

# W

WANT TO  
ADD SOME  
SHAPE TO  
YOUR GARDEN?

## F L O W E R

Take a cue from  
the English country  
garden and construct

## T O W E R S

a natural woven trellis  
like the willow tower  
shown here. ¶ Using the  
same techniques as for basket weaving, Lee Zieke Lee, of Willowglen Nursery in Decorah, Iowa, found that willow is perfect for the craft, and she now grows about 35 different varieties. But, she says, willow is only one of many possibilities: Grapevine, red dogwood, or any plant with flexible stems can be used for weaving. The uprights for the trellises can be cut from bushes or trees that have long, straight branches, including bamboo. ¶ The towers look like works of art and are surprisingly easy to make. Also, says Lee, they're very forgiving: Because they end up covered with vines, any mistakes that you make will quickly disappear under twining stems, leaves, and blossoms.

BY MELANIE HAIKEN



# HOW TO WEAVE YOUR OWN WILLOW

## MATERIALS

- 10 to 12 willow uprights
- 30 to 40 willow stems
- Hoop (you can use embroidery, macramé, or hula hoops)
- Flexible wire or string
- Wooden stakes (optional)



1. Strip stems



2. Tie tops of uprights with wire



6. Spiral up to support gaps



7. Weave new section



8. Wrap tops

**1** Lee makes her towers about 7 feet high, but they can be any height you like. Choose 10 to 12 straight branches (7 to 8 feet long) for your uprights and 30 to 40 flexible stems (10 to 30 feet long) for weaving. Strip off the leaves and any side branches.

**2** Tie the uprights together with flexible wire about 8 inches from the top, then fan them out at the bottom like a tepee.

**3** Place a hoop (an old macramé hoop or oversize embroidery hoop) inside the uprights about a foot from the bottom, and attach them to the hoop, binding each one in place with flexible wire. Space them as evenly as possible; a second pair of hands is very useful at this stage, so it's a good idea to corral someone to help if you can.

**4** Now you're ready to start weaving, using a classic basket technique based on friction. Begin with two stems of approximately the same length, and set the thicker end of one against the back of one upright while the second goes against the back of the next upright to the right. Weave the two stems in front and in back of the uprights, creating something of a figure 8 pattern around the uprights. Hint: Beginners may want to wire or nail the first two horizontal weaving stems in place to keep them from slipping; Lee uses tiny ridged paneling nails when necessary.

**5** Weave more stems in and out, always starting a new stem by lodging the thicker end behind an upright. Stop every so often to squeeze the horizontal stems together to keep your weaving tight.



# TOWER



3. Attach hoop



4. Begin weaving



5. Squeeze stems



9. Snip stragglers



10. Lop off tops



Ta-da!

**6** It's important to leave a couple of large gaps for the vines to grow through. When a woven section is wide enough for your taste, spiral your two stems up at least a foot or two diagonally.

**7** Proceed to weave horizontally again to create another broad woven section; remember to keep squeezing the twined stems together to keep them tight.

**8** Wind an especially flexible stem around the tops of the uprights and over the wire. This has the added benefit of strengthening your tower while concealing the wire.

**9** Use a pair of clippers to tidy up the tower. Snip off any unsightly willow tails that are sticking out of your weaving.

**10** Lop off the tops of the uprights to make them a roughly uniform height.

Now your willow tower is ready for the garden. You can attach the ends of the uprights to wooden stakes to anchor them to the ground. Morning glories, clematis, and sweet peas are perfectly suited to train up willow towers. For even more drama, try a tower festooned with scarlet runner beans or cucumbers. Left standing in the garden, your tower should last at least two seasons. To preserve it longer, remove it from the garden at the end of its first season (it should be thoroughly dry and stiff by then) and spray it with a coat of varnish. ✦

*Melanie Haiken is managing editor of San Francisco magazine and a freelance writer.*

## RESOURCES

Willowglen Nursery sells and ships willow cuttings for planting and flexible cut willow for weaving. For prices, contact the nursery at 3512 Lost Mile Road, Decorah, IA 52101; 319/735-5570.