

Tissue Topiary: A Tree Sculpture

(art + science)

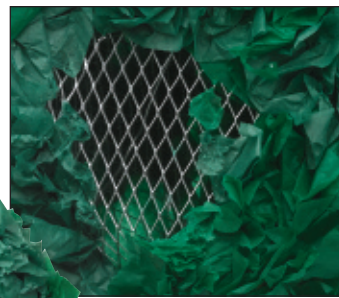
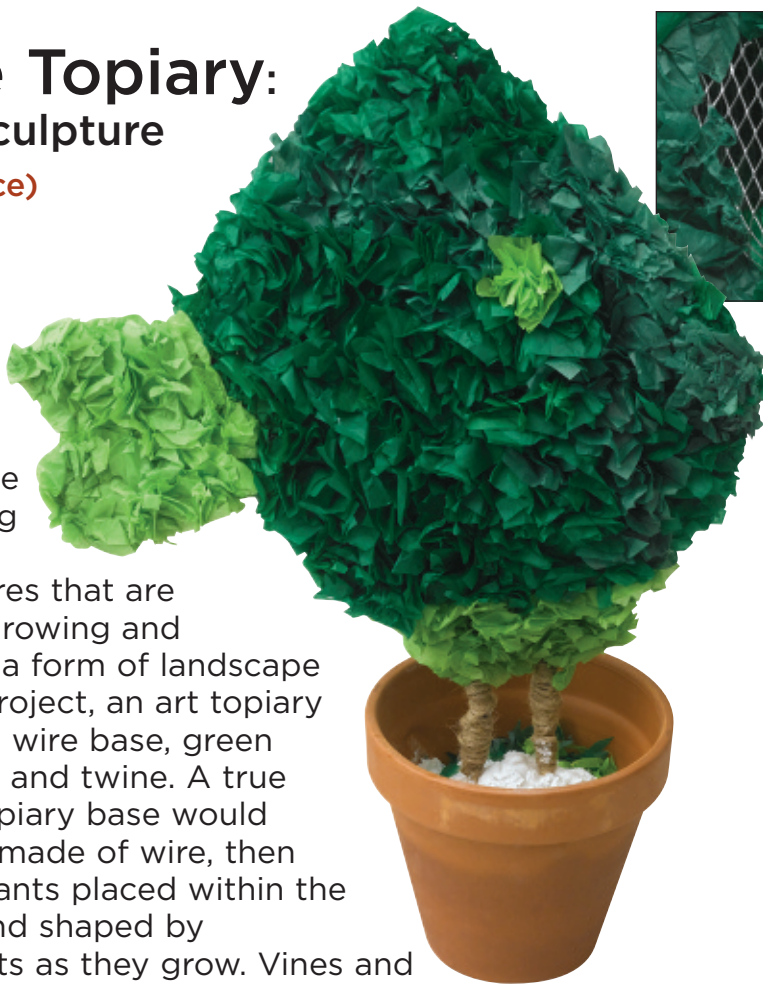
Topiary is the art of turning living plants into sculptures that are constantly growing and changing — a form of landscape art. In this project, an art topiary is made of a wire base, green tissue paper and twine. A true botanical topiary base would similarly be made of wire, then tree-type plants placed 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 4-6

Note: Instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Process

1. Create a simple design with a drawn outline. Animals and geometric shapes are extremely popular. The sculpture must be viewable from all directions. Discuss and consider the elements of design, form, line and shape as they relate to this project.
2. As the plan is drawn, consider how the sculpture is going to be supported. Tissue paper topiaries will be balanced on one or more dowel rods, with the sculpture wire wrapped around them for support, then covered with twine to disguise the metal and wood. Leave half of the dowel rod at the base of the sculpture exposed; it will be secured into the flower pot as a final step.



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

3. Begin the sculpture with 6-8 feet of wire. Any excess can be wrapped around the form to add strength. One end starts as the base, plant stem or leg of the design. Shape the basic form, working with the wire in one piece. Note: Cutting and reattaching the wire will weaken the sculpture. Bend the wire outward for limbs, wings, arms and other variations from the main shape. Safety Note: use only new, clean materials.
4. Cut the Wireform Mesh into pieces to cover the shape. Use it also to add additional projections. Wrap the mesh around the wire and squeeze tightly to attach.
5. Cut green tissue into pieces of 1-1/2" to 2" square. Use a variety of shades and sizes.
6. Twist each tissue square in the middle to make a point, place glue on the point and tuck each into the screen and around the wire joints as close to each other as possible. Tissue pieces can also be glued to each other under the surface.
7. Trim the tissue with scissors to make the shape follow the form more precisely.
8. Wrap the twine around the wire base to make it resemble a trunk or stem. First, tie the ends and use glue to hold the twine in place, then work a dowel rod halfway up the stem or trunk and wrap it with the twine to cover it completely.
9. Work in pairs to make plaster for the flower pot. Place tape over the hole in the pot to prevent leaks. Pour about four cups of prepared plaster into the pot and immediately insert the bottom half of the dowel into the plaster. It does not need to reach the bottom of the pot. Check the balance and position of the dowel, then hold the sculpture at the base until the plaster sets up around it. This will happen fairly quickly. Allow the plaster to cure completely (approximately three hours).



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

Options

1. Use a shoebox as a temporary base form rather than a clay pot. After the plaster hardens in the box, strip the box away and paint the base with acrylic paint (see example above)