

Tissue Topiary: A Tree Sculpture

(art + science)

Topiary is the art of turning living plants into sculptures that are constantly growing and changing — a form of landscape art. In this project, an art topiary is made of a wire base, green tissue paper and twine. A true botanical topiary base would similarly be made of wire, then tree-type plants placed within the wire form and shaped by horticulturists as they grow. Vines and flowers would also be added for texture and color. Although this Tissue Topiary will require some initial sculpting, no care will be needed after construction!

Collect examples of historic and contemporary topiaries such as medieval entries to castles, lush formal European gardens, or creative landscapes in amusement parks and resorts.

Grade Levels K-12

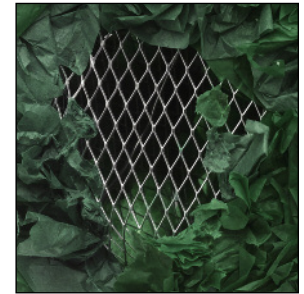
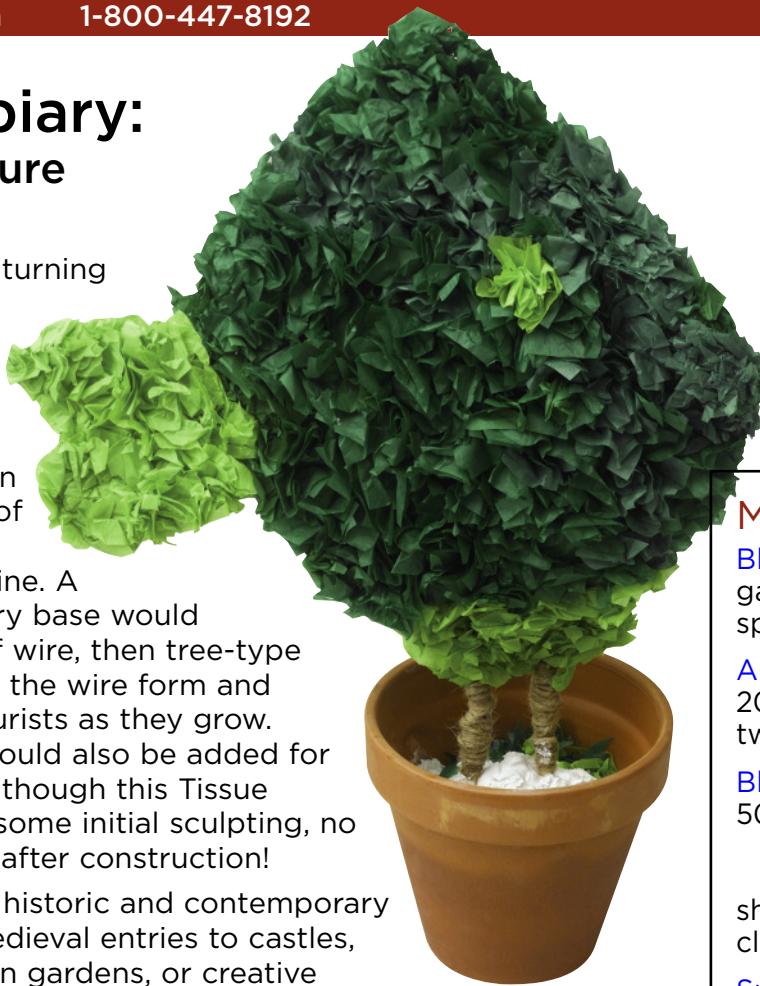
Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Cut shades of green tissue into pieces approximately 2" square.
2. Cut Wireform into approximately 4" x 6" pieces.

Process

1. Draw the outline of a simple design. Animals and geometric shapes are popular shapes for topiary. Consider that the sculpture will be viewed from all directions - plan front and back views as well as side views.
2. Plan a way for the topiary to be supported that works well with the design. Wooden dowels can make animal legs or tree trunks. Half of the dowel will need to be inserted into the flower pot as a final step, so plan the topiary design above the height of the pot on the dowels.
3. Use 6 to 8-ft of wire to form the shape of the sculpture. Start at the base of the sculpture where it will meet the dowel. Bend and wrap the basic form. Keep the wire in one piece and bend it out to form limbs, head, wings, etc.



A wire-mesh sculpture is covered with green tissue paper for a lasting, carefree, decorative topiary!

Materials

Blick® Sculpture Wire, 350-ft, 14 gauge, (33400-1435); share one spool across class

Amaco® Wireform Diamond Mesh, 20" x 10-ft (33408-2850); share two rolls across class

Blick® Art Tissue, 12" x 18", 50-sheet pkgs:
 Apple (11308-7177) and
 Holly (11308-7277);
 share four pkgs each color across class

Spectra® Deluxe Art Tissue™, 20" x 30", 24-sheet pkgs:
 Emerald (11306-7053) and
 Spring Green (11306-7443);
 share three pkgs each color across class

Jute Twine, 3-ply, 219-ft roll, (62984-8543); share two across class

Snippy® Scissors, 12-pack pointed, (57040-2009); need one per student

Playbox® Plaster of Paris, 25-lb (33531-1025); share one box across class

Wooden Dowel Rods, 1/2" x 12", pkg of 12 (60448-1412); share three pkgs across class

Elmer's® Glue-All®, 7-5/8-oz bottles (23810-1005); share 12 across class

Clay Flower Pot, 8"; need one per student

Process, continued

- Cover the wire shape with Wireform Mesh. The mesh can be stretched to build out form and shape or bunched tightly around the wire to add strength.
Note: for extra support and form, bunch newsprint or other lightweight paper and insert it under the mesh.
- To attach the tissue paper to the mesh, twist a square in the middle to make a point. Place glue on the point and tuck each into the openings of the mesh. Attach a number of pieces in this manner spaced at points around the sculpture — these will be anchor pieces. Next, bunch the remaining pieces of tissue and attach by gluing to each other and directly to the surface of the wire mesh until the entire surface is covered.
- If needed, trim the tissue with scissors to make the shape follow the form more precisely.
- Disguise the dowels by covering with more tissue or by wrapping with jute twine. Use more glue to keep in place and leave the lower ends of the dowels plain for placement in the flower pot.
- Cover the hole in the bottom of the flower pot with masking tape on the inside.
- Working with a partner is recommended for the final step. In a separate bowl, prepare the plaster according to package directions (approximately 3 cups plaster to 1 cup water). One person will hold the topiary so that the dowels rest on the bottom of the pot and the sculpture stands upright. The second person pours the plaster into the flower pot. Both hold the topiary still and secure for 4-6 minutes while the plaster sets. It will be hard enough to hold the topiary, and will completely cure in about 3 hours.

Options

- Cardboard boxes and other containers can be used to make the base instead of a flower pot. After the plaster hardens in the box, strip the cardboard away and paint the base with acrylic paint (see example above).

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

K-4 Students use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

Content Standard #2 — Using knowledge of structures and functions

K-4 Students use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas

5-8 Students select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas

Content Standard #6 — Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

K-4 Students understand and use similarities and differences between characteristics of the visual arts and other arts disciplines

5-8 Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual art

