moss.

NOTE: A permanent "faux" topiary may be made using dried materials in dry floral foam. Dried flowers, herbs, leaves, and small berries used in this same large form or in a small form would be lovely. A fresh herb topiary is a Williamsburg favorite. When made it is packed tightly so that when it dries the form is solidly filled and becomes an attractive permanent topiary that retains its wonderful scent. Rosemary is a favorite herb to use as a filler. Consider using trunks with unusual bark or forked shapes to add interest.



This article was taken from Susan Hight Rountree's book *Christmas Decorations From Williamsburg*.