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HOT STUFF

Quick and easy raised gardens

It's not often a napkin holder sparks a business idea and career path, but that's what happened to Northern California high school teacher Jill Plumb.

"It was definitely one of those lightbulb moments," says Plumb, who recalls the day in January 2009 when she was working in her yard, came into her kitchen and an empty napkin holder caught her eye.

"I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if you could slide boards and build a raised bed like the way napkins slide into a napkin holder?'" she says.

That simple but ingenious idea led her to create the M

Brace, a set of four recycled steel corner brackets that can be used to create a raised bed for flowers or vegetables — without tools — in less than half an hour. You decide the length and width (up to 12 feet per side) and use any kind of lumber, including 2-by-4s, old fence boards and grape stakes. Besides being portable and reusable, the adjustable M Brace is also attractive: The steel braces come in a number of designs, including the Swirl Brace, the Sun Brace and the Carrot Brace.

Plumb says many buyers of her product are homeowners with limited space or people tired of the time and trouble

required to build a traditional raised bed.

"I love the feedback we're getting," she says. "The M Brace sparks people's thinking and creativity. They're coming up with ways to use it that I never imagined, like using it to make a nice-looking compost pile. It's really the teacher in me. I love seeing other people's lightbulb go on."

The M Brace costs \$165 for a set of four and is available at Cottage Gardens, 3995 Emerald Drive, Petaluma, (707) 778-8025; Sloat Garden Center, 700 Sir Francis Drake Blvd., Kentfield, (415) 454-0262; and artofthegarden.net.

— Jeannie Matteucci



Art of the Garden

The M Brace is a set of four recycled steel corner brackets that lets you slide in boards to create a raised bed.