



**Lawn Care**  
Once a cornfield, Pearl Fryar's yard is now a canvas for positive messages.

**1** IN BISHOPVILLE, SC

**It took Pearl Fryar 32 years to transform his yard into a living sculpture garden. But its impact is eternal.**

By **Alison Miller**  
Photograph by **Dustin Shores**

**A**LL YEAR ROUND, out-of-town visitors flock by the thousands to this patch quilt of dirt roads and shuttered storefronts, the quiet seat of one of South Carolina's poorest counties. They come to see Pearl Fryar, who has spent the past 32 years turning his own yard into a three-acre expanse where hundreds of living plants exist as fantastical art forms. His message is simple: Work with what you've got, and with passion, time, and patience you can achieve anything. So it's no surprise that his garden began with a single, discarded plant.

In 1980, Fryar, now 72, his wife Metra, and their then-12-year-old son Patrick, moved into the ranch-style home they built on a former cornfield on the outskirts of town. "I wanted to make a good impression," Fryar says, peering out from under a dusty South Carolina Gamecocks

ball cap in the Bishopville Waffle House a few months ago. So he set out to win Yard of the Month from the town's Iris Garden Club. "I live outside of the city limits," he explains, "so I knew I had to come up with something really good so they would make an exception."

With no gardening experience whatsoever, Fryar went to a local nursery, where a potted topiary with two leafy globes caught his eye. The nursery's owner discouraged him from buying the plant, citing its difficult upkeep. But Fryar pressed for details. More than three decades later, his only horticultural training has been the three-minute lesson on topiaries he received that day. Rather than leaving with the cultivated plant, Fryar took home a scraggly holly bush he rescued from a heap of abandoned shrubs behind the store.

With the permission of the staff, Fryar routinely returned to gather

after a 12-hour shift at Rexam, the beverage can manufacturing plant where he worked for 36 years before retiring in 2002.

As time passed, the garden grew upward and outward. It wasn't long before word of his creations spread across the region. But for Fryar, a trim, sturdy man who commands a graceful presence, it was less about making a good impression and more about feeding his passion. In fact, when Jean Grosser, then an assistant professor of art at nearby Coker College, brought her students over to sketch in 1988, Fryar was taken aback. "I thought she had really lost her mind. How in the world could you call cut-up bushes art?"

Soon, though, Fryar realized that what began as a personal quest had grown into something that was stirring inspiration far and wide. In 1996, he transported a topiary to the South Caro-

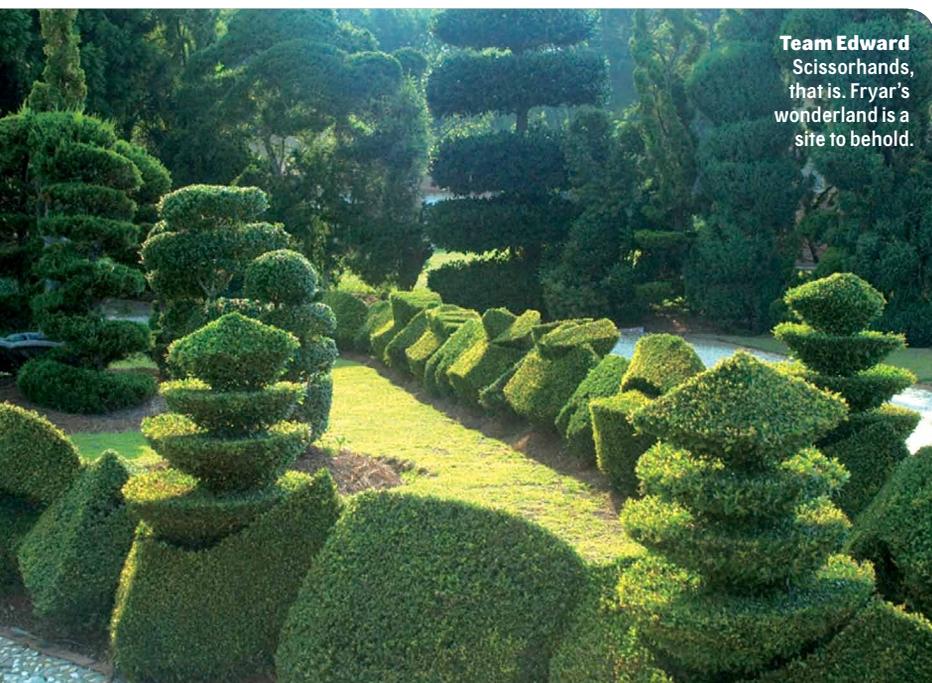
Pearl Fryar Day. Today, Fryar's work is visible in the downtown streets, in the yards of his neighbors (who are avid supporters), and even at the local Waffle House. (Fryar and his wife were granted free breakfast for life in exchange for the array of topiaries he planted and maintains out front.)

"I want people who walk through the garden to feel a little differently when they leave than when they came," he says.

And as visitors walk through the grounds—gazing at a soaring holly bush carved into discs that seem to float atop one another, or at a live oak that took four and a half years of meticulous snipping to be shaped into a square—it's undeniable that his mission has been accomplished.

In addition to the barrage of daily drop-ins from curious travelers, buses full of schoolchildren periodically arrive on field trips. The wide-eyed youngsters are Fryar's favorite guests. They're the ones whose lives his work can impact the most: Not only do they see what one can achieve with passion, commitment, and hard work; but they are the ones who benefit from the donation-financed Pearl Fryar Scholarship Fund.

These days, Fryar does most of his sculpting with a gas-powered hedge trimmer and a cherry picker, which the Garden Conservancy, a national organization that has ensured his garden will live on for generations to come, helped raise funds to provide. (A part-time apprentice also pitches in.) In spring and summer, the daily visitor count sometimes reaches 300. And if he's not out of town leading a lecture at a university or home-and-garden show, Pearl Fryar is at 145 Broad Acres Road, clad in Lee jeans, a worn T-shirt, and brown leather boots, guiding each and every onlooker through his awe-inspiring, otherworldly creation.



**Team Edward**  
Scissorhands,  
that is. Fryar's  
wonderland is a  
sight to behold.

shrubs and saplings that had been deemed unsellable. Armed with garden shears and an unstoppable drive, he went to work in his yard, oftentimes in the dark of night

lina State Museum in Columbia, where it still remains in the permanent collection. Two years later, the South Carolina House of Representatives deemed June 27