

How to Make an Aquatic Topiary

Topiaries are a fun and easy way to grow water plants in a pond or container water garden.

Making the Topiary

Converting the topiary to aquatic use is very easy. You can use any wire form that's been stuffed with sphagnum moss. If you want to grow water plants on the entire topiary, choose one that's less than 6" or 9" in height. A taller topiary may not wick water all the way to the top of the form. If you want to plant a taller topiary, use water plants on the lower portion and non-water plants for the higher reaches. We've found that people especially like topiary forms of elephants, whales, and other animals associated with water.

To plant the topiary, soak the form in warm water until it's fully saturated. This may take an hour or two depending on the size and density of the form. Once it's fully wet, take it out of its water bath and place it on an even surface. Poke small holes in the form, spacing the holes a few inches apart. We usually use a flat-head screwdriver or a butter knife, twisting it to make a small hole.

Then take the plant and rinse any soil from the roots and trim them so that they are just an inch long. Cut the plant into small half-inch pieces with roots attached. Using the screwdriver or butter knife, plug the piece of plant into the hole you made. Let the plant trail on the form. You can use florist pins to hold the pieces in place until the plants have had a chance to root into the sphagnum moss. As the plant develops, it will root further into the sphagnum and grow across the form.

Place the topiary where the base will be in an inch or so of water, so that it will continuously wick water and keep the plants moist and happy. Tap water is acceptable, but distilled water is better. Rain water is also fine, provided it's not too acidic.

Plumbing an Aquatic Topiary

For the truly ingenious, try adding a small fountain to the topiary form. Insert plastic tubing so that the water spouts from a top part of the form, say the top of a whale or the snout of an elephant. Attach the bottom of the tubing to a pump that you can hide out of sight. That's all there is to it.

What Plants to Use?

See the other side of this instruction.

Care and Maintenance

Aquatic topiary may need an occasional trimming to keep the plants from looking scraggly. Simply cut them with sharp scissors so that the shape is neat and even. You can keep the excess and re-root it in a dish of warm water. Most water plants suitable for topiary use grow from stem cuttings.

To fertilize, soak it in a bucket of water with fertilizer added at half its standard strength. Don't add fertilizer directly to the water in the dish where the topiary is sitting- this will quickly cause an algae bloom of green, scummy water. Fertilize monthly.

Soak topiary monthly using distilled or rain water to remove salt build-up from surface of the leaves. Just submerge the entire form in water overnight, to remove the harmful salts from the sphagnum moss.

Insect control: Simply submerge the topiary for a day or two with the water level well above the plant. Usually the insects will float away.

You can put your topiary outside during summer and bring in when it gets cold. Place in large shallow dish of water (1 in to 2 in). Keep near a sunny window for warmth. Keep moist & trimmed.