

Labrie: A Hillside Makeover

A steep hill by the sea is transformed into a usable fruit and vegetable garden.

by Wickie Rowland



Before: an unmanageable hillside



After: Terraces create lots of usable space



A scooped trellis frames the view of the water, and wide steps provide comfortable access.

A Garden is Born

It all started with a useless piece of land on a wooded hillside. I had been attempting to grow vegetables in a sunny patch where there were no trees, but it was literally an uphill battle. The land sloped at almost 45 degrees, the soil was made up mostly of decaying bark chips, and gardening there was not enjoyable as you felt that you should be wearing mountain climbing gear. I had a vague idea of what I wanted to do to make it more user friendly, and after a few years of dreaming, my husband and I decided to see if we could make those dreams into reality.

Enter Labrie Associates, Inc. After evaluating the plot, it was determined that my original thought, leveling the area with the help of a retaining wall, was a bit ambitious, as the retaining wall would have to be over eight feet tall. Ugly. Impractical. Expensive. They suggested a terraced, two level garden, an idea which we liked immediately. I wanted holes in the walls so that I could plant cascading plants like those in my English grandparents' garden; they said "No problem". We had begun.



Two types of fencing combine to define the spaces and create backdrops for herbs, and growing surfaces for vines

Over the next two months, the site was transformed. Trenches were dug to accommodate the footing for the walls. Buried stumps and rocks were removed. Drains were placed, walls built, steps created. Sometimes I would suggest a slight change to the design, sometimes Art, Todd, Harry, or Mick would. Sometimes the site itself would dictate a change. Seemingly effortlessly (they might

say otherwise!) the men would adapt, and each day when they went home, progress had been made.

Once the walls were up and the garden filled in with topsoil, the garden was crowned by a six foot, lattice fence, hand built by Art. The following Spring (I had wanted time to think about the layout of the beds) they came back to put pea stone in the pathways, and I planted strawberries.

The whole project had been completed with professionalism, competency, and good humor. Granted, it had its hiccups, as all projects do, like finding a stump buried where it was least expected and most in the way, and the surprisingly large amount of water that drained through the garden when it rained, causing things to settle in unexpected ways. The men worked through them, and now the garden stands as a monument to their good work.

Although it is no longer new, the "new" garden is a constant source of peace and joy to us. Labrie made the dream a reality; the process was smooth, and the result excellent. And you should just taste the strawberries!