THE CLIPPED GARDEN

The ancient practice of topiary has stood the test of time and remains current in modern garden design

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Topiary can be defined as 'the art or practice of clipping shrubs or trees into ornamental shapes'. This practice dates as far back as the Ancient Egyptians and Romans, and has been ever-present throughout the history of garden-making. While perhaps less fanciful and more restrained, clipping is certainly a welcome design tool in the modern garden. I enjoy incorporating clipped spheres, pyramids or hedges into any garden. These are the elements that add to the structure and keep the foliage looking good, regardless of the seasonal variations. They also provide a wonderful tension in their contrast to looser, softer planting. One need only look at the work of Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf to see how well he contrasts clipped hedges with grasses.

Plants that clip well into spheres and low hedges:
Dune crow-berry *(Searsia crenata)*
Australian rosemary *(Westringia fruticosa)*
Salt bush *(Rhagodia hastata)*
Shrubby germander *(Teucrium fruticans)*
Cape leadwort *(Plumbago auriculata)*
Orange jasmine *(Murraya exotica)*
Littleleaf Boxwood 'Faulkner' *(Buxus microphylla 'Faulkner')*

Plants that clip well into taller hedges:
Holly oak *(Quercus ilex)*
Outeniqua yellowwood *(Podocarpus falcatus)*
Pambati tree *(Anastrabe integerrima)*
Viburnum *(Viburnum tinus and Viburnum sinensis)*

A few ideas for topiary in your garden:
Clipped spheres in pots Even if your garden's limited to a few pots, you can try clipping into spherical shapes.

'Hedge on legs' This is a useful tool for the urban garden when faced with the challenge of screening an unsightly neighbouring building. The trunks of the hedge remain bare at the lower level, thus not encroaching on the limited space, while dense screening is offered at the higher level.

Contrasting foliage For a layered effect, combine clipped elements with soft ornamental grasses or with spiky, architectural plants as in the image above.