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Topiary (Shire Library)



TOPIARY

TWIGS WAY

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Synopsis

Topiary, the art of creating sculpture in clipped plants, originated with the Romans, who employed 'toparii' to clip their hedges. The fashion traveled throughout Europe in the Renaissance, using rosemary, lavender and hyssop as well as the more traditional evergreens of yew, holly, myrtle and box. Louis XIV's Versailles was a triumph of art over nature, and in the low countries cone and lollipop shapes formed, and soon hopped around the globe to populate the gardens of England and America. However, as the fervor for 'natural' landscapes swept through Europe, eighteenth century nurserymen were left with serried ranks of overgrown topiary figures. Fashion mocked the few gardeners who continued to clip, and in 1890 William Robinson claimed that 'a man with shears in his hands is doing fool's work. But as 'ye old Englishe garden' found favor again, so the chess pieces, crowns and artful peacocks broke cover, often claiming an unbroken history of clipping by generations of gardeners. Even Gertrude Jekyll, that doyen of the flowery border, had her favorite topiary yew cat. Despite box disease and labor shortages, topiary has seen a revival in the twenty-first century, and amateurs in the art can purchase 'preformed' rabbits and deer to graze suburban lawns.

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Customer Reviews

âœThis small booklet contains a wealth of information about a subject that has a long history and occasionally wide popularity. The first record of creating sculpture in clipped plants was at the beginning of the Christian era when a friend of Augustus Caesar introduced this novelty called

topiary. The British author traces the story of these wondrous delights to some, but not all gardeners. This heavily illustrated treatise is remarkably filled with stories and fantastic displays that will intrigue every gardener. The author includes a directory of British public gardens that feature topiary sculptures. • Marilyn K Alaimo, Chicago Botanic Garden Journal of Current Books on Gardening and Botany (March 2010)

Following university, Twigs spent several years working as an archaeologist in England, Europe and South America. She developed a particular interest in prehistoric and environmental archaeology. In 1990 Twigs commenced a PhD at Cambridge studying the impact of park creation on landscapes in Cambridgeshire. This led her to focus on the social, cultural and status dimensions of landscapes and to further work on park-related crime. Twigs undertakes consultancy work and research for private clients and for public bodies such as English Heritage. She has compiled a number of histories of private gardens, worked on conservation and management plans for historic parks and gardens, and assisted with the preparation of funding and planning applications. She has also co-ordinated research projects for Essex Gardens Trust. In the media, Twigs has appeared in television programmes for Channel 4, BBC East Anglia and on BBC Radio 4 and BBC Radio Cambridgeshire. She is currently working on the relationship between war and gardens. The author lives in Cambridge, England.

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