



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

Inspired by Spires

When we travel to a new city or town we usually see spires from a distance and wonder what buildings they

tower above. Once within our new destination we look upward to these focal points to orient ourselves so we can successfully maneuver about. We are thrilled when upon reaching the spire, we discover a park or a square with cafes where we can linger and people watch. While vertical elements in a garden are rarely more than one story in height and aren't visible from miles away they still have an important role to play.

They visually tie large buildings and tall trees to the ground to create a scale comfortable for people. As exclamation marks in the landscape they attract the eye and direct attention to one or more parts of the garden. These vertical focal points can be structures such as tuteurs and obelisks or even a birdhouse on a post. Sculptures that stretch upward provide unique visual emphasis.

There are a number of spire-like plants that range from exclamation marks, to columns, to a pyramidal shape. Upright and naturally very narrow plants include Italian cypress, Will Fleming holly and the new Scarlet's Peak holly. Meanwhile there are plants that can be kept narrow with some trimming: Ligustrum japonicum 'Texanum', weeping yaupon holly, yew podocarpus, Little Gem magnolia or the Japanese blueberry tree. Trees that are bred to naturally reflect the pyramidal shape of the structural tuteur include the Oakleaf and Robin hollies.

When using plants or structures for vertical interest, place them as standalone objects or in a combination of three. Repetition of the same object will add unity and simplicity to the garden. For a formal layout use a matching pair to flank a gate, doorway, water feature or other focal point. Be aware that often it is difficult to have two plants look identical over time.

When using the smaller architectural elements, gain some height and impact by placing an obelisk in



- 1 - A pea vine-*Clitoria ternata* climbs an obelisk.
 2 - Lead the eye upward with a unique sculptural spire.
 3 - Make a strong focal point with a cluster of three Italian cypress.
 4 - A tuteur at the Norfolk Botanical Garden



Photos by Stephen G. Pategas, Hortus, Oasis.