



## SERENDIPITY GARDEN DESIGN

*Bringing Verdant Artistry to Capitol Hill Gardens*

by AMY ROGERS NAZAROV

Julie Olson hasn't been at it a year, but her Hill-based garden-design business is poised to bloom.

Olson—who worked as a graphic designer at USDA for 14 years before founding Serendipity Garden Design last fall—had always had a green thumb. Like many part-timers who dream of going solo, she dabbled in

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-Julie Olson

garden design on the side until she felt ready to give up the security of a steady paycheck.

Now she's up to her elbows in Capitol Hill gardens, which have their own special characteristics. "They're generally small gardens with clay soil, which is harder to work with," says Olson, a member of the Association of Professional Landscape Designers. "I add compost and Clay Buster, a product that loosens and aerates the soil so it's not so sticky.

Another feature of many Hill gardens and yards is the construction debris—rocks, nails, chunks of plaster—from renovations past. The stuff can slow her down, but Olson relishes the work nevertheless. "I like a loose, soft garden, one that's lush and romantic," she says. Her clients, however, may want tidy hedgerows or winding

flagstone paths. "One of my clients wanted a garden on her deck, in galvanized steel tubs," she said. "It was a very minimalist look."

After an initial meeting with a client to tease out their preferences, Olson mulls it over until she has a mental image of what the garden will look like. She then drafts it on a grid, labeling shapes standing in for bushes and trees with her own shorthand: RS, CP, LR, each abbreviation representing a different plant.

Based on clients' reactions to this "first draft," she fine-tunes the scheme. Once a client has given the go-ahead, Olson and her assistant tackle the planting. For elaborate jobs, she'll call one of the landscape contractors with whom she partners.

This North Dakota native grew up on the same farm where her brothers continue to work the land. But Olson's not homesick; she's come to love the urban greenery that gives Capitol Hill so much of its appeal. And as for self-employment?

"I love being on my own," she says.



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