



1. Informal atmosphere
In one section of an informal country knot garden, a centrepiece of clipped yew rises out of a low, cloud-pruned box hedge. All is softened by ox-eye daisies and lavenders.



2. Topiary umbrella
Topiary doesn't always have to make a big footprint on the ground. By varying the heights within the knot garden, we've made room for a table and chairs under the canopy of this lovely clipped standard yew.

3. Order, order
Pleached crab apples mark the boundary of the knot garden while simultaneously tying it to the drive, seen on the right of the picture. The plants have been clipped into many different shapes, with one or two pieces just allowed to stray into the drive.



4. From yew to box
The plant materials change from formal yew topiary in the knot garden to less formal clipped box in the kitchen garden. Against the kitchen garden doorway, one large box ball marks the entrance and signals this change.



Arne Maynard is a leading garden designer based in London and Monmouthshire

Topiary

One of the simplest, most effective design tools for adding structure and instant drama to a garden, topiary can be placed in pairs, groups or as a single splendid centrepieces, according to space and style

WORDS ARNE MAYNARD

DESIGN IDEAS

5. Social grouping

This is one of my topiary groups: a box ball, a beech dome on a leg and a yew dome. They're planted quite far apart but as you come into the garden they appear to cluster together and this view changes from different vantage points.



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6. Subtle marker

This hawthorn, planted on the edge of the drive at Allt-y-bela and clipped into a simple shape, stands opposite a line of wild hawthorn trees in what feels like a country lane. Its clipped form is the first sign that you are approaching the house.



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7. Sign language

As you come into the property, and at the point where you cross the stream, you see this clipped beech. I've used beech or other tiered-cut topiary at every entrance or arrival point in the garden.



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8. Shock of the new

Within the garden, with topiary beech behind, is this spiral mound of clipped copper beech, which I've recently planted. The colour of copper beech gives it a very modern feel and the effect will be abstract and sculptural.



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Topiary has weight and structure and is a wonderful means of connecting architecture to the landscape. It also has a density that enables it to bridge the gap in scale between mature trees and the less substantial plants in a garden.

I use topiary in two distinct ways: one formal and structured, the other informal and asymmetrical.

Topiary is wonderful in traditional settings – grand houses with big formal lawns, such as Athelhampton or Parnham in Dorset, where the rill running down the centre of the lawn is flanked by pairs of topiary yew trees. It is

a sympathetic and instant means, if you buy ready-trained trees, of restoring formality to a house that has lost its grandeur. Topiary pieces are good design anchors and can be used to give weight – at the four corners of a lawn or a lily pool, for example. They also define routes and beckon you towards another part of the garden.

But I also find it exciting to use topiary in an informal and deliberately random way. At Allt-y-bela, my house in Monmouthshire, my topiary trees are like characters at a party. Some congregate in small groups, some stand alone; but they're all doing what I want them to do: acting as sentinels at entrances or markers at particular points.



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9. Architectural connection

Within my inner courtyard garden at Allt-y-bela, standard box balls are planted close together, while a tall, formally clipped yew has been planted against the house, to connect with the architectural scale and signal arrival.

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The house is a tall Elizabethan tower house and it's important for me that the topiary gives it a connection to its period. But it's also a country farmhouse, and the rambling shape of the garden and surrounding landscape wouldn't allow anything excessively formal. Using topiary in this asymmetrical and unstructured way has added an element of the unexpected, and this in turn brings a sense of modernity into the garden.

I buy ready-trained topiary and prefer simple shapes: balls, domes, cylinders. Like pyramids in a formal setting, these are shapes that repeat well. Tiered shapes stand out as individuals and I've

used them at Allt-y-bela expressly as counterweights against the height of the house. Yew is the traditional topiary material – evergreen, dark and dense, it's the most formal topiary plant. I also use beech for its lovely colouring and the fact it keeps its brown winter leaves, as well as hornbeam and box. Topiary needn't be evergreen. Hawthorn and field maple make wonderful, naive topiary forms, transparent and twiggy in winter. In fact, winter can be one of the most magical seasons for topiary, when the shapes catch the low sun and cast shadows and the trees appear as guardians of the garden. □

NEXT MONTH Cottage gardens