



The Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden

Bishopville, South Carolina

The lifework of a visionary artist, this remarkable garden began with an ordinary hedge trimmer and an extraordinary imagination. Using only his own labor, resources, and time after work, Pearl Fryar transformed his three-acre property into a topiary garden that now has an international reputation far beyond his original goal: to show that an African-American man could win the Yard-of-the-Month award from the Bishopville Iris Garden Club.

Soon after Pearl and his wife Metra built their house in a former cornfield in the early 1980s, Pearl wanted to create something more interesting than the usual foundation plantings and hedgerows that typically surrounded a home. After a three-minute lesson on topiary at a local nursery, he began to sculpt these ordinary plants into fantastic shapes. With no formal training in art or horticulture, and using only his hedge trimmer and a stepladder, he gradually developed a range of topiary styles—tightly manicured geometric compositions, figurative shapes, and monumental abstractions. Today the garden contains five hundred trees and shrubs he planted over the years, many of them rescued from that local nursery's compost pile of plants discarded as too damaged or too sick to sell. His dazzling topiary designs attract thousands of visitors from around the world to the small town of Bishopville, the county seat of the poorest region in South Carolina, where his garden is a source of civic pride and inspiration for the whole community.

Pearl sees his achievement as a statement about the power of average individuals to do extraordinary things and to make an important contribution to society. His lectures motivate young people across the country and at nearby Coker College, where he is Artist-in-Residence. *A Man Named Pearl*, an award-winning documentary film, celebrates his artistic vision and his ability to effect social change in a small rural community.

As a cultural and educational asset to the state of South Carolina, the Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden has transcended racial, social, and economic barriers, making it worthy of preservation for years to come. In 2007, the Conservancy helped create and incorporate the Friends of Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden, whose mission is to help support the garden and its eventual transition into a public institution.

Every year about five thousand visitors make their way to a small town in rural South Carolina just to see Pearl Fryar's fantastic topiaries. Beginning with only a hedge trimmer, a stepladder, and the light from a street lamp, Pearl devoted his time after work to transforming his three-acre property into a garden that has become a source of civic pride and an inspiration for the whole community.



Most of the plants in Pearl's garden were "throwaways" from the local nursery: junipers, hollies, Leyland cypresses, and oaks considered too damaged or too sick to sell. Over the years he patiently clipped them into many different kinds of topiary, from manicured geometric compositions to figurative shapes to monumental abstractions.