

# A GARDEN JOURNEY

by Dee Montpetit

I love being a garden designer and am grateful to be a part of an industry where I can create beauty and meet wonderful people. But for me, the most rewarding part of my job is making my clients happy.

In September, a recent widow named Elsa contacted me. She was overwhelmed by the 40+ years of accumulation in her garden and desperately needed guidance. Her husband had always taken care of it, was very frugal and didn't like to throw anything away. Elsa confessed to me that she loves to garden but didn't know where to start or how to make it manageable for her moving forward.

I could see right away that this garden would need a lot of ***editing and simplification***.

My first task in working with an overwhelming space is to eliminate anything that no longer brings joy to the owner or has purpose in the garden.

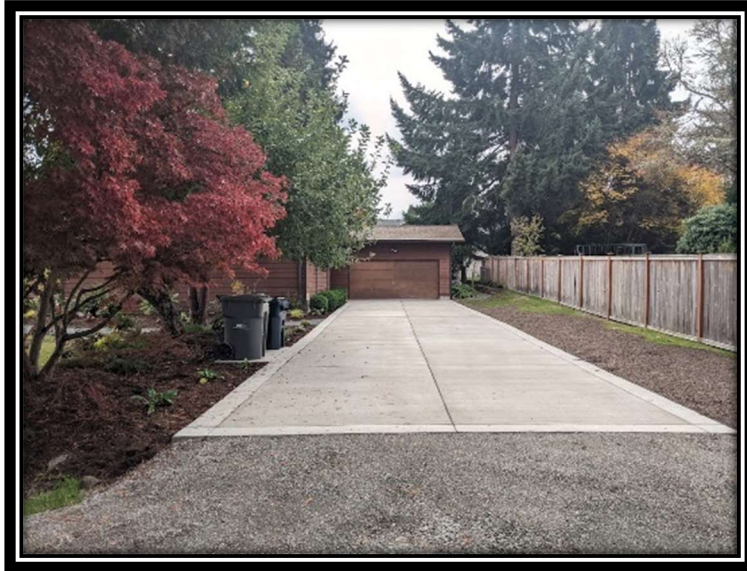


Broken wheelbarrows, ill placed fencing, plastic pots, wood, rain barrels, rotted raised beds and compost bins were all collected then donated or taken away.



The existing space had uneven surfaces from assorted pavers, various edging, and rocks that had long ago served out their purpose.

The crew set about creating level surfaces to eliminate the tripping hazards for both the hard and softscapes. The aggregate surfaces had buckled and were no longer flat and the driveway was only partially finished. The patio and driveway were replaced and expanded to reduce weeding and enhance the beauty of the space.



Yards of topsoil were brought in and spread to fill in holes and grooves worn over time. Compost was added to the garden beds to create more level gardening areas for ease of maintenance.

The dilapidated planter boxes were replaced with larger custom-made cedar beds.

The 4' height requires minimal bending and makes vegetable gardening a breeze!



The many pots Elsa accumulated over the years were crowded, overwhelming and required a lot of care. On my recommendation, she settled on having just one new, large (less watering), beautiful pot to enjoy year-round. It makes a great focal point from her kitchen window too!



The timber raised bed at the edge of the property was rotted, rodent infested and falling apart, so was removed and replaced with concrete blocks. The multi-terraced garden was raised by adding topsoil and compost to provide a leveled planting area. A new fence was built to create a more intimate space, give her privacy from the soon to be developed lot next door, and offer a support for the mature honeysuckle and clematis she loves.



A large part of the project involved editing down the existing plants. The garden was overgrown with raspberries, morning glory, and aspen shoots running rampant as there had been very little time to devote to it over the past several years.

Healthy existing plants were kept and used in more suitable locations. New, low maintenance plants were brought in to complete the design and provide year-round interest.

The editing was perhaps the most difficult part for the family. There was an emotional connection to some of the plants - the rhododendrons were her husband's favorite and he had gifted her with many of the rose bushes. Elsa confessed that she wasn't really a rose person but decided to keep just a few of them and gift the rest to her daughters to share the memories. The rhodies that were planted decades ago were overgrown and unhealthy, so they were removed and replaced with more size appropriate, shade loving plants.



One day, a rather serendipitous event occurred. There was a mature choisya being moved to a different location and we were all surprised to see a small rhododendron clinging to life at the base of the shrub. It had been hidden for years and had certainly not seen any substantive light for several seasons. I soaked it in a bucket of water for a few days and as it began to come back to life, everyone agreed that *this* rhodie deserved to be kept, nurtured, and placed in the garden as a remembrance.



The finishing touch to this garden makeover was the door to the shed her husband built many years ago. It hadn't closed properly for some time and the veneer was peeling and unsightly. The original idea was to replace it with a new one but when this became cost prohibitive, the remaining veneer was stripped off and the door was primed and painted with a shade of her favorite color. We replaced the doorknob, added accoutrements of her favorite things- birds and flowers, and voila!



It took roughly three weeks to complete this project and for Elsa and me it was an absolute joy to see the transformation. She is really looking forward to sharing her new garden with her family, friends, and beloved birds! I thank her for allowing me to work with her and for the very special way she treated my crew and me. Every day she gifted us with either fresh baked cakes, pies, or cookies and always a beautiful smile filled with gratitude.

Elsa "let it go" and now has a garden that will bring her pleasure for years to come, while giving me a new friend and project I will never forget. Thank you, Elsa!