

The robot that's a cut above a gardener

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WITH its whirring blades and extendable cutting arm, it would not look out of place stalking the streets in a futuristic urban dystopia.

But a robot has been developed at Edinburgh University to potter around the garden, pruning rose bushes and trimming topiary.

The semi-autonomous Trimbot is programmed to recognise leaves, stalks and flowers so it does not inadvertently deadhead living blooms.

It can even clip box hedges into preset shapes, although its makers admit they would not let it loose on the complex patterns in formal gardens.

"It can do simple shapes," said Prof Bob Fisher, of the university's school of infor-

matics, "but I'm not sure I'd let it have a go at a topiary I'd spent 20 years training."

Engineers spent four years developing the robot, and estimate it could be available in five years once it had been proved to be safe.

"Getting the robot to work reliably in a real garden was a major feat of engineering," said Prof Fisher.

"Gardens change fast so we used machine learning to help it adapt. All the research staff have been working behind a double fence for safety. And the robot moves quite slowly so it's quite easy to get out of its way."

Using different tools, Trimbot can be used to maintain communal green spaces, help nursery owners and elderly or disabled people who no longer have the mobility or dexterity to maintain their gardens.

