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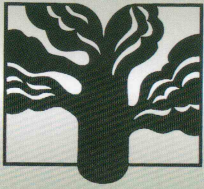
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**ЛЕСОТЕХНИЧЕСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ**  
**ФАКУЛТЕТ ПО ЕКОЛОГИЯ И ЛАНДШАФТНА АРХИТЕКТУРА**  
**КАТЕДРА "ПАРКОВО И ЛАНДШАФТНО ПРОЕКТИРАНЕ"**  
**КАТЕДРА "ПАРКОВО И ЛАНДШАФТНО СТРОИТЕЛСТВО"**

**60 години**

**специалност**

**ЛАНДШАФТНА АРХИТЕКТУРА**

**Доклади от юбилейна научна конференция**

**21 април 2011**

**София**



**КАМАРА НА АРХИТЕКТИТЕ В БЪЛГАРИЯ**

**Регионална колегия София - град**  
**Архитектурна колегия на ландшафтните архитекти**



**Съюз на**  
**ландшафтните**  
**архитекти**



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# TOPIARY PLANTS IN TODAY'S LANDSCAPE DESIGN

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## Abstract

Topiary plants in the recent landscape designing are taking the chance of being the most distinguished parts of the open green spaces. As recognizable elements of the classic Renaissance and Baroque gardens in European Villas, their appearance dates from the time of the Roman Empire and first villas and gardens there. Evergreen shrubs and trees with dense foliage were shaped and trained through the ages, raising them to the level of art forms that easily find their places in the classic gardens in the past as well in today's designed open green spaces.

**Key words:** topiary plants, landscape designing, open green spaces, Renaissance and Baroque gardens, evergreen shrubs and trees

## INTRODUCTION

Choosing the theme for topiary plants, we wanted to point at this kind of art that brings up new moments in today's open green spaces. The topiary plants were always treated as something specific, special art forms situated among the native trees and shrubs. From the Roman time, where they first appear, in the villa of Pliny the Younger in Tuscan, they show their delicate design through the centuries. Not only in European gardens, the topiary plants were considered as parts of the Far East, China's and Japanese's cultures as well, practicing the plant art there in different esthetic way, more naturally.

Representing the forms of nature and ordinary life in the past, these hand-made topiaries shows that with careful pruning, shaping and training, some evergreen plants today could have different forms, like few balls on a stem, often combined with cones, cylinders, cubes or self standing spirals or Pompons. They can be considered as live sculptures that took their places in the gardens through the centuries in Europe and also becoming special kind of art in the East Asia civilizations, called bonsai.

## THE SUBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Subject of this research are topiary plants that can take place in open green spaces, considering Skopje as well.

The purpose is to present the most exposed plants as topiaries, their specific forms and to define their settings on right places and above all, to recognize the need of using them as specific forms of art in today's landscape designing.

## METHOD OF WORK

The method of work means that there should be considered all facts needed to investigate this theme

from the ancient times till today. The right references and the literature that affects this issue had to be found in order to get more information for the topiaries. So, among the other things, in the text that follows will be presented plant species connected to this theme.

Not every plant could be trained and shaped as topiary. The most appropriate are the ones that are evergreen, with small leaves and dense foliage, with compact or columnar growth habits. Once they were determined, the activities like pruning and shaping could start and the final result is trained topiary in some geometric object or in form taken from the real life. They are today self standing shaped plants, very often set in pots.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The history of topiaries

The origin of the name "topiary" is from the Latin word for an ornamental landscape gardener, "topiarius" creator of topia or places.

The art of making forms from certain kinds of shrubs and trees dates from Roman times, about 2000 times years ago. The history says, some Roman citizen, named Cneius Martius Calvena, was the one that introduced the first topiary to Roman gardens. It was the garden of the villa of Pliny the Younger in Tuscan, where the first topiary was set. But not only in European gardens, the topiary plants seemed to appear in China and Japanese gardens as "penjing" or "bonsai", showing there some other kind of culture.

From that time, the live sculptures made with careful shaping and pruning the plant material through the ages, reached their climax in the period of Renaissance and Baroque period. The most interesting forms of topiaries decorated the parterres and corners of the gardens in 16th century in European elite villas.



Many boxwood, Holly trees, Bay laurels, the yew trees or privets were formed and shaped as cones, balls, columnar or some kind of animal form. After that period, in the next few centuries the interest for this kind of work has dropped, and the topiary fell out of fashion. It was not long when near 1840's the interest for them revived and started to increase. Nowadays, the topiaries find their places in the open green spaces as accents near entryways, corners, as décor in front of the hotels, restaurants and administrative buildings and also in private gardens.

### **Topiary forms**

The art of topiary gives us opportunity to transform a plant into any form we like. Today modern are topiaries in shapes like "spiral", "pompon", "ball", "cube", and somewhere in the bigger parks you can find living sculptures of elephants, dears, dinosaurs, or some other theme inspired from life.

Although one need to have appropriate tools, skills for pruning and shaping, patience and time, and of course a sense for art design, topiary can still be made in an easy way. A construction of wires in any needed form has to be done and then set the climber over it, so in a short time the plant will cover the frame.

### **Topiary plants**

The plants have to be evergreen, so they stay in shape the whole year. Usually they have dense, small leaves or needles and grow vertically. They need to prune easily and stand trimming, so you can make any form you like.

There are a lots of plants for making topiary forms and among them are: *Cupressocyparis x 'Leylandii'* and it's varieties, *Cupressus arizonica*, *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana 'Glauca'*, *Buxus sempervirens*, *Taxus baccata*, *Hedera sp.*, *Ilex spp.*, etc. The mentioned ones can be found in certain forms as topiary in Skopje, so the following description will consider them.

#### **Fam. Cupressaceae**

##### ***Cupressus arizonica* - Cypress**

It is an evergreen tree that comes from the western parts of North America. It is fast growing specie that requires warm and sunny habitats and can stand dry soils. This conical conifer with grey-green needles, withstands pruning and cutting. Usually topiary forms are: cylinders, balls and spirals.

##### ***Cupressocyparis x leylandii* - *Cupressocyparis***

This fast growing, evergreen conifer tree is hybrid between *Cupressus macrocarpa* and *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*, both from North America. It might reach 30 m in height. It has grey-green leaves and

dense foliage. Behave on every type of soil, except on extremely moist ones. It can stand -30°C. It is usually used for hedges and withstands any type of pruning and shaping, through the whole year. Topiary shapes: cube, balls, pompons, cylinder and spiral. Some of its varieties are: C x I "Castlewellan Gold"-compact form of habits and golden color of the leaves; C x I "Silver dust"- wide form of habits and blue-green color of the leaves, occasionally with white glow; C x I "Leighton Green"- cylindrical form of habits and dark green color of the leaves; C x I "Gold Rider"- yellow-green color of the leaves.

Pompons, balls, cubes, spirals, cones are the topiary shapes made out of these species and its varieties. They are usually raised in pots.

##### ***Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* - False cypress**

This evergreen conifer tree with columnar form comes from western parts of North America. It can grow 30-50 m in height, and can stand shadow places and low temperatures. It grows on fresh, deep, clay soils and can stand dry and polluted air. Withstand pruning and shaping. There are many varieties, and most exposed are *C. lawsoniana* "Columnaris", 10-12 m in height with striking blue needles, and *C. lawsoniana* "Ellwoodii" reaching 5 m in height, steel-blue needles, columnar. Cylinders, balls, spirals are the topiary shapes.

#### **Fam. Taxaceae**

##### ***Taxus baccata* - Yew**

This conifer, 20 m tall, 10 m spread, can be raised as shrub or small tree. Its native land is whole Europe and North Africa. The leaves are soft, 2-4 cm long, narrow, dark green, very dense foliage. The female species have attractive red fruits. It is slow growing specie that is resistant on -30°C. Grows on sandy, slightly acid, well drained soils. There are some cultivars used in landscape design like: *Taxus baccata* "Fastigiata", columnar habit, 1,2-2 m height, 0,5 m width; *Taxus x media* "Hicksii"-wide columnar habit.

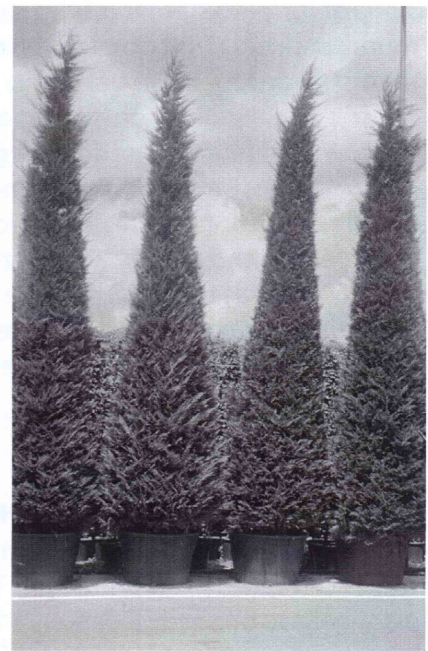
There are very specific topiary forms from Yew, like balls, cones, pyramids but they can not be found very often in Skopje, because of their high price. They are usually situated in the elite private gardens.

#### **Fam. Buxaceae**

##### ***Buxus sempervirens* - Boxwood**

It is evergreen shrub or small tree that can grow 1-9 m. The leaves are green, oval 15-30 mm. It grows on various types of soil and it's resistant on low temperatures to -30°C. Equally good stands shadow and sunny locations. Withstands pruning and shaping and in the past it was the most popular topiary specie.





Picture 1. Topiary forms

mostly for hedges. The other cultivars are lower and slow growing and can be also used as topiary plants. One of them is *Buxus microphylla*, which originally comes from Japan, with 2-3 m in height. The leaves are oval, with bright green color, 10-25 mm long. It is resistant on low temperatures to  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The forms like balls, cones, pompons, spirals and cubes can easily be made out of this plant.

**Fam. Araliaceae**

**Hedera spp. - Ivy**

The ivy is maybe the most popular evergreen climber, especially *Hedera helix*. Naturally it comes from south and central Europe, south and central Asia and west and northwest Africa. It can grow 30 m in height. Over the surface is climbing with its tiny little roots. There are many forms, colors and dimen-



sions of its leaves. Some of the varieties have small, round, dark blue fruits, that grow in late autumn, and than stay on the branches-trunk the whole winter. Ivy can equally grow on sunny locations as well in shadow, where its dense foliage gets dark green. It grows the best if it's on moist and humus soil. It is usually used for covering and decorating damaged walls, fences and of course on wire constructions in certain shape as topiary. There are some species that are usually used, like: *Hedera hibernica*, *Hedera colchica*, *Hedera algeriensis* "Glore de Marengo", *Hedera helix* "Goldheart" etc.

### Fam. Aquifoliaceae

#### *Ilex aquifolium* - Common Holly Tree

It is evergreen, broadleaf shrub or small tree, which can reach 10 m in height. This slow growing plant behave on shady locations and fresh, fertile soil. It is resistant on low temperatures. Female plants have red berries. The leaves are green, thorny, but they could be in various dimensions and color, depending of the specie. As topiary it can be shaped as balls, rounded bushes, pompons or cones.

### CONCLUSION

Creating topiary forms out of some evergreen shrubs and trees is quite interesting and intriguing occurrence. It integrates the human knowledge of pruning and shaping plants with the elegance of nature, making in that way extraordinary forms of geometric or animal figures, starting with the hedges in the classic gardens. If they are showing up in up to date landscape design of the open green spaces in Europe today, in Skopje could be found not many places where they are set. There are few topiary plants that can be found in front of some public buildings and more often in the private gardens. *Cupressocyparis x 'Leylandii'*, mostly as hedge, but also in Pompon, spiral, ball, cube and cone shape. *Cupressus arizonica* in cylinder, ball and spiral shape. *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Glauca' with identical topiary forms like previous one. *Buxus sempervirens*, can be found in various shapes, first as hedge, than in pompon, ball, spiral, cube, cone or cyl-

inder form. *Taxus baccata* as very slow-growing specie with its characteristic forms has much expensive price than the other ones. It is very rare in the open green spaces in Skopje but can easily be located in some private gardens in elite quarts. *Ilex spp.* as topiary can be found in ball, pompon and cone shape, and is interesting because of the colour and shape of its leaves. *Hedera sp.* is very often climber that covers damaged walls or climbs over fences. It is used for making topiary in a different way, when planted over cages mode of wires, for a short period of time, it flourish into the shape of the frame.

There are more plant species from the ones presented in this work, which could be used as topiary, considering their ability of withstanding pruning and shaping. Among them are: *Thuja sp.*, *Photinia x fraserii* 'Red Robin', *Prunus laurocerassus*, *Laurus nobilis*, *Euonymus japonica*.

But not only can some kinds of shrubs and trees be shaped as topiary. There are also some herb species like: rosemary, lemon verbena, fringed lavender, dwarf sage, sweet bay and flowering plants like: *Lantana*, *Fuchsia*, *Hydrangea* that can be used for this purpose too. But that is an issue for another work on topiary theme.

At last, these topiaries usually find their place in the open green spaces. In spite their beauty they still can not be found in big number in Skopje. The reasons are most likely in their price, the inability to maintain the shape constantly and take appropriate care of them. There can be found topiary forms mostly in private gardens and in front of some public buildings.

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Table 1. Schedule of the plants by their topiary forms

Species	Conifers	Broadleaves	Topiary forms
<i>Cupressus arizonica</i>	+		cylinder, ball, spiral
<i>Cupressocyparis leylandii</i>	+		pompon, cube, spiral, ball
<i>Chamaecyparis lawsoniana</i>	+		cylinder, ball, spiral
<i>Taxus baccata</i>	+		ball, cone, pyramid
<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>		+	ball, cone, pompon, spiral,
<i>Hedera spp.</i>		+	arches on trough
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>		+	cone, ball, pompon



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