

TWIGGERIES
Garden Features & Utilities
Made From Pruning Throwaways
a presentation by
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for
Garden Writers Association
Annual Symposium 2007
Oklahoma City

A Downhome Disclaimer

Twiggeries is a made-up name for my improvised response to a pair of split hazel wickets in a Connecticut garden in 1990. They were the genuine British import and cost accordingly: \$1,500 for each 4-by-8-foot panel. Be not afraid. No such highdollar relationship has ever evolved from any of my twiggeries. They are expensive only in terms of the time & energy gardeners routinely give to their comforting labors of love. They are like herbs and simples grown and dispensed at home; their value is that incalculable. Sometimes I get arty and disappoint myself, but that's all right too. These artifacts are very much at home in gardens of no great consequence, which is to say houseabout gardens made and maintained by their owners, for their own pleasure.

My first twiggeries were made here in Oklahoma using oak, hackberry and willow, all fugitive compared to the yew that became my mainstay out East where sizeable specimens are often in need of shapely prune. Even smaller sizes of yew with a history of bad pruning offer curvaceous rhythms and eccentricities delightful to work with. Yew twiggeries also last for donkey's years. In 2004 I spent a lovely autumn afternoon in SE Pennsylvania refurbishing yew fence and trellis made for friends in 1998. Wire, more than wood, was giving way.

Now that I'm back in the home state, the search for local materials continues. I'm hankering to tangle with thorny locust and Osage orange but don't yet have the workshop space. Crepe myrtle is coming in handy though my mainstay thus far is weedy ole pasture cedar *Juniperus virginiana*. I can't help admiring its elderly good character as a yard & garden specimen, but share the general dread of its invasiveness afield. All the more reason to make the best of unwelcome abundance.

Cedar, like yew, is a longtime, not a sometime thing, though youthful, more compliant growth convenient for more fanciful twiggeries is soon attacked by all manner of deadwood desperadoes--tiny woodboring beetles, bees and wasps. My notion of a garden is highly friendly to that kind of interplay, though clients are more apt to respond to the birdlife consequences. The usual bark-savvy woodpeckers, nuthatches, titmice, chickadees and wrens inspect cedar twiggeries regularly. Sharp-eyed generalists quickly catch on too--sparrows, juncos and cardinals. If that mix sounds improbably rich, offer the birds a steady year-round source of water and

prepare to be amazed.

Adopt a playful attitude. These rustic artifacts are simple, natural improvisations. They take their cues from growth itself--growth the gardener studies, learning how to prune. Young cedar growth is pliant, though stubbornly curvilinear, so I'm still working at designing around that built-in limitation. Trimming the branches bare is about as much fun as shaving a live hog so consider doing just enough to sample the satisfaction of your first finished piece. Same goes for any wood you work with. You can probably guess at its lasting potential. Grapevine, willow and hackberry won't last like oak which is fugitive compared to cedar/juniper. Live wood is easier to deal with, though interesting things can be done with the longstanding deadwood that haunts the tormented innereds of many a neglected foundation evergreen.

From Your Local Hardware Store

Buy a pair of linesman's pliers. Two sizes are commonly available. The smaller, lighter one is easier to use. Do make sure to get linesman's pliers. The square jaw and cutting edge combo is just what you need. Ordinary pliers will drive you nuts.

Insist on rebar tie-wire. Many hardware stores have it in stock & can order it if they don't. As the name suggests, this is the wire used on construction sites. It is easy to cut & work with; also quick to rust, a perfect match for rustic woody artifacts.

The wires used by florists & picture framers are grievously unsuitable.

Technique

Not much manual dexterity is required, just practice and some cusswords.
tip The roll of wire will be more manageable if you loop a circle of wire through the center so it slips around easily as you unreel.

Do make a habit of looping all cut ends. Loop as you cut so you don't forget.
Unless, of course, random body piercing is your secret joy.

You'll soon find how wire twists "right": cross left end over right end then twist to the right. This is one of those rules that's hard to grasp in words but quickly comes to hand. (Left-handed twisters will re-interpret to suit.)

Don't fret about making mistakes. Wire and unwire to your heart's content. When in doubt, do the wire-twist equivalent of basting stitch: wire loosely to see how the given connection fits; fiddle & fuss & change your mind till you're satisfied it's time to twist and stand firm. Even then, you can change your mind as often as you care to snip wire & twist & tweak anew.

Artifacts You Might Oughta Try For

1. *Up The Downspout Vine Support*: grapevine wound around just about any vertical around the place, say downspouts or porch posts. Offers visual interest any

time of year & climbing grip for perennials like Clematis or annuals like morning glory.
tip wire butts of 3 or more lengths of vine to the lowest point and work your way up to wire at the top. Braid lengths, or wind as a group, or use individually.

2. *Suit Yourself Trellis*: Improvise to your heart's content, though offer firm support. tip lend flimsy whimsy unobtrusive support with rebar. See #5.

3. *Pot Trellis*: tip steady uprights with support buried in the pot. Butts of uprights can be wired to twig crosspieces or (easier I think) sunk through holes drilled in a piece of wood. Both supports can also be used at soil level--alone or in addition to buried supports. Visible support should be handsome eg driftwood.

4. *Lookout Bird Perch*: tip Steady the butts of uprights by wiring to stakes driven in the ground. On hard surfaces, wire them to anything solid or heavy.

5. *Maypole/Witchtree* tip Steady this or any rustic artifact by wiring to a stake of rebar or rusty pipe or weathered wood--anything stout enough to pound in firm. Rebar is sold by many lumber yards. Half inch rebar makes wonderful garden stakes, easy to cut with a hacksaw. Quarter inch can be bent into curving shapes.

6. *Tripod Focal Point*: tip steady these fanciful-as-you-please constructions by wiring the base at one or more points to a stake or heavy rock.

7. *Screen/Wicket/StandAside*: lightweight, freely improvised twiggeries steadied in various ways (see above). tip Here it's easier to create visual persuasions than outright obstructions. Then again, maybe you have a way with brambleweaving...

8. *Fencing Actual Practical or Simply Visual*: tip Really stout uprights may want a hole here & there, in which case you'll use a drill and wide-blade bits. tip Poles can be steadied in holes a foot or so deep (sometimes less) with firmly wedged rocks or bricks down in. Fill in with good planting soil, sometimes planting as you "build."

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