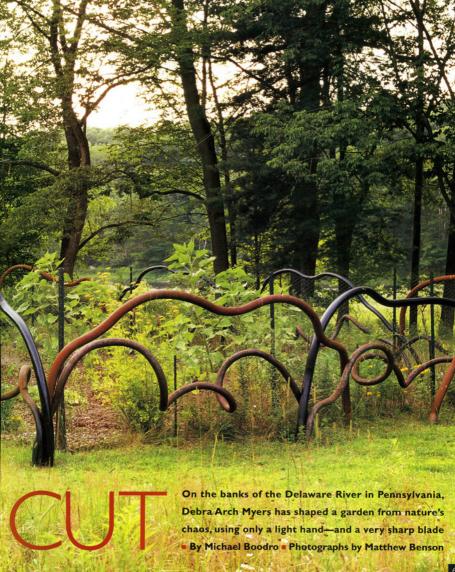


VEGETABLE LOVE Rio Myers walks by the vegetable garden. enclosed in a fanciful tence-sculpture by his father, Forrest, to keep deer, woodchucks, and beavers at bay.

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GOLDEN HOURS

Opposite: Butterfly weed in full bloom, backed by Rudbeckia hirta. Right: A path lined with ostrich fern, Matteuccia struthiopteris, leads past a yellow birch to the river. For rest Myers's The War of the Worlds, below, also serves as a table. Bottom: A stone pile shelters toads, crickets, and snakes.



weed, and rattlesnake-master (so she spends virtually nothing on plants).

Most of the garden's "beds" and paths are shaped through cutting. That task falls to Forrest, who spends about half a day every five to ten days on his mower." It started with a push mower!" he says incredulously. "Now I ride around on a 42-inch Simplicity lawn tractor. It's become my psychiatrist." The division of labor seems fair, since his sculptures come first. Debra explains, "We have a site in mind, then develop a garden around the sculpture. We're running out of room now—though we do have a couple more spots we're thinking about."

Not that Debra is left free of all responsibility for her zone 5 property. "Some of the plants I love are invasive," she admits. "Sometimes that works to my advantage. Ostrich ferns are taking over what I initially imagined as a woodland garden. Now it's become

a fern walk to the river—and it's more beautiful than it would have been otherwise. I love the sense of abandon, of nature constantly trying to come back. I believe you should not fight it, just shape it. An English garden is just not me. But I have to be careful."

A friend originally lured the couple to the property because he knew that they had grown tired of summering on Long Island. "It was 1988," remembers Debra, "that year of medical waste washing up on the beach, and the red tide of algae. I first came up here in August, saw people swimming in the river, and decided that this was the most magical place I had ever seen." That judgment required something of a leap of faith, however, considering that "most of what is now the garden was just a gravel parking

For more on Debra Arch Myers and her design business and antiques store, see INFO, page 80.



DOWNTO EARTH

A bed of sweet fern, Comptonia peregrina, left, in front of the vegetable garden. Below: The biennial Daucus corota, Queen Anne's lace. Bottom: Rio and Debra on the sculpture Marjorie Daw, with a "Heritage" river birch in the center. Opposite: A path lined with river stones and edged with crown vetch.

lot, and the house was fronted by a loading platform for 18-wheelers."

The property had once been part of one of the larger evergreen nurseries on the eastern seaboard, established in response to ads posted by the firm founded by Frederick Law Olmsted, which was in search of native shrubs for Central and Prospect parks. The enterprise at its height encompassed 500 acres.

That glory was long past by the time Debra arrived. "The meadows were full of greenhouses with row after row of one-, two-, and three-foot trees," say Debra. "It was all fenced against bears and deer, with a pole barn in the center and an old red gas pump. We had virtually no money, so we just said, How much can we get for this much?" What they got was three acres and a building. "It was like living above the gas station."

She has had a career nearly as serendipitous as her garden. "When my son was 4 or 5, 1 was riding the subway and saw an ad for the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx. I had never been there, and this was one of my last chances before Rio got out of preschool, so I decided to go. When I went in, the man at the gate asked, 'Have you seen our catalog'? I took one, saw a course in landscape design listed, and less than two years later had my certificate." Now, in addition to her design business, she has opened a small antiques shop. "I want to be here all summer," she says. "The Delaware is one of the cleanest rivers in the United States. We have a wonderful fly-fishing eddy. We're under the flight path of Neotropical birds."

Myers looks around. "Each year the garden is so different. Last year, the ragged robin was huge; this year, there's hardly any. It teaches you patience—and observation." She smiles. "I remember being pregnant with Rio and out raking the gravel. Someone drove by in a truck and yelled, 'Hey lady, you'll never get grass to grow there!"

