

Raised Beds: A How-to Guide

Raised bed gardening is easy, convenient, and efficient for gardeners of all ages, skill levels, and physical abilities. All you have to do is find the type of raised bed that works best for you and your garden.



Reasons to Use a Raised Bed System

- Improve soil conditions
- Allows for a wide variety of site options
- Easy maintenance for beginners or gardeners with disabilities
- Easy organization and planning
- Less problems with weeds and pests
- Longer growing season
- Better drainage
- Easy garden preparation and clean up at the beginning and end of the growing season

Types of Raised Beds

- Raised beds can be crafted out of a wide variety of materials.
- Wood is the most common, highly accessible and fairly inexpensive (ensure that the wood is untreated).
- Alternatively, rocks, stones, cinder blocks or bricks may be collected and stacked on top of one another to create an enclosed structure for the bed. Because these are not physically attached they can be rearranged at any time, allowing for some creativity in designing your garden!
- When designing your raised bed system, it is important to keep in mind the gardeners who will be caring for your plants and modify the structure accordingly.



Design Aspects

- Depth: Increasing the depth of your beds will allow for less bending during garden maintenance. This may be beneficial to gardeners who have physical disabilities or injuries which may keep them from easily kneeling or bending over.

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Design Aspects (continued)

- Length: There are no limitations other than your site conditions when deciding the length of the raised bed you want to build. Just remember that creating aisles between beds can decrease foot traffic through beds and make garden maintenance easier.
- Width: This is the most critical characteristic to consider when designing your bed. For most gardeners 4 feet is a good distance that allows for easy access from both sides of the bed. If the garden is going to have children or people with physical limitations working in it, decreasing the width to 3 feet is recommended. This allows for a shorter reach across the bed and easier access for workers.

Maintenance

- Maintaining a raised bed is very similar to maintaining a garden in the ground!
- Keep the area as free of weeds and pests as possible.
- Maintain adequate soil moisture and water for plant growth. (The raised bed will warm and dry out more quickly than the soil in the ground, compensate for this by simply adding additional watering times to your schedule).
- The use of mulches in the form of wood chips or straw can be used to decrease moisture loss, keep the soil cool, and decrease weed problems.
- At the end of the growing season, the bed may be emptied of all soil media and plant residues, if the gardener wishes. You can also till the existing plant matter into the soil for additional organic matter, which will decompose and add nutrients to your soil. After this you can cover the bed in mulch again and let it sit over winter. You will be all ready to add some topsoil and plant your seeds in the spring!

