



Rosemary Topiaries

by Penye Cushing, UC Master Gardener

Rosemary bushes shaped as little Christmas trees can be a wonderful addition to your holiday decorations. They become available in stores shortly after Halloween, and their wonderful fragrance is a temptation for all.

A triangular shape is not the normal growth pattern for Rosemary. This type of pruning can be responsible for putting the plant into shock. When purchasing, look for the brightest green needles. Run your hands gently over the needles to make sure they do not droop and to make sure the needles are not too dry or brittle, since these are all symptoms of poor plant health. If the plant has a foil wrapper, you should check to make sure the plant has not been sitting in water.

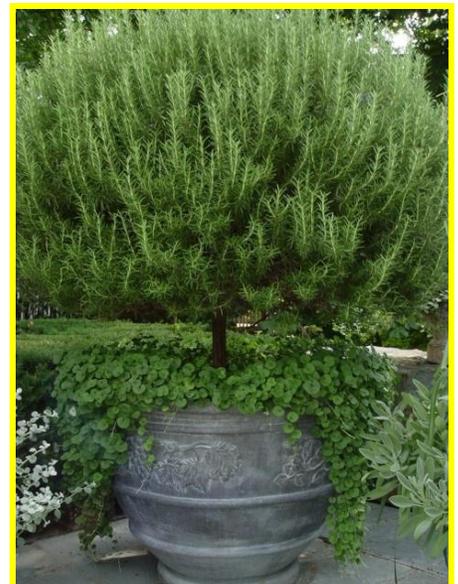
Once it passes your test, make your purchase, and take your new plant home from the store. Since this is a greenhouse-raised plant, try to avoid temperature changes by not leaving the plant in a cold car, even for an hour. This will help insure survival for your new addition. Your new plant will need tender loving care. Look for evidence of problems by watching for drooping or dry needles. These are important signs of trouble.



- Now at home, remove the decorative wrapper. Make sure the roots are dry since wet roots can cause the plant to die.
- Water the plant, and allow it to drip from the pot bottom. You want to make sure that your rosemary tree is well drained.
- If desired, you can rewrap in pretty wrapping, but first place rocks or marbles inside so there is a buffer between the pot and the wrapping.
- Display your topiary with other house plants so that they can benefit from shared humidity.

If your previous Rosemary topiaries have died, it was probably due to overwatering. We tend to think house temperatures will dry them out, but they are very particular about water and do not require much water during the winter months. *What they do need is humidity.* Water once a week and mist them three to four times a day. Keep a layer of rock for mulch at the soil line. It will help keep the soil from drying out, and will form a wet mist to be released to the plant slowly.

Keep your Rosemary tree away from heat sources. If you keep your topiary on your coffee table or in the middle of your dining room table, it will not be happy unless it receives the required amount of sunlight. Six



hours of daily sunlight are necessary, and the sunlight must be bright enough to actually cast a shadow when you hold your hand in the sunbeam. You can take a chance and alternate locations, and allow the required sunlight every other day. Sunlight will determine life or death for your Rosemary topiary. These Christmas plants are usually small enough so that this moving routine can be handled easily.

Pretty decorations are not plant friendly. Make sure to remove them carefully, not bending or bruising the needles. If you like the decorations, and want to keep them, a possible solution would be to wire them to pipe-stems and then gently slip them into the middle of the bush. It is not recommended to use lights on these little trees, as the heat generated might dry out the needles.

Once the holidays are over, you may continue to keep your rosemary tree all year long. It will require regular pruning to keep its original shape. Just watch the plant growth and trim as necessary.

The look and fragrance of these lovely Rosemary Topiaries is irresistible. Please take a chance, purchase one, and then follow these guidelines for a delightful indoor holiday plant.

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