

The rich history of topiary trees

Topiary trees are being used more and more to refresh the appearances of gardens, parks and avenues. Here are several striking facts about the origin and application of topiary trees.

Topiari

Ancient texts on the art of gardening include references to the multitude of shapes of pruned trees and hedges known as topiari. They originated during the reign of Julius Caesar but only became famous when the book *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* by Francesco Colonna containing illustrations of a topiary collection was published in 1499. He introduced fantasy shapes and animal and human figures to a wider public.



Hornbeam pergola paleistuin 't Loo Apeldoorn (NL) (Het Loo Palace Garden)

Gellicum (NL)



200 year old taxus around 1920



Today

Decorative trained fruit trees

The training of fruit trees began many years ago due to practical considerations. Close to a wall warmed by the sun, fruit ripens better. This means that by bending, training and shaping the branches against a wall the tree produces better fruit.

It was first written about in 1561. The development of new cultivation techniques has given this type of pruning a primarily decorative function. Nevertheless, these trees still yield a maximum and top quality fruit harvest.

Practical tree shapes

Until the introduction of barbed wire, topiary trees were frequently used by farmers as livestock fences, land boundaries or sun shades. These were pruned wood walls, hedges and trained lime trees that provided shade in summer but hardly obstructed the light in winter. Trained lime trees are still exceptionally popular.



Old trained lime trees near a farm in Hoevelaken (NL)