

One thing in life is indisputable, no two persons idea of the ideal garden are ever the same. There are those whose sole aim in life is to produce and maintain the 'bowling green' lawn, others like that formality to stretch to other parts of the garden with regimented beds and borders.

The majority of us however fall into a third category we like to have a go at taming nature but at the same time or cost restraints mean that we introduce formality but at the same time allow nature to run her course with just a little helping hand from us.

One of the simplest ways of introducing formality is in the use of topiary. What is topiary you may be asking, this is a term that often is used in a broad sense, in my definition it is anything where you are training by pruning or tying in branches to create a formal shape. Some people hate topiary and see it as unnatural, however the same could be said about any plant that is trained and few see any problem when training is used on the likes of roses to encourage flowering, or fruit trees to control fruiting.

What is more important is trying to ensure that whatever plant you are training is put in the correct setting. Topiary should be seen as living sculpture, something that adds to the environment rather than diminishing it, some of the best natural sculptures are those where nature itself has been involved initially in developing a unique shape such as gnarled stem olives or natural bonsai.

The simplest topiary are the half standard plants which you often see either side of doorways, or on patios, these come in a huge range of textures and sizes. They are generally easy to look after



TAMING MOTHER NATURE



rarely needing pruning more than twice a year, those people who struggle to keep them do so usually through lack of watering or erratic watering. Other forms available are balls, cones, spirals or pompons, these are seen less often due to requiring a little more care to maintain their shape.

For those of you who like the ability to develop this formality further should look to planting topiary in beds, along driveways or other vistas, providing a guard of honour taking you or your focus to where you want it to go. This is particularly effective where an avenue of trees would be over bearing. Used in this way the plants are not only adding interest in their own right but acting as a framework to highlight other objects, whether this is the front of your house, a man made sculpture or a prized plant. In this scenario under planting the topiary with beds of buxus or more informal lavender or rosemary can produce a striking effect. So far I have mentioned the taller topiary but equally formally trained plants such as buxus can be used to great effect to provide a uniform 'mini hedge' around beds of more colourful plants.

My favourites are the larger topiary such as the gnarled olive or cloud trees which although work well alongside other pieces also look great as a feature on their own. Other topiary take the form of pleached or espalier standard trees which not only look good in their own right but provide excellent screening to hide those views you would prefer not to see.

Enough of my ramblings I need to help unload a delivery of hedging plants fresh from the field. What a joy!

www.pantiles-nurseries.co.uk