

Raised Bed Gardening



The Raised Bed Advantage

Raised bed gardening is often used where soils are poor, thin, contaminated, or poorly-drained. Soils in raised beds heat up more quickly in spring and are, therefore, useful where growing seasons are shorter. They can also be helpful to the elderly or disabled, who may find conventional gardening physically challenging or stressful.

Building a Raised Bed

Raised beds can be built in many different dimensions. A useful size is 4'x 8'. For most plants, an 8" bed height is sufficient. For the elderly or the disabled, taller beds are best, with 16" being a minimum. For wheelchair-accessible beds, a 24" high bed should be planned. The sides of the box should be assembled with 2½-3" decking screws. Corners are reinforced with 2"x 4" lumber, 6" longer than the box is deep (the additional 6" of lumber is buried in the ground, providing additional stability to the box). A sitting ledge of 2"x 4" lumber can be added to the top edge of the box.

Raised beds can be constructed of a variety of materials, but are typically made of 2"-thick lumber. For edible crops, use only rot-resistant, untreated lumber. NOTE: Treated lumber is recommended only for growing non-edible/ornamental plants, such as flowers, due to health and safety concerns over the possibility of preservative chemicals leaching into the soil.

Contents of a Raised Bed

The contents of a raised bed can vary, but a good, basic mix is one part topsoil, one part sand, and one part compost (with or without manure). More elaborate content systems can include (in order, from bottom to top) layers of newspaper, clean straw, blood meal, burlap, humus, compost, shredded leaves, blood meal (again) and potting mix or topsoil.

Planting

Once the bed is built and filled, you're ready to plant! Plants can be spaced more closely in a raised bed, partly because the growing conditions are nearly ideal—the soil is richer, warmer and remains uncompacted. Unlike in a conventional plot, vegetables in raised beds are not grown in rows, allowing for greater planting densities. Plants can be spaced so that the leaves of the mature plants just barely touch. Research done in an Ohio arboretum shows that yields in a raised bed can be double that of a conventional plot.



Cardboard base to smother grass and prevent weeds from invading box.



Finished box with mix of topsoil, sand, and compost.