

## Vegetables Grown Easy

Thinking about vegetable gardening this spring, what about raised bed gardening? Traditionally, to grow your own fresh vegetables we often thought that we had to have a back 40 or some large area to plant, along with equipment such as a tractor or tiller, which is not necessarily true. A garden salad can be produced in small raised bed 4x4 gardens or even in containers. This is what we have set up to do with school and community gardens throughout northern Louisiana.

A raised bed garden can be as rustic or as contemporary as you like. Raised beds can be very inexpensive using recycled material or very expensive using decorative stones or bricks. One of the greatest things that we want to keep in mind is the ease in the maintenance of the garden. For instance, in many cases where we use a garden tiller to turn over soil we often later encounter a battle with weeds, which can be very discouraging. Building raised beds we can combat the weed problem from the start. The typical size of a raised bed garden is approximately 10 feet long and 4 feet wide.

The first thing in building a raised bed for vegetables is to locate the garden in as much sunlight as possible. The fruit-bearing crops, such as tomatoes, peppers and squash, need full sunlight for best production. Too much shade results in a very disappointed gardener because of limited production although; the leafy vegetables will tolerate more shade than the root or fruit bearing crops.

To suppress the weeds we can lay a weed mat on the ground or cover the small area with several layers of newspaper or cardboard. The weed mats are normally sold in garden centers and can be costly, however, very effective at taking the light from the grassy weeds and allowing your plants above the mat to thrive. The cardboard or newspaper can be recycled material. Once you have placed several layers of newspaper or cardboard to suppress the weeds, we can then determine what we use as the sidewalls.

Sidewalls can be made of lumber, rubber borders, stones, bricks or anything that will hold soil. The height of the garden bed can be as high as you like, however, 4-6 inch depth is sufficient to grow vegetables. Once you have established your sidewalls, you are ready to fill the bed with soil. Remember we want to keep our raised bed weed-free so caution should be taken in determining which soil to fill your raised bed. It is no fun if we have to weed the garden each time we go out. Soil purchased in bags is normally free of unwanted weeds and can be handled easily. If you have, a well-aged compost pile this soil may be just what you need. Once you have filled your bed with soil, you are ready to figure out what you are going to plant.

A garden salad can be produced from the seeds of lettuce, radishes, spinach and carrots in just 45 days. Fall is just around the corner, which is a great time to grow leafy vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, mustard, turnips and collards. Tomatoes and cucumber can be added next spring after danger of frost. Remember you do not have to have a back 40 or a garden tractor or tiller.

For more information regarding this or any other horticultural topic, please call Rafash Brew, regional horticulture specialist, at your Union Parish Extension Office, a branch of the LSU AgCenter at 318-368-9935 or 318-368-2999.