



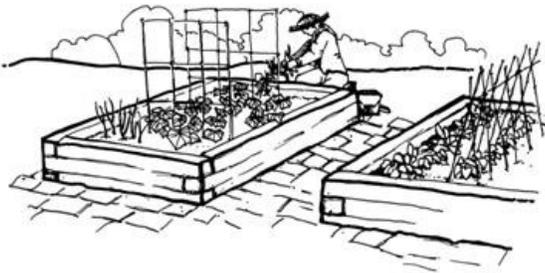
Guilford Gardening Journal

Timely Tips from a Professional Gardening Expert

RAISED BED GARDENING

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Gardening in a raised bed has many benefits. Most gardeners enjoy working in a rich bed of soil that warms early and is weed free. The main advantage of raised beds, however, is the fact that you never need to step on the soil in the bed, which prevents compaction, allowing your plants to develop deep, healthy roots. Raised bed kits are available in stores and online, or you could make your own for little expense or time. Consider adding a raised bed in your garden or landscape, and you and your plants will thrive!



WHAT IS A RAISED BED?

A raised bed is an area higher than the surrounding soil level. The higher level allows for good drainage and root growth, and the soil will warm more quickly in the spring. The goal for raised beds is to have loose, fast draining soil that's rich in organic matter and deep enough (8-10") for plants to develop healthy root systems. Raised beds should be constructed to fit your space and location. Some raised beds are constructed using planks, timbers, logs, or cement blocks. Borderless beds can also be formed by raking soil into mounds, then sloping and pressing down the sides to remove air pockets, which prevents erosion.

WHY SHOULD I USE A RAISED BED?

Once raised beds are established, they are less work because they're easier to weed, water, and fertilize. The organic matter you add to improve the soil goes into the bed, not waterways. You can be creative in the location and the shape of a raised bed. Virtually all plants will grow well in raised beds.

WHAT ARE SOME GUIDELINES?

Let the sun shine in! For vegetable gardening, locate the raised bed in an area that receives at least 6 hours of sun a day. The garden should also be located near a water source. A soaker hose or drip irrigation will supply deep watering, so the plants will receive 1" a week.

Bigger isn't necessarily better. Raised beds can be any shape or size, but square or rectangular shaped beds are most often used for vegetables. A height of at least 8-10" deep is recommended; for gardeners with limited mobility, beds can be raised to wheelchair height so they can be tended while the gardener is seated. Keep the width narrow enough – no wider than four feet -- so you can reach across it when planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting. You can create a free-form garden by using a garden hose to outline the shape. Although raised beds do not require a border, you'll find that the soil stays in place far better with some sort of containment. Once you decide the shape, remove the weeds, grass and rocks from the area.



KEEP IT SIMPLE!

To create a simple 4' x 8' by 10" bed with a wooden border, you can purchase three 2" x 10 x 8" boards. Cut one in half to make two 4-foot long boards that will form the ends. Use the other two boards for the sides. One two inch x 4"x 8' lumber can be cut into 16" lengths to place in each corner. This will anchor the beds in place. (You will have some left over.) Number 12 or 16 galvanized screws can be used to screw the boards together. Drill starter holes into the wood before screwing together. You may use treated or untreated wood, or you can select rot resistant woods such as redwood or cedar. Creosote-treated railroad ties are not recommended. If your bed is longer than about twelve feet, you'll want additional bracing about halfway down each side.

MAKE YOUR BED!

Now that the raised bed is prepared, mix the existing topsoil with organic materials such as compost, aged manure, or shredded leaves. Additional soil can be purchased or moved from nearby areas as needed to fill the bed. The finished soil mixture should be at least 1/3 organic material. Rake the prepared soil into the center of the bed. Spread the soil inside the frame until it is 1-2" from the top edge. Water the bed, let the soil settle for a few days, then plant.



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