

THE BEGINNERS GUIDE
TO START AND SUSTAIN A THRIVING
GARDEN IN URBAN CONTEXT

RAISED BED GARDENING



RICHARD LINZ

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Thriving Garden in Urban Context

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Introduction

A raised bed garden is essential for anyone who wants to create a more complex agricultural system designed to be more space efficient and to produce the most yields. It is a proven, tried and tested method for raising production level and quality, allow gardening efficiency in small spaces; and it even saves time and money. It even allows itself to be more efficient for using soil known for being difficult to work with, such as clay.

Like its name suggests, raised-bed gardening implies that the structure where you are planting your garden in is raised off ground level. The structure, typically made of 2x4' box crates without bottoms, are filled with mounded soil and walled around with the structure. The great thing about it is that you can easily grow *any* vegetable on raised garden beds, as well herbs or annual or perennial blooms and shrubs.

Typically, experienced gardeners are the ones partial to this gardening method. They do this as a way to avoid the numerous challenges surrounding seasonal gardening. But this doesn't mean novice gardeners should not attempt to employ this gardening technique as they make their way into the wonderful world of gardening. The key to raised bed gardening is to ensure that you use good soil. So much so that you need to use customized soil and compost blend to ensure the success of your garden. Drainage is also an important part of gardening on raised beds and should be built into your bed structure or walls, ensuring that the soil is in place despite being able to easily drain it of excess water. Plants can be spaced closer together to make sure your production of harvests go up, and this also means efficiency when it comes to watering your garden.

Because raised bed gardening is usually used to grow edible plants, be very careful of the kind of materials you use. For instance, if you use wood that has been treated with toxins or railroad ties, this might seep its way into

your vegetables and herbs. Instead, experienced gardeners use cedar wood or eco-friendly lumber.

Advantages of Raised Bed Gardening

Like other types of gardening, raised bed gardens have both advantages and disadvantages. Understanding both sides and weighing them properly will help you decide if you should consider making your own raised bed garden or stick with a more conventional garden plot. Let's start with the advantages of building a raised bed garden.

Requires Small Space

Raised bed gardens help in maximizing all the available area and are usually smaller than traditional gardens. Therefore, a raised bed garden is a perfect garden plot for areas with limited space.

Home Beautification

Raised bed gardens are a great addition to a home or an establishment's landscape. Raised bed gardens can be made out of bricks, woods, bamboos, and other materials. You can make a raised bed garden design that complements your home exterior and choose plant varieties for your garden beds.

Less Costly

There are certain reasons why having a raised bed garden is cheaper than other gardening methods. First, you can make it out of using recycled materials such as old rot-resistant woods. If you have unused or old woods at home, you won't have to spend money in building the garden. If you purchase the woods in the salvage yard, it will be a lot cheaper. Second, it requires no costly power cultivation equipment such as a garden tiller.

Better Drainage System

Raised beds can drain excess water better as compared to the conventional garden beds. This helps a plant to breathe, which also helps in the plant's growth. So, if you're living in an area with saturated soil, raised bed gardens will surely be your only option to grow different kinds of plants.

Prevents Soil Compaction

Moreover, there is a great reduction in soil compaction in having raised bed gardens. In a conventional garden, it's common to step on the ground with plants on it while tending to daily gardening. With raised bed gardening, you can properly grow your plants without stepping on them as you do your gardening.

More Manageable

You are able to prepare your beds according to the needs of your plants. Therefore, you can group your plants that require highly acidic soil in one area, and another bed for other types of plants requiring a different pH level. You can choose to build a raised bed garden if your area has a poor and rocky soil quality or is located on sloped terrain. You can just add healthier soil to replace the poor or rocky soil and grow your plants.

Protection from Weed, Pest, and Erosion

Raised bed gardening also allows you to take more control of weeds. You can till your soil to remove the weeds before building the beds and filling them with healthy and weed-free soil. The raised beds can act as a barrier and protect your plants from pathway weeds, aggressive grasses, snails, and other infestation. The garden bed's borders can also prevent heavy rains from eroding or washing away the garden soil.

More Convenient

Through raising the soil level off the ground, you can experience reduced back strain, especially when bending over to tend to your garden. This can be beneficial to older individuals who enjoy gardening. In fact, the gardener can even sit on the bed's edge while weeding if the bed's borders are well built. With better soil quality and higher soil levels, you can expect easier access and less maintenance, as well as bigger harvests that are easier to collect.

Bountiful Harvest

The soil mixes utilized in raised bed gardens are usually high in quality and contain rich amounts of organic matter. Therefore, it improves drainage while increasing crop yields as well. At the same time, you can distance the plants a little closer together since you don't need extra space to step on which again increases productivity per square foot. You should continue to use some amount of plant spacing since your plants will need ample space as they grow.

Disadvantages of Building a Raised Bed Garden

You will have to consider them too before you finally decide whether or not to push through with your raised bed garden.

Needs More Watering During Warm Seasons

Elevated garden beds dry quicker, especially during the warm months, which increase the need for supplemental water. This can be a disadvantage to people who are residing in hot climates or who don't have time to water regularly.

You Have To Till By Hand

For any tilling, you'll have to do it by hand since it will be difficult to make use of tractors or rotary tillers in elevated planting areas. Everything that you need to do to take care of the garden bed should be done by hand.

Difficult to Disassemble and Transfer

If you've made your raised bed garden using landscape blocks, railroad ties, or timbers and you want to transfer your garden, then you'll find a hard time disassembling and reassembling your garden.

Promotes Plant Diseases

Although raised bed gardening can reduce the risk of weed and pest infestation, it can promote plant diseases. Raised beds have closed spacing that reduce air circulation and allow crops to hold moisture longer. This can encourage plant diseases to develop and damage your crops.

Danger in Using Wrong Type of Materials

You have to choose the materials you'll utilize in constructing your raised bed garden, and there are some materials that shouldn't be used. This is because of the possible leaking of soil over time that may poison or kill your plants. Most of the disadvantages in having a raised bed garden are preventable. This gardening method gives you the control you need to grow your crops according to your resources and goals.

Materials to Build a Raised Bed Garden

Part of deciding to build a raised bed garden is choosing and gathering the necessary materials, depending on what you think will best fit your home or the area where you will place your raised bed garden. Here are some of the materials you might consider choosing:

Bricks

Reclaimed bricks are considered excellent raised bed materials because they're solid and don't require any maintenance. It can also be utilized to make various forms and shapes for your raised bed garden and give it a formal look that will last longer than other materials. However, it requires more labor than other materials since it requires mortaring, so you may need the help and expertise of a professional.

Cedar or Redwood

This is an excellent material you can use because it's durable and naturally resists rot, so it will last for several years. It's also easy to assemble especially for beginners. However, it's expensive and, eventually, you'll need to replace it when it gets damaged.

Composite Timber

Composite timber is usually made of polypropylene and wood fiber or from recycled materials. Sometimes, they come with UV ray protection that makes them last longer.

Concrete Blocks

The good thing about this material is its affordability and availability. You can find them in most hardware and garden stores. If you have any broken concrete at home, then you can use these pieces to create your raised bed garden. Concrete is solid and requires no maintenance. However, it's very heavy to move around and usually isn't nice to look at compared to other materials.

Natural Rocks

This will give your garden a rustic or natural look. Stones are also a popular option for framing a raised bed garden with or without mortar. They also last longer together with concrete as compared to wood. It requires no maintenance and can make different forms and shapes for your raised bed garden. However, stone can be quite heavy to move around.

Old Tires

This is not recommended if you're growing vegetables as tires can release toxic materials into your garden's soil. However, it can be used in ornamental gardening.

Pressure-Treated Lumber

Choose the newer version of pressure-treated lumber that contains copper. The new type doesn't have arsenic that can leach into your garden's soil causing you any harm. The good thing about this material is that it's rot-resistant and will last for several years.

The Benefits of Raised Bed Gardening

There are many great benefits of growing your own fresh fruits and vegetables. Raised bed gardens are for the gardener who wants to grow bumper crops of favorite vegetables, and for those who want to grow different varieties of flowers, such as roses or azaleas. Let's take a closer look at some of the benefits that you can enjoy by incorporating raised beds into your garden.

You determine the width of your beds but it is recommended that you go no wider than 4 feet across so you will be able to have ready access to all parts of your raised bed. You will not need to incorporate pathways through each bed (the pathways go around the beds), so there's much more focus the growing space. Removing the need to walk through your plants also ensures that your seedlings are not going to be inadvertently trampled as you are pulling weeds.

Sloped terrain is often quite a challenge for gardeners. Raised beds allow you to adjust the design of your bed so that the sloped terrain no longer poses a barrier to easy growing.

Plant placement in raised garden beds is handled differently than in the traditional row gardens; this can allow you to more than **quadruple your crop production** than you would see with a traditional garden. As an additional bonus, many gardeners find that their raised beds use 20% of the space needed for single row planting. This can allow you to truly maximize your available space. If space is at a premium in your garden, your raised beds will allow you to take full advantage of the space that you do have.

Raised beds allow gardeners to embrace **organic growing methods**, without the concern about what chemicals may be lingering in their garden soil. Many lawns have been treated heavily with an assortment of chemicals

to promote year-round green growth and of course in an effort to reduce weeds. It can potentially take several years for all of those chemicals to fully cycle out of your soil, and it can also mean that your plants are absorbing them directly as they grow. By starting fresh, with brand new organic soil, you can be assured that your raised beds and resulting produce are chemical free.

Traditional gardens are often reliant on a **location** where it is easiest to work the soil, which is not always convenient for daily weeding, watering, and other attention. With your raised beds, you can select placement that works for you and your lifestyle. Imagine placing your raised beds right off of your kitchen so that you can pop out for quick tomato harvest in the evening. With easy and convenient access, your garden will get much better attention, and is sure to thrive under your care.

Because you are **starting with fresh soil**, you will not have to immediately be concerned about weeds existing in the garden. You will also be able to avoid nematodes and other pests that lurk in the ground like grubs or squash vine borer larvae. Fresh soil, fresh start!

Soils that are above ground level are able to warm up much faster than the surrounding soil. This poses several advantages for your garden. In the spring, while the ground may take several hours to reach a nice warm temperature, your raised beds can not only maintain a steady temperature but rapidly rise in degrees as they are warmed by the sun. This will result in much **faster germination and seedling growth**; jumpstarting your growing season.

Warmer soil can also assure you of an **extended growing season**. Simply cover your plants as the temperatures dip at the end of the summer, and you'll be able to see those late tomatoes turn rosy red and those butternuts turn that warm autumn hue.

If you live in an area that receives high rainfall amounts you may find that your traditional garden beds quickly become waterlogged, or that walking on them soon after heavy rains compacts the soil. Raised bed gardens have **superior drainage**, which can prove to be hugely beneficial if you are growing plants that do not like to have soggy feet.

Of course, it is not all blossoms and happiness with raised beds. They do present some potential challenges. However, if you are aware of them then you'll be able to better prepare for the challenges as you meet them.

- Elevated garden beds do offer the superior drainage that you're looking for, but they can also dry out faster if you are in an arid climate and of course during the warmer summer months. Supplemental watering can be introduced if needed.

- It can often prove costly to invest in the frame materials and new soil as you set about establishing your raised beds. Costs can be kept reasonable of course, but it's important to take all associated costs into consideration during the planning stages.

- The often-constrictive sizes of raised beds can lead to the limited rotation of crops, which may also lead to an increase in problems with nematodes and soil-borne diseases over time. This can be resolved with good crop rotation awareness.

- Just about any vegetables can be grown in raised beds, but over time you may find that they are simply not the best solution for vegetables that tend to sprawl. These could include cucumbers, pumpkins, and even watermelons.

- There is sometimes the increased concern about foliar diseases as a result of the increased plant density seen with raised beds. This can be combatted with careful planning and monitoring of your garden.

At the end of the day, raised bed gardening allows you to grow a larger garden, get a much more plentiful harvest and of course put in much less work than traditional gardens. Growing your own fresh vegetables and fruits can also help your family to see a nutritional boost, which is something that we can all thoroughly appreciate.

Planning Your Garden

Before you go for your raised bed gardening project, you need to make a plan so you will know what you will need and be ready with all the things necessary to make your project a success. Hence, right at the beginning, you need to make a checklist of all that you need as well as all of the steps you should take to get your gardening project established and running.

7 Factors That Make a Great Raised Bed Garden

There are many factors that you will need to take into consideration when you build a raised bed garden. Fortunately, all of these factors are easy to deal with, and you can set up your garden in no time – even if you have next-to-no experience in gardening.

Sunlight

How much sunlight will your garden require? This is perhaps one of the most important questions you need to ask before you start with your plan for the raised bed garden. For vegetables, the basic amount of sun requirement is about 8 hours of sunlight. There will be varied sun requirements for flowers – check with a gardening specialist or your local garden supplier. For a good garden, you will need to ensure you get adequate sunlight.

How Big Will Your Garden Be?

With the raised garden bed, you can choose how much area you designate for your garden. This type of garden is especially useful when you are living in areas where open space for gardening is limited. The raised bed garden can be made completely mobile – build it waist high and on wheels so you can push it around wherever you prefer: indoors or outdoors. The best design to use for this situation is the square foot garden – where the plots are divided into 1 square foot plots and built just as large as it will allow you to reach its center without too much strain.

Is Fencing Required?

The raised bed garden might require fencing but not in the mode that you would use for a regular garden. This garden will require protection from

birds – maybe – and gophers or other animals that might burrow into your garden from below.

For this purpose, you should lock the bottom of the raised bed garden with wire mesh – the type used for chicken coops. This will allow the soil to breathe, will not interfere with water drainage, and so on. The mesh will prevent anything from getting in from downside; for above the garden, you can use specially made covers to keep the birds away.

What Type of Soil Will You Require?

Check with your local gardening center to find out what type of soil you need for the plants you are planning on using. You will need to know what levels of fertility you will need to have for your soil to ensure that your garden starts on a good foot. Specifically, you will need to know include how much organic matter, how much mulch, etc. is required to get the earth ready for planting of a new crop.

What Type of Plants Should YOU Choose?

While some plants can adapt in different time zones and climate zones, most do not. Even those that do adapt do so with a price. The plants that thrive in other parts of the world will more often than not mutate slightly to adapt to their new environment. Therefore, it is best to decide what plants you'd like to plant depending upon the climate zone in which you live and the type of plants that are native to where you live.

If you are a beginner, try consulting the local gardening shop for reference or check USDA.gov to find the nearest local cooperative extension services. It is very important that you choose the right plants, or you will end very disappointed with the results. You will also need to decide whether you are planning to grow vegetables – and if so, make a list of vegetables you

would like to grow or you may decide you would like to grow a flower garden in which case you would need to plan what type of flowers, what colors, and what fragrances you would like to have.

Pay Attention to the Seasons

You will also need to pay attention to which plants are best for which season and what you enjoy most for each season. In case you cannot be bothered with seasonal plants, then decide type of evergreens you would prefer. For help in deciding what to plant, you can contact your local gardening store/ center and/ or the local extension services at usda.gov.

If you prefer seasonal plants, you will need to make a seasonal plan, so you will know what and when you need to plant to have flowers/ vegetables throughout the year.

Ensure You Have Some Basic Tools at Hand

You will need some tools – though raised bed gardening requires the minimum – such as a soaking hose, garden fork, hoe, hand-weeder, and a medium-sized basket for moving soil and/ or mulch around.

Building Structures

You can always buy readymade raised garden beds. For those who want to start from scratch, building a raised garden bed is not that difficult. Use the following steps for a DIY project.

Type of Wood

Cedar is the most popular choice for material for these types of garden beds for one major reason – cedar is naturally rot proof. Among the many options, the Western red cedar is the best. Other choices are Port Oxford (yellow), Vermont white cedar, and Juniper. Cedar can last up to 15 years depending upon the weather conditions in your garden and local climate. In the worst conditions, you can safely expect to use the cedar beds for at least 10 years.

The Best Height of the Bed

The height of the bed is according to your convenience. Generally, the height is 12”, which is the result of two 2”x6” boards stacked one upon the other. If you have good soil in your garden, you may have the bed be just 6” tall.

You can build a bed as high as you wish. Just keep in mind that with the increased height, there is increased pressure on the sides of the beds which could tend to bend outwards. To prevent this, you need to add a cross support in bed that is longer than 6 feet and taller than 18 inches.

The height of the bed also depends upon the types of plants you are going to grow. Various vegetables require various soil depths. Check the table below for a general idea (vegetables are listed in reverse alphabetical order):

Shallow Roots 12” – 18”	Medium Roots 18” – 24”	Deep Rooting 24” – 36”
Strawberries	Turnips	Winter squash
Spinach	Summer Squash	Watermelon
Radish	Rutabagas	Tomatoes
Potatoes	Peppers	Sweet potatoes
Onions, chives, leeks	Peas	Rhubarb
Lettuce	Kale	Pumpkin
Kohlrabi, Bok Choy	Eggplant	Parsnips
Garlic	Cucumber	Okra
Endive	Chard	Beans (lima)
Corn	Carrots	Asparagus
Chinese cabbage	Cantaloupe	Artichokes
Celery	Beets	
Cauliflower	Beans (dry, pole, snap)	
Cabbage		
Brussels sprouts		
Broccoli		
Arugula		



6" bed height



11.5" bed height



32" and 24" bed heights

The Best Width of the Bed

The most recommended width of the bed is 4 feet. This is because the best raised garden beds should allow you to reach the center of the bed without too much strain and 4' is just enough for that. Long beds are okay as long as adequate support is added every 4-6 feet along the length to ensure that there is no bowing out.

Exposure to Light

To optimize exposure to sunlight, the most popular way to arrange the beds is north to south. In this way, there is less chance for the tall plants to overshadow the tiny plants. Of course, in such a case, the tall plants should be placed towards the north and the smaller ones towards the south.

For this plan to succeed, you need to know how tall your plants will grow. If you are planning to plant multiple vegetable plants in one bed, you need to be acquainted with the height of the various plants.

Vegetable	Size at Maturity	Vegetable	Size at Maturity
Beets	4"-12"	Radishes	2"-6"
Endive	6"-9"	Lettuce	6"-12"
Carrots	6"-15"	Turnips	6"-12"
Arugula	8"-10"	Spinach	6"-15"
Cabbage	12"-18"	Parsnips	6"-18"
Chinese cabbage	12"-24"	Onions	8"-24"
Garlic	12"-24"	Kohlrabi	9"-12"
Kale	12"-24"	Leeks	12"-24"
Cauliflower	12"-30"	Pumpkin	12"-24"
Chard	12"-30"	Squash, summer	12"-24"
Eggplant	12"-36"	Squash, winter	12"-24"
Cucumber	12"-60"	Potatoes	12"-30"
Broccoli	18"-24"	Sweet potato	12"-30"
Celery	18"-24"	Rhubarb	12"-36"
Beans, bush	24"-30"	Watermelon	12"-36"
Beans, lima (bush)	24"-36"	Peppers, hot	12"-48"
Brussels sprouts	24"-36"	Rutabaga	12"-18"
Asparagus	48"-72"	Peppers, bell	24"-36"
Artichoke	48"-60"	Peas	24"-72"
Corn	48"-96"	Okra	24"-96"
Beans, pole	96"-144"	Tomatoes	24"-96"

An example of a mixed garden would be having lettuce – which is a short plant in the front - followed by beans - which are medium in height - and at the back you can have tomatoes, which grow very tall. Check out the picture below to get an idea about the way such a mixed raised bed would look:

4 Steps to Build Your Raised Bed Garden

There are many bed designs, and you can buy these or make your own. Both are easy and depending upon your time and talent, both methods can be used. In case you are tempted to build your own, these 4 simple steps will walk you through the process and in no time, you will have some great beds for your raised bed garden.

Step 1: Get Your Materials Ready

For a 3'x6' bed the following material will be needed:

SIX 6'x6" wide 1" or thicker boards

ONE 4"x4"x4" post

THIRTY-TWO 2" stainless steel wood screws

ONE roll 3' wide ¼" or ½" hardware cloth – cut length as per your needs

Soil as per your requirements and about 40 pounds of organic manure

You can use 12-inch-wide boards. It is easier, though, to buy 6" wide boards as this will save you the time and effort of cutting them. Cut the 6'by 6" lumber into two. This will give you four 3' boards for the bed.

Cut the foot sections in dimensions measuring 4"x4"x4'. These should be four 1-foot sections. These will be required for each corner.

Attach two of the 3' sections to the 4"x4"x12" parts with 2" wood screws. Repeat to make the bed.

Step 2: Attaching the Sides

To the frame, you will need to attach 2 of the 6'x6" lumber using 2" wood screws. It is very important that you ensure that the screws are put through

the 4"x4"x12" part of the lumber and not through the 1" wide part of the end piece (see picture).

Step 3: Ensure That Pests Stay Out of Your Garden

If you are living in an area where gophers, moles, and other such pests are prone to attack your garden, you will need to add reinforcements right at the beginning. Just attach a ¼" hardware cloth (super-tough screening material) to the bed you are building.

Cut the "cloth" into 6'6" – best when you buy the 3' wide roll – so you do not have to worry about trimming it. Cut just at the edge of the 4"x4" post – use a pair of snips for this purpose – and staple it tight.

In the end, your bed should look like this:

Step 4: Get Your Bed Ready - Add Soil

Now that you have your raised bed garden ready, it is time to fill it with soil. You can buy a high-quality planting soil from your local gardening center or make your own soil. To enrich your own soil, you can add leaves you collect from the fall to the bottom of the bed and soak them with water. Add the soil and rake it well to prevent it from compacting. Add to this mix about 40 pounds of organic manure and rake it again. Your bed is now ready for planting.

Mastering the Basics

Now you are ready to get down to the nitty-gritty: where you are going to build your raised bed(s), possible sizes, and how to prepare the area beforehand.

Location

Unless all you want to grow are greens and root crops, your garden beds should be located in a spot that gets at least six hours of sun every day. If you live in the city, this may be a bit trickier than you think. Places that get eight hours of full sun during the months of June, July and August may not get any in the early spring or late fall.

If you live in U.S. Hardiness Zones one through four, this won't matter since you only have around ninety frost-free days anyway. But in the warmer ones, you can plant out earlier in the spring and let things grow later in the fall, especially if you plan to give your crops some frost protection.

The caveat with that is that the sun appears lower in the sky in the early spring and late fall, casting a lot more shadows than during the summer. Especially if you plan to build next to a tall structure, such as a fence, shed, tree or right across from your neighbor's house, you need to be sure that the area will get enough sun for when you want to plant.

As an example, let me tell you about my north Texas suburban garden. It is mostly in the side yard, which has an eight-foot-tall wooden fence separating it from our neighbor's side yard. From mid-October to late March, the half of the side yard next to the fence is in shadows, as is the entire portion of the side yard from our kitchen window to the front of the house, about a third of the area.

So, for my fall, winter and early spring garden, I can grow things in the bed that is in the half of the side yard next to the house, but nothing in the other bed. I can grow nothing in the 32-square foot bed outside the kitchen window during the winter; by early spring there is just enough sunlight during the day to grow greens there.

If you plan to garden outside of the summer months, and especially near a tall structure, you may want to wait a year so that you can observe how much sun a particular area gets during each season of the year. Even greens need two hours of sun a day, or several hours in dappled sunlight.

Your garden beds should also be as close to the house as possible. If you live in the city where any location in your yard would be close to the house. While that is true, there is close, and there is **close**. I located my garden in the side yard so I could keep an eye on my son while he played in the backyard.

But even though the garden is right next to the house, I can't see it out the back door and that makes it harder to remember to go out and cut herbs for dinner or check to see if something is ready to harvest. A sunny place in the backyard, just outside your back door, is the best location for a vegetable garden.

Another location issue has to do with the orientation of the garden beds. If they are going to be long, rectangular beds – not square or keyhole beds – if it all possible place them in an east-west orientation, so that one end is on the east side and the other on the west, and each of the long sides is on either the north or south side.

Sizing the beds

The ever-so-popular four-foot-square bed. This shape and size allow most adults easy access to all parts of the bed, even the middle, without stepping onto it.

What if you want to make it longer than four feet? In that case, make the bed as long as you want, but no wider than THREE feet. Trust me on this: the books that say “anybody” can reach easily into a bed that is four feet wide without stepping on it must think that “anybody” is six feet tall! Unless you are building square beds, four feet is too wide. Make it three, and gardening will be much more enjoyable.

Of course, keyhole beds are a different story. Their shape and the location and width of the path make a slightly wider bed perfectly do-able.

Speaking of the width of the path...you want at least two feet between raised beds. If you are tight on space, you will be tempted to go narrower.

Don't. The photo below – from my own garden with an eighteen-inch path – illustrates one reason to have wider paths.

Plants will often spread wider than you think they will, taking over your path. Another reason for wider paths is that they allow you to move between beds without having to do a balancing act. And you can bend over to watch a bee on a borage flower in one bed without a branch from the tomato in the adjacent bed tickling your fanny.

Preparing the growing area

Once you have decided on the location, width and length of your raised bed, it's time to prepare the area. First, mark off the area. You can either mark it off with string wrapped around a stake in each corner of the bed or put a brick where each corner will be. If you're building keyhole beds you will mark off the perimeter.

Next, decide whether you need to kill off the grass. Some gardening experts claim that it's enough to put several layers of newspapers, one layer of corrugated cardboard, or a layer of heavy black plastic over the area. Others recommend spraying the grass with 20% vinegar to kill it or digging out the

sod. I say, the grass will very likely eventually try to grow back into the bed, especially if it is a rhizomatic variety, so you might as well not take great pains to remove it.

On the other hand, if you kill off the grass it could be a couple of years before it reappears, so if you want to save yourself a bit of weeding, then go ahead. Also, if you dig the sod out deep enough, it may take even longer to come back.

In fact, digging out the sod is another way to create a free border around your bed. Dig it out in six-inch high “bricks”, turn the bricks sod-side down, and arrange them around the perimeter of your bed. I’ve never tried this method myself, but I read that this improvised raised bed border will last several years.

If you use black plastic to kill the grass, leave it there for a month or two and then remove it before building the borders and filling the bed. If you pile up newspaper (use four or five layers) or use cardboard, those materials can stay since they are biodegradable.

A word of caution about newspaper: while it is supposed to be biodegradable, sometimes several layers of it will harden instead of breaking down. While I haven’t had that problem, I have heard enough about it that I prefer to use cardboard now and recommend that over newspaper.

Besides, cardboard (the plain, brown kind – never use cardboard from product packaging, with a waxy outside and glossy colored print) generally has been exposed to fewer chemicals during manufacturing and processing than newspaper.

Once you have laid out the newspaper or cardboard, if you are using a border you may want to line the walls of the bed with either landscaping fabric or heavy black plastic. Line the walls and the first few inches into the

bottom of the bed on all sides. This will keep grass from sneaking back into the bed from outside. If you're like me, you may want to avoid any kind of synthetic material (the landscaping fabric is also synthetic). If so, you can either do nothing and just have a little more weeding to do later on as the grass returns, or you can purchase hemp or organic cotton fabric.

This latter solution will be costly and, of course, won't last nearly as long as black plastic, but will last longer than cardboard.

Now that you have selected the garden bed location, slope and size; now that you have killed or covered up the grass (even if you kill it you should still cover the area with cardboard); now that you have picked out border material, brought it home, and set it up around the bed area; now you are ready to fill your raised bed with rich, nutritious soil.

Soil

Every successful gardener will tell you that soil preparation comes first when you aim for a bountiful harvest. Without proper soil, you may as well throw in the towel before you even begin. Initially you should focus all your attention on the condition and quality of soil you are going to use. A good quality soil will ensure that your vegetable plants grow to their full potential and that you will not spend too much valuable time fighting pests and weeds.

Following are a few tips for mixing rich and fertile soil to suit all your planters and garden beds. Your locality may influence the type of soil you will need to a small degree, but these basic principles are applicable everywhere, regardless of where you live.

1. Topsoil does not Always Contain Organic Matter

Purchased soil often looks quite promising: dark in color, well screened and clean. This might not always be an indication of what it actually contains. It may well be a good growing medium though without any of the vital organic matter that is essential for growth. Therefore, you should always inquire from the attendant at the garden center what the soil consists of and what its origin is. You should assume that some extra feeding would be necessary to build up this soil to the standards needed for successful gardening.

2. Revitalize Soil Annually

Usually new gardens will do fairly well during their initial year even though no additional matter was added to amend the soil. The reason for this is that the available nutrients, organic matter and trace minerals have not been tapped yet. However, after one or two seasons of successive gardening, the

crops will have used up all the riches in the soil. That is why it is so important that you revitalize your gardening soil regularly.

A wonderful solution is to plant 'green manure' as a cover crop after the first two seasons of growing vegetables. These crops are very easy and simple to grow and have many benefits. As soon as the cover crop has matured, chop it up and then dig it lightly into your soil. Now your soil has been replenished with fresh organic matter. Consider growing leguminous crops like alfalfa or fenugreek since they will fix the atmospheric nitrogen in such a way that it can be used as nutrients by the plants. This type of green manure has many benefits; their roots will loosen the soil, bringing the deeper nutrients nearer to the surface of your garden beds. While you chop up the manure and work it into the ground as well as the activity of the roots will aerate your soil, thus improving the drainage for future crops.

3. Soil must be Crumbly, Fluffy and Light

You want to make it as easy as possible for the roots of your plants to be able to work their way through the layers of soil in search of moisture and nutrients. Compacted and dense soil will make this essential task of plant roots very difficult and they will spend so much energy struggling to get to the nutrients that not much will be left for the rest of the plant to grow. You can easily facilitate better root growth by lightening your garden soil. This in turn will lead to better vegetative growth and you will see the positive results when your plants start to flourish.

How do you know if your soil is light enough? A simple test is to push your finger into it. You should have no trouble to poke it in up to the third knuckle of the finger. If you struggle to achieve this then you will have to lighten the soil by adding peat moss and working it into the top layer. I have already mentioned that peat moss is acidic by nature, so you will most probably have to add lime. Always enquire about the pH level of the soil

you purchase. You need to know if lime will be necessary. Acidic soil is commonly found in most areas of our country, so lime is usually needed, although there are regions that have alkaline soil. Many gardeners prefer to use vermiculite for lightening the soil because it does not break down at the same speedy rate as the peat moss.

4. The Ultimate Amendment for Soil: Compost

Making your own compost is easy and can save you extra expense. Many gardeners have a compost heap in their back gardens. Compost consists of organic material filled with nutrients to turn normal soil into a rich medium for all your plants. Use this valuable resource correctly and wisely and you can be sure of a prolific vegetable garden. Instead of adding compost to the soil right after harvesting, rather postpone it to two or three weeks before you plant your next crop. You want to prevent a sudden downpour from washing away all that wonderful richness in the compost and undo all your hard work.

The general idea amongst many people who consider a compost heap an unsightly, smelly mess is truly a misconception. If you go about it the correct way, your compost heap will be neat and tidy with a wonderful rich and earthy aroma. Veteran gardeners will tell you that active compost heaps should not be smelly. If your plot is too small to allow for a larger compost pile, you can purchase a sealed composter. This device contains smells and is small and tidy in appearance. Because they are sealed, they are immune to dogs, mice, raccoons and such-like critters.

A composter in your garden has an additional benefit; it will take care of all the dead plant matter left after the harvest. After your last tomatoes have been harvested, carefully remove all the 'skeletons' from the plants, break or chop it into smaller pieces and simply throw them into the compost pile. It is a wonderful way to re-use all plant residues in your garden to make a

contribution to the nutrient-rich compost for your future crops. Just inspect the dead plant matter carefully for any diseases before you add it to the composter.

5. Organic Fertilizers are the Best Choice

Do not be overly enticed by all the many product claims you read on the packaging of chemical fertilizers. They may be true, but the advantages often do not last and are rather short-lived. You will have to reapply them regularly after each planting. In the end, the benefits of these commercial fertilizers may be lessened to some extent because they do not improve the condition of the soil, the most important aspect of successful gardening.

I would therefore suggest that when you find yourself short of compost, to make use of an organic fertilizer. It will also give your little seedlings an instant boost. Canola meal is one of the popular fertilizers. This material is finely ground and lightweight, making it very easy to sprinkle onto your beds. On top of that, it is relatively inexpensive and free of weeds. (Some kinds of manures may include weeds). Make sure to mix the canola meal lightly into the topsoil because mice love it and may attack your beds. For the same reason, take care where you store your bag. It should be well sealed and in any dry spot where mice will not be able to reach. \

Planting Your Raised Bed Garden

If your soil is extremely compacted or has poor drainage, it can be very difficult to have a garden- but we all want to eat more fruits and vegetables, right? If you have the problem of poor soil, then raised bed gardening is your best option.

They take a small amount of space and you can build them on a concrete patio. The drainage provided in a raised bed is greater than that of an in-ground garden. A raised bed that is 1 foot in depth provides sufficient room for most roots.

The soil warms up much quicker in spring than the ground does, so you can plant much earlier. If your bed is narrow, about 3 feet or less, you won't have to step on the soil, which means the soil won't get compacted. Plants grow much better in loose soil.

Be sure that you don't build your raised bed on a wooden deck. Once the bed is full of water and soil, the weight could cause damage to the structure.

If the bed will be sitting on the ground, be sure to line the bed with chicken wire or hardware cloth to prevent burrowing animals (moles & gophers) from coming up into your garden.

As mentioned before, your raised garden bed can be made of a wide variety of materials. You can build it from stone, cinderblocks, wood, brick, or any other material that you can build a base that is at least 1 foot deep. You will want to choose a location in your yard that gets a minimum of six hours of sunlight every day. You can raise almost any type of vegetable in a raised bed. The only thing that doesn't grow well is potatoes and corn. The potatoes need lots of room for their roots and the corn would be so high it would be hard to harvest it.

Tips on Planting a Raised Bed Garden

1. Fill the bed with some compost or good quality potting soil. Rake the surface as level and smooth as you can. Take out any debris or rocks, as they can affect the growth and development of your plants. You want your plants to grow big and healthy, right? Make sure that your soil is as good as you can get it.
2. You can place your plants in the raised beds closer together, since manure, soil additives, and fertilizer can be concentrated in the smaller area. You have much more control over these things than you would in a traditional garden.
3. To plant lettuce, you should poke holes in the soil at six-inch intervals and sprinkle a few seeds in each hole- not all the seeds will grow, but most will. Once your seedlings come through and germinate, you can thin them to one seedling per spot.
4. Another option is to broadcast your seeds on the surface of the raised bed. If you plant carrots, add a layer of fine-textured soil over the tops. Carrots are attractive to some butterflies.
5. Cucumbers can be planted on the edges so that they can trail over the edge of the bed.
6. Water the garden immediately after you are done with your planting.

Planting Tips

1) Don't mix! If you know how to plant a raised garden with plants that prefer different moisture levels, you know that the key is interplanting. Interplanting is mixing several different types of plants in one bed.

Tips on interplanting:

You should plant melons under pea plants. This way they don't crowd each other out.

You shouldn't plant borage and asparagus in the same bed. Asparagus loves to drink water and the borage will wilt if there is too much water in the soil.

You should not plant carrots and endive together if you plan to use compost containing peat moss. You will want to plant the endive when you harvest the carrots.

You shouldn't place a plant that matures quickly with one that takes it's time to grow and ripen. You don't want to be harvesting and disturb the ones that aren't ready, right?

2) You can prevent soil erosion. Soil erosion can harm your plants, even kill them if it gets too much. So, you will need to judiciously prepare your soil to prevent the sun and the wind from eroding the soil and harming your plants.

When you're making the decision of what to garden and how, make sure that you purchase moisture holding polymers to use- they lock in the moisture. They work much better in a raised bed garden, which is enclosed since there can be a much heavier concentration of them. Just be certain that you don't sow them with the seeds. They can push the seeds out when you water. Add them when you are preparing the soil so that you can prevent any mishaps.

3) Learn how to rotate your crops and group the shallow rooted plants together and the deep-rooted plants together. Your garden can show off both types of plants.

The deep-rooted plants will need more soil depth. Make sure that you take the time to aerate your soil when you are preparing it. Shallow rooted plants will need nutrient rich soil and will require much more water near the surface.

For these reasons, it's best to have more than one container, but if you only have one, that's okay too. Just be sure that you change the soil each year so that you can alternate between shallow rooted and deep-rooted plants. You may want to build a raised bed garden with stones so that you can build it up or take it down according to what type of plants you're planting.

4) You should know how to raise your garden for maximum growth and development of your plants. As long as you have prepared your soil correctly, your plants will grow tall. For your bean, tomato, climbing peas, and cucumber plants, you may want to build a tepee, trellis, or arbor to help them grow.

When planting in raised beds, you can place those plants that like more shade under those climbing or tall plants.

Note: You should plant eggplant and onions on the South side of your garden, especially if you have placed your tall plants on the North.

5) Amend your soil after each planting. You've done well through a season of crops, you've kept your weeds out and you've raised beautiful, delicious vegetables. Now, you want to plant more, but you will need to add some more fertilizer or soil amenders before planting again.

You put so much work into your raised bed garden, you don't want to deplete your soil. So, you will want to prepare a soil amender or some fertilizer before planting again. Make sure you follow the directions so that you don't plant too soon after you add them and end up killing your plants before they have a chance to grow.

The soil is vital to the success of the garden, and what you put in is what you will get out. In time, your plants will use up all the nutrients in your soil, so you will want to use a high-quality topsoil mixed well with fertilizer or manure. If you annually add humus to the top of your soil, it will keep the plants and the soil healthy.

Growing an Organic Home Garden

Going Natural: Organic Gardening Techniques

Organic gardening has come to mean as growing of food products without the presence of synthetic hormones, pesticides, or fertilizers. It will give you, home gardener, a hands-on chance to promote and develop the natural diversity and cycle. Your garden should be sustainable and self-sufficient without relying on artificial nourishment and chemicals.

Knowing what exactly what had gone into the process of growing your food will give you some form of peace and satisfaction. Organically grown vegetables and fruits ultimately taste superior and sometimes, look healthier too. Don't be daunted by the organic style of gardening. You will get used to it and the benefits are for the long term.

The chemical-free way will solve not only your practical needs but also the ethical needs of the environment. You will save water, protect the wildlife, and contribute to the balance in biodiversity. You will make a difference in this world right in your backyard.

Begin by deciding on what you truly want for your organic garden. Do you want a few pots of vegetables or do you want a full grown vegetable and fruit garden? Consider your needs and your capacity as a gardener. Be realistic about your expectations especially if you are new to gardening.

Look around your work area. Where is the best place for your organic garden? Will it receive sufficient sunlight? If you plan on growing an herb or vegetable garden, it's best to stay clear of shady areas. Consider your watering and drainage options. If you'd like to add aesthetics to your criteria, consider the location where it can best be viewed and appreciated.

Grow plants, like coriander, marigold, dill, and Echinacea, that can attract beneficial insects. They will maintain a balanced and healthy garden for you. Ladybirds will help you remove caterpillars and spider mites. Bees, who pollinate your flowers, will aid the increase of your fruit yield. If there is a great need to eliminate pests, there are obtainable organic pesticides. Organic pesticides for vegetables may have baking soda or sodium bicarbonate, hydrogen peroxide, and copper or sulfates. Be careful in using baking soda and always clean out the sodium build up. Some biological fungicides are actually beneficial in the prevention of disease development.

Chickens are ideal for organic gardening. They're quiet, resourceful, and behaved. They are great for pest control because they'll be beetles, bugs and removing the slugs and snails. Flies will be chased away from your fruits. Chickens they aid in fertilizing the soil too. Not to mention the fresh eggs they will provide you. Chickens are low-maintenance animals. Just provide them with grains, plenty of fresh water, and a suitable place to rest.

The importance of compost in organic gardening can't be stressed enough. It's one of the fundamental aspects in having a healthy organic garden. A good and vibrant soil will supply the much-needed nutrients for your plants. You don't have to buy a compost mix. You can make them at home by gathering composting organic materials like weeds, leaves, twigs, manure, kitchen scraps, and papers. The process of composting involves decomposing the layers of these matters through time and heat. Not only will you make the soil healthy, but you'll recycle and lessen the dump at the landfills as well.

Sanitation is vital in organic gardening as it prevents the transfer of plant diseases. Clean all your stakes, containers, and trays after using them. Disinfect your supplies by steaming or soaking them in hydrogen peroxide. This process will remove the plant residues. Do not throw the plant residue

in your compost because they could be hosts of diseases. You don't want an epidemic in your garden.

Planting

The thrilling aspect of starting up an organic garden is the picking of plants. There are options of picking organic seeds or saplings that are dependent on the season. If you want a purely organic garden, don't pick the conventional plants that are raised with non-organic compost. If you purchase from the nursery, there is a definite way of determining if the sapling has been grown properly. The root bulb should have the same depth as your organic patch's hole. Its width should be twice as that. At the first plant, water it thoroughly then includes your organic compost that's about 3 inches deep.

Organic garden beds should be created with carefully to reduce any risk of plant diseases and pests that are soil-borne. Grow similar plants in the same garden beds and rotate the beds every year. For example, your bed one can have peas and beans. Bed two will be eggplants and tomatoes. Bed three is for turnips and carrots. The fourth bed contains squashes and cucumbers. Have a rotation system for each bed in each year.

Spacing is essential to increase the plants' susceptibility to disease, intensify light reception, and increase the air circulation. Plants like tomatoes needs stake to keep them from touching the ground. This will expose the plant to extra sunshine and reduce the risk of any disease from the soil.

If you want fruit-bearing trees for your garden, pick the variety that is suitable to the environment and weather. Lemons and oranges are the types of fruit trees that can be grown in almost any type of location. Cherries and apples, on the other hand, will do well in colder conditions. Tropical climate is the best match for avocado and mango. Bear in mind the size of

your garden or yard as most of these trees will have their roots clinging deep and long.

When choosing vegetables seeds or saplings, select varieties that are disease resistant. They should be strong enough to survive contagion. If you go for transplants, examine the leaves, stems and roots meticulously. They should be free of lesions and the roots should have a light color without excess roots or decay. Likewise, if you notice plants in your garden that are showing symptoms of disease, remove them immediately to avoid infecting the nearby plants. Purchase the young plants and don't buy plants which have already produced fruits.

You have your tools, your place, and techniques. Now you are ready to grow your home organic garden.

What to Grow in Your Garden?

Raised bed gardening is becoming more and more popular to take maximum advantage of small spaces. If you plant your raised bed garden correctly, you can get amazing crops of vegetables, flowers, and herbs with very little effort compared to what you must do in traditional gardening.

These types of gardens have an important role in the landscape of the home. They feature framed areas above the ground, and often have wooden frames around the area. They have an increased ability to drain away excess water and eliminate compacted soil. Also, you can add soil nutrients as necessary to help your plants be the best they can be. This allows gardeners to plant a variety of plants in their gardens.

Most plants will work well in raised bed gardens. The exception is those plants that are large or have very deep roots or sprawling top growth. Other plants that don't work in raised beds are those that are top-heavy and tall and therefore need to be firmly anchored.

Since the plants in your raised beds will be sharing soil, light, fertilizer, and water, you should make sure to choose plants with similar or the same requirements for growth and development.

As far as size, moderately tall plants work well. Also, trailing plants or smaller plants work quite well in raised bed gardens and can be planted together. Planting in raised beds is just another type of container gardening, and therefore basically requires you to follow the same rules. Plant your tallest plants in the center of your bed and go down to the smaller plants near the edge. Plant the trailing plants along the edges, so they spill over.

Vegetables are pretty easy to grow in raised beds. You can maximize the amount of yield you get from your crops by planting the summer plants as soon as the spring ones have been harvested and fall ones as soon as the

summer ones have been harvested. Since the fertilizer and soil are easier to control, you can plant vegetables and plants closer together than in a traditional garden.

Also, raised bed gardens are being used to raise tropical houseplants as annuals. In the fall, you can dig them up and bring them in for the winter. The raised garden beds can be a spectacular addition to your backyard décor.

As far as flowering plants go, you can raise both annuals and perennials in your raised garden. You should choose annuals that match the availability of sunlight in your area. Annuals will add a pop of color and look great as border additions in your garden. The growing conditions offered in the raised bed garden seriously increase the growth of the annuals, so make sure that you allow enough room for them to grow. Annuals will flourish in the rich soil offered in the raised bed garden.

Perennials will give your garden a more permanent addition. They will flower year after year and can form the basis for your raised bed garden. You can add perennials to create a low maintenance garden that requires very little work through the seasons. To achieve constant color and flowering, you should choose plants that bloom at various times of the year.

Raised bed gardens are great for vegetable gardening because they offer a neat area for planting. The rich soil will ensure that you have a prosperous harvest, providing that you have placed them in such a way that there is room for growth. Make sure that you read all your labels so that you can decide on the best placement for the plants. An added benefit of the raised bed garden is that it keeps pests out- the frame provides a base to which you can place poles to attach fencing.

Peas

Peas work well in raised garden beds, according to the National Gardening Association. The raised design helps drain the excess water away and allows gardeners to plant earlier. You should plant peas after the last frost of the winter.



Peppers

According to the National Gardening Association, peppers grow quite well in raised bed gardens, especially if they're really wet. This is because of the drainage and the warmer temperatures offered by raised bed gardens. It's best to plant them after the last spring frost, but they can be started inside earlier and then moved outside to create an earlier harvest.



Eggplant

Like peppers, raised beds are great for growing eggplants. They like lots of sun as they grow and will do exceptionally well with a layer of mulch around the base of the plants to prevent the growth of weeds. Eggplants have beautiful purple flowers that make your vegetable garden especially attractive.



Okra

Okra grows quite well in raised beds and does well next to peppers and eggplants. According to the National Gardening Association, you should plant okra from a seed. It doesn't do well with frost and doesn't do well in a really hot climate either. If you live in an area with a really cold winter, you can still plant okra, provided that your spring and summer months will be warm.



Another great addition to raised bed gardens are herbs. They grow just as well as the vegetables and annuals will. The extra organic material and the soil looseness allows the roots to spread quite nicely. When the roots spread, the plant can better absorb nutrients and moisture from the soil. Herbs can be paired with vegetables or annuals or can be planted all on their own. You should disperse those strong-smelling herbs throughout the garden to repel insects. Also, you will attract bees and butterflies, which will keep the pests to a minimal level.

Harvesting and Preserving Home-Grown Herbs

Planting, cultivating, and growing your home-grown herbs are just the beginning of the process. Another part of the herb gardening process, which many gardeners enjoy, is the harvesting and preservation of these herbs once the growing season has ended. As a beginner, you might get confused on the right time and the right process of harvesting and preserving your plants, so here are certain tips on how you can do the process properly.

To start with, here are some factors that you need to consider when harvesting herbs:

- Annual herbs can be picked until the frost comes.
- During harvest time, be sure to utilize sharp pruning clippers, so you avoid tearing the plant's stems.
- Herbs are to be harvested when the essential oils that are responsible in the herb's aroma and flavor are at their peak.
- When harvesting, start the process early in the morning after the dew dries, but not before the heat of the day begins.

How to Harvest Home-Grown Herbs

The best time and method in harvesting herbs can differ according to the plant that you are trying to grow. Take a look at the details below to determine how to harvest herb leaves, flowers, seeds, and roots.

Harvesting Herb Leaves

The right harvest time depends on the part of the plant you want to harvest and the intended use of each part. For instance, if you want to harvest the plant's foliage, you should harvest it before its flowers. It is because when flowering occurs, it can cause the foliage to produce an off flavor. You have to start the harvest once the plant has adequate foliage to maintain its growth. As much as 75% of the current growth of the plant can be harvested at one time. It is best to choose larger leaves if you want to use them in making salads.

Harvesting Herb Flowers

Experts claim that herb flowers reach their most intense oil concentration and flavor once harvested before the flower buds open up. Harvest your herbs before it starts flowering as leaf production can start to decline. Herb flowers, which are to be utilized for arts and crafts purposes, need to be harvested just before they become fully open.

Harvesting Herb Seeds

If you plan to use the seeds of herbs, then you should harvest the seed before the seedpods change its colors from green to brown to gray and before they open. You may shake the flower head to encourage the seeds to fall. Prepare a bag or container to catch the seeds you gather.

Harvesting Herb Roots

When harvesting, dig widely around the herb plants, so you avoid cutting or damaging the plant's root system. Herbs that will be harvested for medicinal purposes, such as ginger, ginseng, and mandrake have their active medicinal ingredients found either in their roots or rhizomes. They should be harvested early in the spring or during late autumn. Be sure to wash them with cold water and to dry them properly afterwards.

Preservation Methods

There are a few ways you can use to maintain the quality of the herbs. Herbs get their aroma and flavor from their oil, which eventually evaporates when the leaves are crushed in the process of preservation. Fresh herbs should be used for cooking; however, it is still possible to maintain some of its freshness for later use. This is made possible through the different ways of herb preservation.

Freezing Method

Freezing is one of the easiest ways to preserve herbs. You just need to rinse the herbs in cold water quickly, shake off the excess water then chop them up coarsely. Add a few pinches of these herbs in a water-filled ice cube tray then place them in the refrigerator to freeze. Put these herb cubes in a plastic bag or an airtight plastic container.

Another way of freezing the herbs is through spreading them on a cookie sheet, then transferring them into a large plastic bag. Once these herbs are thawed, they will not be perfect for garnish but still can be utilized for cooking. Never refreeze the herbs once they are already thawed.

Drying Method

Drying is another method of preserving herbs. You can rinse the herb, shake excess water off, and then let them dry on paper towels or dishcloths. Then you can tie the stems into small bundles using strings and hang them upside down. Place them in a warm, dry and airy place under the sun. Do not tie the bundle too tight but just enough for air to circulate properly.

You can also spread the herbs on your window screen if you do not like hanging them to dry. You should turn the leaves frequently so as to ensure drying on the other side of the herb's leaves.

When drying herbs with seeds, you can tie the herbs in small bundles, put them inside a paper bag with holes on each side, and then suspend them in a dark area with enough air circulation. You can collect the seeds once they are dry and store them in properly sealed and light-proofed containers.

Plant Profiles

Beet

Beta vulgaris

Beet greens and roots are edible. They can be roasted, pickled, grilled, or boiled, and they freeze well.

Family: Chenopodiaceae

Growing Seasons: early spring or late fall in warmer climates; late spring or early fall in colder climates

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 12 inches apart

Seed to Harvest: 50 to 60 days

Indoor Seed Starting: not recommended

Earliest Outdoor Planting: in cooler climates, early spring once your raised bed can be worked; in frost-free areas, sow in the fall

Watering: 1 inch of water per week

Starting

Location: full sun, part shade

Planting: Beets do not like acidic soil; they prefer a pH between 6 and 7.

Growing

Too much nitrogen will make the tops grow better than the roots.

Harvesting

Harvest beet greens when they are 4 to 5 inches long. Harvest the roots at 1 to 3 inches in diameter.

Problems

Leaf miner: Handpick and destroy affected leaves.

Leaf spot: Keep water off the green tops.

Cantaloupe

Cucumis melo var. cantalupensis

Most people will grow their cantaloupes on the ground rather than on a trellis, because they “slip” off the vine when they are ripe.

Family: Cucurbitaceae

Growing Seasons: in warmer climates, early spring; in colder climates, late spring to early summer

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 36 to 48 inches apart

Seed to Harvest: 70 to 85 days

Indoor Seed Starting: 3 to 4 weeks before planting, but direct sowing is recommended

Earliest Outdoor Planting: after danger of frost has passed

Watering: 1 to 2 inches of water per week

Starting

Location: full sun

Growing

Melons have a shallow root system; avoid damaging it when weeding or cultivating.

If you are growing melons on the ground, use plenty of mulch so they do not sit in the soil.

Harvesting

Ripe melons will “slip” from the vine. You will not need to exert much pressure to get them to release.

Once they start to smell like a melon, they are ripe.

Problems

Aphids: Use an insecticidal soap or a heavy spray of water to remove them.

Powdery mildew: Spray plants with a solution of 2 to 3 tablespoons of white vinegar per gallon of water.

Squash bugs: Remove eggs from the underside of leaves in the morning and later in the day.

Wilt disease: Use a fungicide.

Chives

Allium schoenoprasum

Chives are a great focal point in a garden bed and a welcome addition to many cuisines. For best production and healthiest plants, divide clumps every 3 to 4 years.

Family: Amaryllidaceae

Growing Seasons: spring, late spring

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 3 to 4 inches apart

Seed to Harvest: 80 to 90 days

Indoor Seed Starting: 8 to 10 weeks before last spring frost

Earliest Outdoor Planting: after danger of heavy frost

Watering: water seedlings thoroughly after planting; plants need about 1 inch of water per week

Starting

Location: full sun

Seeding: Seeds can be started indoors or directly sown in the soil.

Transplanting: Plant seedlings with plenty of room for the root ball.

Planting: In the garden, cover seeds with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of soil.

Growing

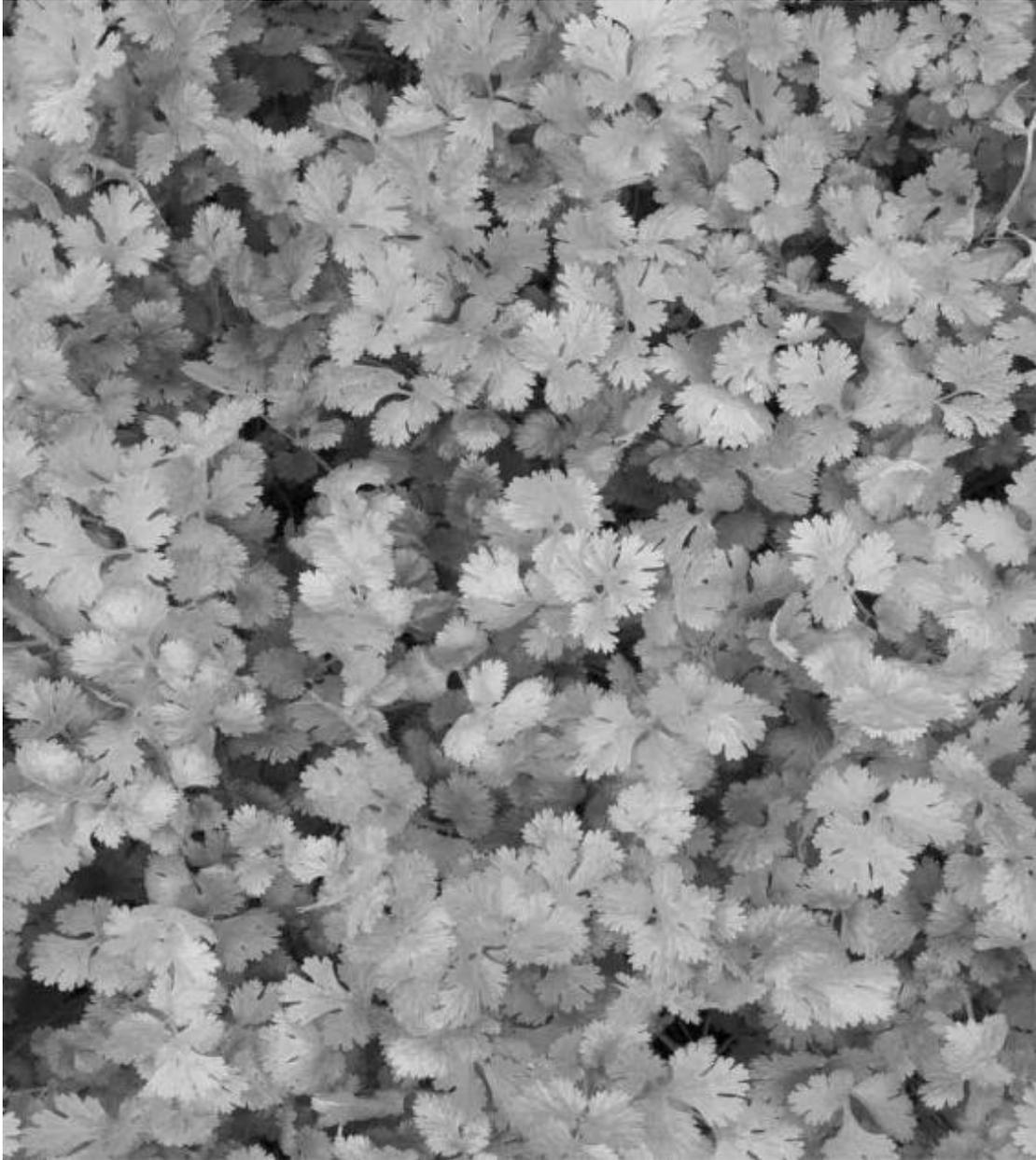
Weeding and watering are the only maintenance needed.

Harvesting

Clip plants to 1 inch above the ground. The tops will regrow.

Problems

Chives usually remain pest-free.



Cilantro

Coriandrum sativum

Cilantro can be harvested as cilantro (the fresh herb) or coriander (the seed). For cilantro, harvest plants once green leaves are present, before the plants flower. For coriander, harvest the seeds once they turn grayish-brown.

Family: Apiaceae

Growing Seasons: spring, early summer

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 10 to 14 inches

Seed to Harvest: 60 to 90 days

Indoor Seed Starting: 6 to 8 weeks before danger of last frost

Earliest Outdoor Planting: after danger of frost

Watering: needs 1 inch of water per week

Starting

Location: full sun

Seeding: Plant indoors 6 to 8 weeks before the last frost.

Planting: Cover seeds with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of soil. Plant every 3 weeks if you want a continuous harvest.

Growing

Cilantro needs 1 inch of water per week. Do not fertilize.

Harvesting

Cut with scissors to 2 inches above the ground.

Problems

Keep soil moist so plants don't wilt.

Green Beans

Phaseolus vulgaris

Beans are available as bush beans or pole beans. Bush beans do not need the support of a trellis, but pole beans do.

Family: Fabaceae

Growing Seasons: early to late spring, depending on zone; check your zone for specific times

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 2 to 4 inches apart

Seed to Harvest: 50 to 55 days

Indoor Seed Starting: not recommended

Earliest Outdoor Planting: early spring once the danger of frost has passed

Watering: 1 inch per week

Starting

Location: full sun

Growing

When watering, do not wet the leaves. If they do get wet, do not handle them when wet because disease may result.

Harvesting

Beans are easy to pick right off the vine.

Problems

Aphids: Use an insecticidal soap or a heavy spray of water to remove them.

Bacterial blights: Use copper fungicide.

Spider mites: Use neem oil.



Kale

Brassica oleracea var. acephala

Kale has many health benefits. It is good for digestion, high in iron and vitamin K, and filled with antioxidants. You can plant it from early spring to early summer, but if you plant it in late summer, you can harvest it from fall until the first ground freeze.

Family: Brassicaceae

Growing Seasons: spring, fall

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 12 to 18 inches apart

Seed to Harvest: 50 to 55 days

Indoor Seed Starting: direct sow outdoors up to 3 months before the last expected frost

Earliest Outdoor Planting: early spring once your raised bed can be worked; will germinate as low as 45 degrees Fahrenheit

Watering: do not let the plants dry out during drought periods

Starting

Location: full sun, part shade

Planting: Kale is easy to grow and prefers well-drained soil.

Growing

To reduce disease and pests, do not plant kale in the same location as other cole crops (cruciferous vegetables like broccoli or cabbage) for 3 to 4 years.

Harvesting

Kale harvested after a frost will have a sweeter flavor.

Pick the outer leaves and leave the center.

Problems

Kale is relatively pest- and disease-free.



Leek

Allium porrum L.

Leeks grow through the winter in the Deep South. Some varieties are bred to overwinter in colder eastern climates.

Family: Alliaceae

Growing Seasons: spring, fall

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 18 to 20 inches apart

Seed to Harvest: 98 to 105 days

Indoor Seed Starting: 6 to 8 weeks before danger of last frost, or direct sow in the garden

Earliest Outdoor Planting: 4 weeks before last frost

Watering: 1 inch of water per week; keep evenly watered

Starting

Location: full sun, part shade

Growing

Leeks have a shallow root system and do best in a loose, well-drained soil. They should be kept well-watered and weeded. Mulching is a good way to hold the water and suppress the weeds. Avoid damaging when weeding or cultivating.

Harvesting

Leeks should be harvested when they are about 2 inches in diameter. Rock them back and forth to loosen them. Once harvested, the roots and all but 2 inches of the leaves should be cut off.

Problems

Damping off (pathogen-caused seedling collapse): Spray with a mixture of 1 tablespoon hydrogen peroxide per quart of water.

Downy mildew: Remove and discard affected parts of plants. Do not get water on leaves. Do increase airflow by thinning plants.

Marigold

Tagetes

Marigolds are ornamental and not edible, but they are beautiful and help cut down on nematodes, beetles, and spider mites.

Family: Asteraceae

Growing Seasons: spring, early summer

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 9 to 12 inches apart

Seed to Harvest: plants bloom in about 55 days

Indoor Seed Starting: 4 to 6 weeks after the last frost, or direct sow in the garden

Earliest Outdoor Planting: early spring after danger of frost has passed

Watering: water regularly

Starting

Location: full sun

Growing

Marigolds are quite easy to grow. They require only regular dead-heading—removal of dried and spent flowers. Reach beneath dead flowers and pinch them off the stem.

Harvesting

Marigolds are not harvested, because they are not an edible crop. You can cut marigolds and place them in a vase but remove any leaves below the water.

Problems

Aphids: Use an insecticidal soap or a heavy spray of water to remove them.

Mites: Use an insecticidal soap or a heavy spray of water to remove them.

Fungal infections: These infections can occur if the soil is too wet. Apply a fungicide.

Nasturtium

Tropaeolum majus

Nasturtiums add color to your garden, and some are also edible. They are related to the watercress family.

Family: Tropaeolaceae

Growing Seasons: spring, late spring

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 8 to 12 inches apart

Seed to Harvest: 35 to 52 days, depending on the variety

Indoor Seed Starting: 4 to 6 weeks before the last frost, or direct sow in the garden

Earliest Outdoor Planting: early spring once danger of frost has passed

Watering: 1 inch of water per week

Starting

Location: full sun

Planting: Plant seeds or seedlings after the danger of frost has passed.

Growing

Nasturtiums are available as a trailing grower, which can be trained up a trellis, or as a bush variety; read the description before ordering seeds. Soak seeds in water overnight before planting. Nasturtiums are notoriously low maintenance.

Harvesting

The flowers and leaves are edible. Use scissors to cut them off the plant. They have a strong peppery flavor, like watercress.

Problems

Aphids: Use an insecticidal soap or a heavy spray of water to remove them.

Cabbage butterflies: Remove them by hand.

Cucumber beetles: Remove them by hand.

Slugs: Remove them by hand.

White flies: Remove them by hand.



Onion

Allium cepa

Onions can be harvested as green onions or, if grown to full maturity, as bulbs.

Family: Amaryllidaceae

Growing Seasons: spring, fall, depending on location; check your zone for specific times

Zones: 3 through 10

Spacing: 3 to 4 inches apart in rows 1 to 2 feet apart

Seed to Harvest: when planting seeds, 100 to 150 days; when planting seeds for green onions, 60 to 120 days; when planting onion sets (young plants), harvest at desired size as green onions or in 85 to 100 days as bulbs

Indoor Seed Starting: 6 to 10 weeks before the last spring frost

Earliest Outdoor Planting: after danger of heavy frost

Watering: keep the roots wet and tops dry; watering by ditch or drip irrigation is best

Starting

Location: full sun

Planting: Plant onion sets by covering the bottom (white part). In the garden, cover the seeds with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of soil. Short-day varieties are for the south and central United States; long-day varieties are for the north.

Transplant: Onions can be transplanted once the seedlings are about as thick as a pencil.

Growing

Because onions have shallow roots, give them adequate water at all times, by drip irrigation or a soaker hose. Do not get the tops wet.

Harvesting

Onion bulbs can be picked when their tops begin to turn yellow. Bend over the tops, wait several days, and then pull the bulbs. Dry onions in the garden for about 1 week or in a warm, dry location for 2 to 3 weeks.

Problems

Onions are usually pest-free. If you see yellow, drooping leaves before harvest, pull one and check for onion flies, which lay their eggs at the root. Use a floating row cover to protect seedlings.

Feeding Your Plants: Adding Fertilizer and Nutrients throughout the Season

If you want your raised bed garden to thrive, it is important to monitor your plants periodically for signs of nutrient deficiencies. The most common symptom of nutrient deficiencies is the change of foliage. Leaves that turn yellow, new leaves that have distorted shapes, new leaves that are light instead of dark green, new leaves with brown edges can all be signs of nutrient deficiencies or imbalances. Slow growth is also a common symptom of nutrient deficiencies. Fortunately, there are natural ways to provide your plants with nutrients that will help them thrive again. The following are the most common natural fertilizer options that you can choose from.

- **Compost Tea:** Compost tea is microbial-rich natural fertilizer made through a simple tea-brewing process where a mixture of compost, water, and a sugar substance is aerated for several days to grow and multiply beneficial bacteria, nutrients, and fungi. The bacteria, nutrients, and fungi are suspended in the tea solution, which is then either poured into the soil for the plant to absorb through its roots or used as a foliar spray. This simple solution will help supercharge your garden plants' growth and protect them from common diseases and pests.
- **Worm Castings:** Worm castings, also known as "Black Gold," are a worm's excrement and are highly beneficial to plant growth. They also contain 10 to 20 times more microbial activity than the soil and the food the worms ingest. Worm mucus is also found in the castings, which helps the soil hold nutrients and retain moisture. Add to the soil when filling your bed or sprinkle the castings around your established plants. You

can also create a worm casting tea to feed your plants regularly throughout the growing season.

- **Worm Casting Tea:** This is the mix of worm castings with water and some molasses that has been aerated for several days to grow and multiply beneficial microorganisms, nutrients, and fungi similar to compost tea.
- **Grass Clippings Tea:** This is so easy to make on your own! All you have to do is put grass clippings into a bucket of water along with an aquarium air pump and let them steep for 2-3 days.
- **Rock Dust:** This type of fertilizer is exactly what it sounds like: crushed minerals in a powdered form, that is easy for the plants to absorb. Add this to the soil when filling your bed; add a sprinkle when transplanting seedlings, or sprinkle around established plants.

There are several types of rock dust available for purchase, including basalt and granite. I use AZOMITE® brand rock dust, and I highly recommend it. AZOMITE® is mined from a mineral-rich volcanic ash deposit in Utah and contains over 70 minerals and trace elements. It has helped me produce sweeter fruit and larger vegetables.

- **Wood Ash:** This fertilizer is very rich in potash. It is essentially the remainders of wood after combustion. You can use the ashes of your fireplace to give your plants a boost! Wood ash is high in potassium which is necessary for healthy flowering and fruiting. It also contains nutrients like calcium, magnesium and phosphorus.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

If you have been paying attention throughout the book, then a lot of what you read in this will be information that you encountered before. This is because the book is written to give you all the information you need to garden like a pro. Simply put, you have already learned the right way to plan and care for a raised bed garden. When you learn the right way, you avoid making mistakes by acting on assumption and instead act with knowledge and comprehension.

With that said, it never hurts to be thorough. If you've been paying attention, then hopefully you find yourself nodding along with the understanding of how these common beginner mistakes could easily be avoided. If you don't want to make the rookie actions that cost time, money, and energy, and cause major headaches and stomach pains then you are going to want to pay careful attention to these common mistakes that beginners keep making.

Overwatering Your Plants

This is the last chance there is to reinforce the idea that it is better for your plants to be too dry than too wet. While plants need plenty of water, too much water is the deadliest thing of all. It gets into the soil around the roots and prevents them from sucking in oxygen. The roots will blacken and die. They go from having a solid texture almost like a piece of string and instead start to feel slimy and gross. This is all happening under the soil, though, so the first sign that most gardeners see is when the leaves of their plants start to go mushy as they rot from the inside, and if you aren't regularly checking your plants you might not see it until the whole plant has started rotting. If you notice this early on the lowest leaves, you might be able to save the

plant by digging it out to remove the rotted roots but more often than not it is already too late.

So, the best way to avoid this tragic experience is to avoid overwatering your plants. Always give the finger test before watering and if you are unsure then be cautious and wait a day. It only takes a moment, but it can save you the work of removing and replanting your crops. Plants will begin to wilt when they are overly thirsty, and this can be a sign to water them. But make sure this wilting isn't just due to the noonday sun. Some plants will wilt in order to protect themselves from the hottest temperatures of the day. Once the sun starts to set, they will stop wilting. Since you should never water your plants at night, anyway, check for wilt in the morning to get a more accurate reading. Noonday wilting has tricked many beginners into a panicked watering in the afternoon and this leaves water in the soil overnight. Even if your plants appear to be dehydrated, wait until the morning to water them. It may feel odd, but it is the healthier option.

Skipping Out on Maintenance

Maintenance is so important and we're still going to briefly touch on it again. This is another one of those mistakes that happens often enough to be embarrassing. There is simply no excuse for leaving your garden completely untended to. When you do this, you are choosing to completely ignore any signs of danger that you might have been able to catch early. If you left your house for a vacation, you would lock the front door. When you stop maintaining your raised garden beds, you are basically leaving them with their door wide open for pests, weeds, critters, and disease.

The biggest problems with untended beds are weeds and dead plant matter. Weeds will completely take over a raised garden bed if you don't catch them early. Skipping out on maintenance for half a week could lead to an

infestation you are unable to beat without replacing the soil. Weeds that get out of hand will starve out your plants and this will lead to far more leaves dropping off them than normal. This increases the amount of dead plant matter in the garden bed and offers more space for pests and diseases to get an entry hold. Both weeds and dead plant matter are issues on their own but when maintenance is left ignored, they end up being a one-two punch to your raised garden bed and the health of your plants.

Ignoring the Drainage

When you mix up your own soil, you are doing it to create a quickly draining texture. Raised garden beds drain better due to their elevated positions but you still need to use well-draining soil. Introducing too many plants will block up the soil and slow down the draining, while preventing any one plant from getting enough nutrients. Weeds will also slow down the drainage. But the biggest problem is failing to include drainage holes in the raised bed frame itself. Depending on the material used, water will have an easier or harder time getting out even with a drainage hole. You need to balance this all when building and mixing a soil. Many beginners only take into account their soil or their drainage holes and not the whole spectrum of influence.

Using the Wrong Soil

We mixed together a general-purpose garden soil mixture. This mixture will work for many plants but not for all of them. You need to do your research on what you are going to grow to see if this soil mixture will work for them. Typically, most of what you want to grow is either going to enjoy this or it will want something with a little more of a sandy texture. More minerals in the soil will increase the speed of drainage but not every plant enjoys a sandy soil.

The disappointing thing with using the wrong soil is that you may not realize it is wrong when you first start using it because it does a decent enough job. You might think that your plants are doing fine, when they are actually smaller than they should be. But when you provide them with a soil that is right, you will notice a major difference in the size and depth of color they take. This is especially true if the soil you have chosen doesn't have enough nutrients in it.

But the other issue with soil is that what was the right soil last year might not be the right soil a year later. The quality of soil degrades over time, more so if it is reliant on organic components like compost. It is important to pay close attention to your soil. Degrading soil will start to drain much slower. You may need to mix in some more minerals and compost, but this can be hard to do after you have planted your raised beds for the year. A good way to get a heads up on this issue is to water your beds before you plant anything. Doing this will let you see if they are draining properly or not. Take a few minutes to also dig through the soil and see if it "feels" right. If you have been using the same soil mixture for some time, then you will have a sense of how it is supposed to feel. If it feels off, then it will be time to amend it to make sure it still works as intended.

Making Your Raised Beds Too Wide

Your raised garden beds, or even those beds in the ground themselves, should never be more than four feet wide. This is done so that you can tend to all of the plants in the bed, including those in the middle that are the hardest to reach. You may believe that you can reach a little further than that and so might make a larger raised garden bed but you will find that once your plants start to come in it gets a lot harder to reach those middle ones than you expected. While they are seeds or seedlings, there is nothing obstructing your view or reach but once foliage starts to grow in it can become like trying to navigate through a miniature jungle.

Remember that length doesn't matter. You can make your beds as long as you want, it is purely about width. However, if you have blocked off one of the long sides of the raised bed by having it up against a house or barn then you will want to go with a slightly thinner design no wider than three feet. It pays to be cautious about the size and placement of your raised garden beds for more than just sunlight.

Building Raised Beds Too Close Together

This pairs well with not making your raised garden beds too wide. If you are going to be placing garden beds next to each other then you should make sure there is two feet or so between them. You might be able to get away with a foot and a half, but it is better to have a little more space than not enough. The reason we don't make our raised garden beds more than four feet wide is so that we can access all of our plants in order to keep an eye on them and maintain their health. This is the exact same reason that you want to have enough space to be able to easily maneuver between your beds. If you can't properly move around the garden bed, then you are effectively cutting off access to an entire side and reducing your ability to properly look after those far away plants.

This is even worse when you consider that the reason this happened is because of a second raised garden bed and this means there are twice as many plants getting neglected. You might really want to squeeze two beds into a small patch of direct sunlight but doing so might put your plants at risk and defeat the whole purpose. In a case like this where there is very limited space to fit two raised garden beds, stick with just one. Grow a few other sun-loving plants in containers that you can easily move out of the way while you tend the plants in the raised garden bed. Just remember to return the potted plant to its sunny spot after you are done. This will take a little more effort, but it beats entirely neglecting a bunch of your plants.

Using the Wrong Material

Again, we've already covered the importance of using a safe material when building our raised bed frames, but this needs to be stressed again. There are plenty of safe materials that you can use like concrete, stone, bricks, hardwoods, and more. But there are also materials which degrade the quality of the land and the soil. Tires might be an easy way to add some circular imagery to your landscaping, but they should only be used for non-edible flowers since they could seep heavy metals into the soil. Then there are downright deadly materials like railway ties, which are so toxic to the land around them that there have been several governments, issued warnings against their use in the United States. It is important to make sure that the material you are using isn't going to end up taking a bite out of your or your plants' health.

Tips and Tricks for Raised Bed Gardening

Are you ready to give raised bed gardening a shot?

Before you go out for your supplies and plants and get to work on your garden, here are some tip and tricks on raised bed gardening that you should keep in mind:

- Be sure that you use good-quality potting soil or compost when building your raised bed for your plants.
- Take a rake and run it through the surface of the soil. Allow the rake to smooth the top of the soil and level it.
- Remove rocks and debris from the soil.
- Be sure to plant your greens closer together so that you can achieve their microclimate that will lend itself to better success.
- Generally, when spacing for planting leafy vegetables, allow a six-inch interval per plant.
- Water your raised bed garden after planting your vegetables, blooms and greens.
- Raised bed gardening can allow you to grow plants and vegetables, herbs, and flowers even if your home has poor soil or bad drainage.
- Raise your bed a little higher if you do not want to strain your back while gardening so that you don't have to keep bending over to get work done.
- Drainage in raised bed gardens are higher than traditional on-ground gardens—be sure to provide around 6-12” of soil to give the roots ample time and space to grow their roots.

- Remember that plants grow a lot better in loose soil. This is because plant roots have more room to grow in loose, fluffy soil versus compacted soil.
- If you can help it, avoid stepping on your soil to avoid compacting the soil.
- There are different ways that you can build your raised garden—you may use bricks, cinder blocks, stone, but by far the best option would be to build your own using wood.
- Take the time to create raised garden beds if you have a small lawn or garden space.
- Invest in a raised bed garden as well if your soil is rocky or abused, or if it generally has poor quality.
- If you are using a wood frame to support your raised garden bed, do not use treated wood to avoid chemicals getting into your edible greens.
- There are various eco-friendly alternatives, particularly from non-treated wood, that you can use.
- Cedar is by far the best wood option to use if you are looking to create a durable raised bed garden that will last you through the years.
- Thicker wooden boards or planks are likely to last you longer and prevent you from needing to replace your raised bed structure.
- Concrete, if used as your support for raised gardens, will add to the soil's pH over time.
- Do not use railroad ties to secure your raised bed structures.

- When choosing a location for your raised garden bed, choose one that is level and gets an ideal balance of sunlight. It shouldn't be too hot or too shady.
- Four feet should be enough width for planting beds; this is so you can easily reach on each side without having to step on the soil and causing the soil to compact.
- The length of your raised garden bed can go as long or as short as you want.
- In terms of depth, the general range is between 6 inches to 12 inches. That way, you are giving the roots enough room to grow.
- Support the walls of your planting bed by placing a pole at every corner of your planting bed. Poke through the ground deep enough so that it is secure and anchored. Around two feet would be the ideal.
- Keep the stakes level and at the same height to avoid uneven beds.
- Set the lowest plank or bar at ground level and make sure that they are level all around.
- Use galvanized screws and nails to secure the boards on the poles.
- Create a mix of compost, topsoil, and other organic material in your soil mound so that you can create a nutrient-rich soil for your garden.
- Soil in raised garden beds will dry out faster, so in hotter months and seasons, be sure to water your garden regularly and add straw, mulch or hay on top of the soil to keep it moist.

- While new, and if you are just starting your raised garden, it will require more watering than usual. But once you get past those early stages, raised garden beds will require little maintenance.
- Maximize your seasons. Just because your raised garden isn't directly affected by poor soil quality that is typical of bad planting seasons doesn't mean that you can do anything to extend your planting and growing opportunities. Employ succession planting as a way to get the most harvest gains when you're maintaining a raised garden bed.
- Be sure to support your raised bed walls, especially if it is any higher than 18 inches off the ground.

8 Reasons Why You Need One

How I Learned to Love Gardening In a Box

When I was a very young man, I loved to garden. A good thing too, since I grew up in farm country. One year, I decided to convert a large portion of my mother's lawn to vegetable garden. Needless to say, my efforts were somewhat less than well received.

After a bit of 8-year-old fast-talking, my mother relented. At that point, there really wasn't much choice. Instead of losing her temper, she showed me how to layout my first real garden. She explained how to design the garden so the corn wouldn't shade the beans. And the sunflowers wouldn't kill the carrots.

Then she came to the mint. And I learned how to build my first garden box. Not from desire, but from necessity.

Built with an 8-year old's sense of workmanship, it barely lasted the year. And the higher boxes I built for fun survived about as long. In fact, the only thing that saved me was the fact that I also had an 8-year old's sense of responsibility. Fortunately, the mint didn't survive to take over the yard.

Fast forward some thirty years. The lawn was now my own. And I had no one to warn me about mint. After the first year, I remembered my mother's suggestion to build a box to contain weeds like mint. And I was off. Soon I had boxes for my roses. I had boxes in the front of the house. I had boxes in the back of the house.

Of course, they were all low and intended to keep lawn and garden separate. Then came a request from my wife. She was having problems bending but still wanted to garden. So, I spent some time and designed a higher box that would actually stand the test of time.

Gardeners have used raised garden beds for centuries. Made from a variety of materials, they were used for visual reasons and for more practical reasons. From the floating gardens of Babylon to today's hydroponics, raised gardens have been used for practical reasons and for pure enjoyment. Filled with garden waste, they became a favorite of the Victorian gardener.

8 Reasons Why You Might Want A Raised Garden Bed

Today, raised garden boxes are often thought of as a specialized tool of the professional gardener. But in fact, they can be a powerful tool in the hands of an amateur green thumb. There are many reasons that an amateur gardener might want to explore their use.

Being Disabled Doesn't Mean You Can't Garden

Raised garden beds are the perfect solution for the disabled. Three-foot wide boxes laid out with three-foot paths allow the wheelchair bound to reach any part of the box. And allow the wheelchair to pass between the boxes without the problems of uneven and soft ground. Not to mention the benefits of consistent and level walk areas and fixed edges to the blind.

Overcoming the Limitations of Age

Even those who are just beginning to suffer from time's cruel effects benefit from raised gardens. Stiff joints benefit from having beds placed at sitting height. And being able to cultivate soil without having to fight compressed soil makes gardening easier. And of course, at the other end of the scale, raised beds keep little gardeners working in their own areas.

Design Flexibility

Being able to access the garden isn't the only reason to use raised garden beds. Raising the beds gives you infinitely greater flexibility when it comes to design. By working in three dimensions rather than just two you can create your own little world in the garden. Hills, rivers and plains open up in the garden. Fairy hills can appear in your back yard -- or front.

Keeping Your Plants to Themselves

Of course, the traditional uses for raised gardens in commercial gardening remain available to the amateur gardener. Gardeners often use raised gardens to provide separate areas for different plants. This can be because the plant is known to spread uncontrollably -- as I discovered with mint. Or it can be because one plant will shade and limit the growth of another. Or it may simply be because of esthetics.

Staying Wet in Different Stages

Growing roses can be an exercise in frustration. Although they are a hardy plant (hey, they survive me) they don't do well if they become too dry or too wet. Providing a separate area within a wider bed can allow you to provide more (or less) drainage for your sensitive plants.

Different Soils

And of course, there is the age-old issue of different soil mixes. Some plants grow best in a sandy soil. Others grow best in a loamy soil or a heavy clay soil. Yet others are happiest without soil. Hydrangeas, for example, can give different color blooms depending on the ph level of the soil. Raised garden beds allow you to create a mix of different growing environments within a single garden.

Gardening Late, Gardening Early

Finally, we mustn't forget the concept of protection. Many gardeners enjoy a garden that contains exotic plants. Frequently these plants are not winter hardy. On the other hand, many gardeners enjoy starting their gardens as early in the year as they can. If you have the room, a greenhouse or garden room is the perfect solution. But that isn't always practical. And it doesn't allow you to leave your plants in the ground. A raised garden bed makes a perfect base for a temporary greenhouse. These can be made cheaply and easily using plastic or used windows.

Protecting Plants & People

Winter isn't the only thing that plants need protection from. People walking through the garden will tend to compact the soil. They'll also inevitably break a certain percentage of plants. And in some cases, beautiful plants present a hazard to people walking by them. Using raised garden beds creates a separation between plant and person. It protects both the plant and the person.

How You Can Learn To Love Raised Gardens Too

With all the benefits to be found with raised gardens you would think that everyone would build one. But many people are scared of them.

They feel that they are hard to build or that they will require more care than other types of gardening.

But it's just not true. It's very easy to build a raised garden bed. If you take a bit of care when you fill the bed, you'll find that it's even easier to raise plants successfully in raised garden beds than it is in the earth.

Conclusion

Thank you for making it to the end of Raised Bed Gardening starting a raised bed garden is a great way to accommodate that budding little gardener in your family. It is the ideal way for kids to learn about nature; they will see the wonder of a little seedling emerging from the ground, growing tiny leaves and later develop into a mature plant with fruit. Planting in raised beds will make it convenient for both you and the young ones to reach every plant in the box without ending up with muddy feet or knees full of dirt.

Now that you have all the information needed, it is time to get going. Walk around your available space during the day to find a sunny location. Once you have decided where you want to place your raised bed, decide on the size and dimensions. The next step is to make a list of everything you will need, from the soil, compost and other materials, to the frames. Once your bed is up and filled up with the soil mixture, it is time to turn your attention to the plants. Select the type of veggies you want to grow according to the guidelines I have provided. If you want to grow plants from seeds, you will have to do some prior planning since it will take time for them to develop into seedlings ready to be planted outside in your box. Otherwise, you can purchase seedlings to plant directly into your raised beds.

A well-planned garden alongside the selection of the right soil is the secret to successful raised bed gardening. These gardening tactics are not new inventions; in fact, they have been practiced in some form or the other from ages. Raised bed gardens are becoming increasingly popular in the US today. Certain technical aspects of the planning may vary from region to region, but the fundamentals are the same virtually everywhere. If applied skillfully, these techniques can result in a far better production rate (as much as 4 to 10 times better according to some estimates) than what you

would achieve through orthodox gardening methods in an average fertile land.

One of the most important factors that make raised beds so effective and efficient is that the crops get the chance to grow in just the right type of soil - deep, fertile and loose enough to yield higher production rate. This is possible because the overall condition throughout the setup is favorable towards proper soil drainage as well as aeration, which in turn enables plant-roots to penetrate deeper.

Apart from that, maintenance is also pretty easy in any raised bed garden. Removing weeds and rubbles hardly takes any time, enabling you to focus more on other important tasks such as watering the plants. Since the gardener will always be standing in the pathway, the plants never have to face the risk of being stepped on. Unlike the traditional gardening tactics, you can concentrate your soil amendment and improvisation efforts on the beds only, not on the pathway. This, needless to say, helps you save on both resources and time.

The appeal of raised bed gardening is that it hardly requires any special care or attention. The only factors that you will ever have to worry about are watering the plants, planting and harvesting them at the proper time and periodically removing minimal amounts of weed from the garden. Whenever you harvest a plant, add some compost into the empty space and then replant.

The type of the soil as well as the wall material used for constructing the raised beds play a pivotal role in the overall health of the plants and your garden. Proper spacing between the plants is also crucial - if congested, they won't get enough room to grow freely. On the other hand, if there's just too much space in between them, your production rate will suffer, and weeds are encouraged to grow. You also have to be careful to choose plants that will grow favorably in your climate.

The next step for you is to take a walk around your potential raised bed garden area and do some planning. Remember, if you have good sun, good soil, and plenty of water you're going to be okay. Good luck and happy harvesting!