

Home Garden Series

Raised Beds



Constructing Raised Beds for the Home Vegetable Garden

There are many great reasons to grow vegetables in a raised bed in your home landscape. Raised beds are perfect for smaller yards. They're also good for people who don't own large garden equipment and those who don't want to constantly fight encroaching grass.

This guide will help you determine where to place your raised bed vegetable garden and how to construct it. You'll be gardening before you know it!

Where Should I Place My Vegetable Garden?

You are not the only one who likes homegrown vegetables, so keeping the garden near your house can help to ensure you get to eat the majority of produce. Placing your raised bed far from your house will be more attractive to animals such as possums, rabbits, deer, raccoons and squirrels, who will quickly eat a lot of the results of your hard work.

In addition, seeing your garden will remind you to check on it. Be prepared to visit your garden at least twice a week. Scouting for insects and disease often will allow you to treat problems early before they wipe out your crops.

Be sure the raised bed is near a water faucet. Easy access to water will ensure you water your vegetables when it's needed. Irrigation requirements vary by soil type. Check your garden often to make sure plants are not wilting. The soil should feel moist but not saturated. Place your index finger into the soil. If it feels moist, you do not need to water. If it feels dry, water.

If you have a poorly drained yard, place your raised bed in a high location, or build a taller bed.

Before You Build, Remove Grass and Weeds

Removing weeds before you build will make maintaining the garden much easier in the future. You can remove weeds and grass in several manners.

1. Use a nonselective herbicide to kill broadleaf and grassy weeds. Allow the plants to completely die and then remove all plant material from the area where you plan on placing your bed. This includes removing roots.
2. Use black plastic, cardboard or some other material to smother weeds and grass from sunlight. This process will take at least a month for complete kill. Again, remove all plant shoots and roots before building the raised bed.
3. Use a string trimmer to remove all grass and weeds in the area. Completely remove all green portions of the grass and then dig at least 3 inches into the ground with the trimmer to remove roots. Rake it out and then construct your raised bed.



Building the Raised Bed

Raised beds come in many sizes and shapes. The design possibilities for raised beds are limited only by your imagination.

The following are examples of raised beds that work well for home gardeners because they are simple to build and work well for most vegetable crops. Take a look at these and use your imagination to create a beautiful garden area.

TIPS

All Raised Beds Must Be

At least **8 inches in depth**. This allows for adequate root-ball growth for optimum yields.

No wider than you can comfortably reach the middle. Constantly stepping in raised beds compacts soil, making it necessary to till and thus defeating the purpose of building the raised bed.

Made with treated wood or other suitable materials. Treated wood made after 2003 is completely safe for vegetable gardens. Untreated wood will not hold up in Louisiana's wet climate. Fresh wood treated with creosote, such as railroad ties or telephone poles, may burn roots of vegetable plants. Bricks, pavers, stones, cinderblocks and other building materials are suitable building materials for raised vegetable gardens.

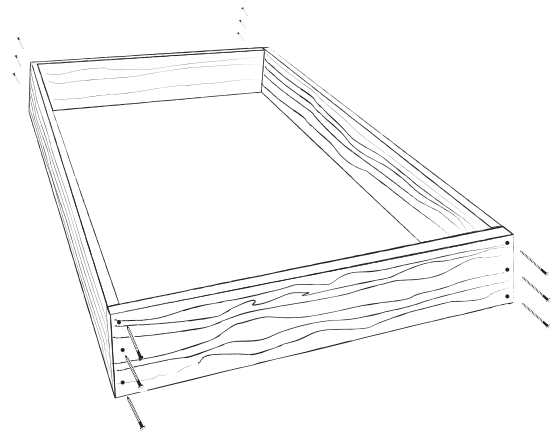
The Standard Raised Bed

The standard bed is 4 feet wide, 8 feet long and 12 inches tall.

To build this bed, you'll need:

- Three 2-by-12-inch boards 8 feet long
- 12 wood screws (2½ to 3-inch self-tapping wood screws work best and help you avoid drilling pilot holes)
- Drill and drill bit(s) to fit the type of screws you are using

Cut one of the 8-foot boards to half its length (4 feet). Hold the 4-foot board at a right angle to an 8-foot board. Use three screws to hold the board together, placing one at the top, one in the middle and one at the bottom of the joint. Repeat again until all four corners are connected. This bed can be built to any length. If connecting boards together to make a very long bed, reinforce with a 2-by-4-inch board at each connection. Fill with soil and plant.



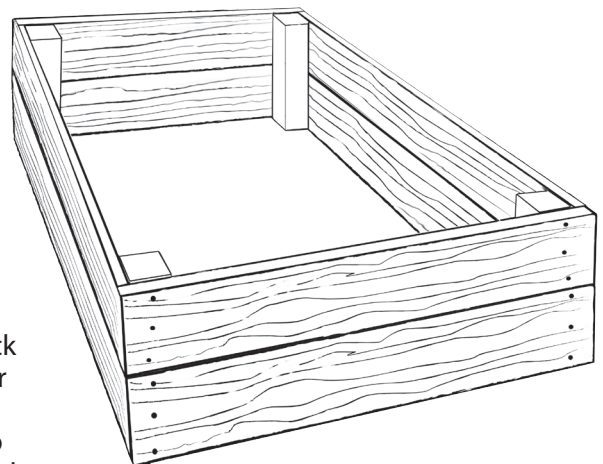
Taller Ground-level Beds

You can create beds of all heights. The taller the bed, the more soil you'll need to fill it. But you won't have to bend down as far either! This bed is the simple bed made taller by doubling the height. The dimensions of this finished bed are 4 feet wide by 8 feet long and 24 inches tall.

To build this bed, you'll need:

- Six 2-by-12-inch boards 8 feet long
- 1 4-by-4-inch board 8 feet long
- 42 2½-inch wood screws
- Drill and drill bit(s) to fit the type of screws you're using

A simple way to construct a tall bed is to follow the directions for the simple bed but to build two of the simple beds. Then just stack one on top of the other. Cut the 8-foot 4-by-4 inch board into four 24-inch pieces. Reinforce the two beds by using 4-by-4 boards in the corners. Screw the sides of each bed into the 4-by-4 boards to ensure the separate beds don't separate when you fill with soil and plant.



Handicap Accessible Bed

This bed is suitable for gardeners in wheelchairs or those who just want to pull up a stool and sit and garden. The wheelchair accessible bed is approximately 34 inches above ground level with a 28 inch knee clearance.

To build this bed you'll need:

- Two 4-by-4-inch boards 8 feet long
- Three 2-by-6-inch boards 8 feet long
- Two 2-by-4-inch boards 8 feet long
- 28 2½-inch wood screws (self-tapping works best to avoid drilling pilot holes)
- Drill and drill bit(s) to fit the type of screws you're using
- A 4½-by-10 foot roll of chicken wire
- A 4-by-25 foot roll of landscape fabric
- Staple gun and staples

Cut the 4-by-4-by-8 boards into four 30-inch lengths. These will serve as the legs of the bed. You should have four of these. Extra lumber can be discarded.

Cut one of the 2-by-6 boards in half to give you two 4-foot lengths.

Screw a 30-inch 4-by-4 board onto one of the 8-foot long 2-by-6 boards, using one screw at each the top, middle and bottom of the 6-inch board.

Next, screw a 4-foot 2-by-6 board at a right angle to the same 30-inch 4-by-4 board that you previously attached to the 8-foot board. The 6-inch boards should be on the outside of the 4-by-4 leg.

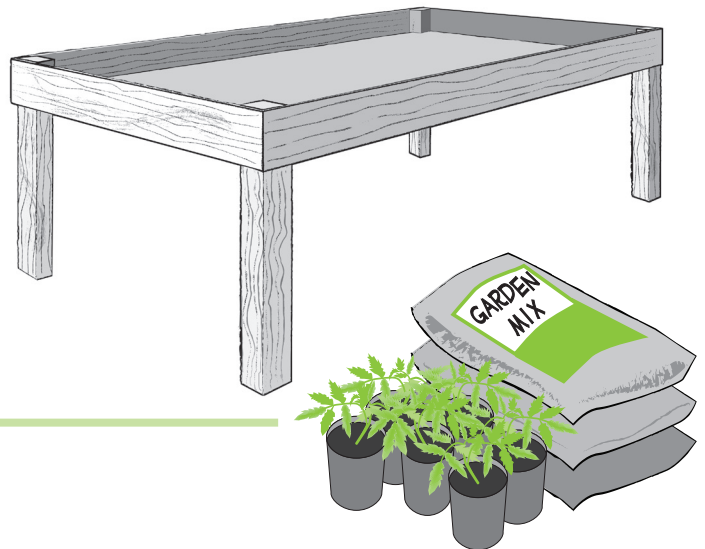
Repeat connecting all sides to the four legs until you are left with a triangle.

Cut both 8-foot 2-by-4s in half, making 4-foot lengths. Screw one half between each set of legs about midway up. This will support the table and reduce wobbling. Screw the remaining 4-foot 2-by-4s to the bottom of the table underneath the 6-inch boards running perpendicular. This will support the weight of the soil and plants once the tabletop bed is filled.

Using your staple gun, staple the chicken wire into the interior of the bed approximately 2 inches from the bottom of the inside of the 6-inch board. Tightly secure to all sides of the bed's interior.

Next, cover the interior of the bed with the landscape cloth. You will need to use two layers so that you have enough fabric to staple to the interior sides of the bed.

Finally, fill with soil and plant.



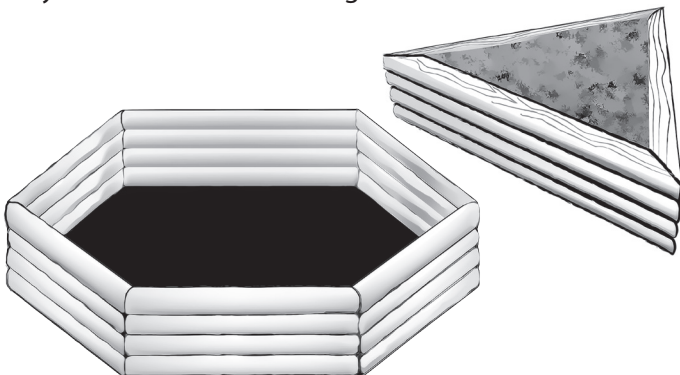
Bed Shapes

Get creative with landscape timbers. Landscape timbers are easy to use if you want to fashion a raised bed into a shape.

Use at least four landscape timbers on top of one another to form the sides. Then just use your imagination to create the shapes and sizes you desire.

You can construct a triangle.

Or you can construct a hexagon.



Raised Beds Can Be Constructed From...

Raised beds can be constructed from many different building materials. People use lumber, bricks, cinder blocks, pavers, sandbags and anything else that will hold soil in place.

Drainage

Remember, however that **drainage is crucial**. If using an old container or a bed with a bottom, drill holes for adequate drainage.

Purchase Soil

Garden soil is not uniform throughout the state. The optimum soil mix for raised beds is a 1:1:1 ratio of sand, compost and garden loam.

The problem is that you may be introducing incredible amounts of weed seeds and disease-causing organisms if the soil has not been treated to eliminate weeds and disease organisms. Most garden centers sell a garden blend of soilless soil or media that works well for vegetables.

Soil should be dark and comprised of decomposed materials. Try to choose a soil that isn't primarily large bark pieces. Too much bark ties up nutrients and drains too quickly.

When buying soil or planting media, ask the seller for a copy of the soil analysis. Make sure the soil has a pH of 5.5 to 7.0. This is the perfect range for most vegetable crops.

Fertilize and Plant

Use the Louisiana Vegetable Planting Guide for more information on planting dates, spacing and depth!

http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/lawn_garden/home_gardening/vegetables/home_garden_crops/Louisiana+Vegetable+Planting+Guide.htm

Enjoy the Garden!

You'll be eating fresh produce before you know it. Just remember to pull or spray weeds around the edges of the bed so they don't encroach. Scout for insects and diseases and choose plants appropriate for the season.

Enjoy your raised bed!

This publication was made possible by funds from
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Pub. 3360 E 5M 2/15

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