



How-To: BUILDING RAISED BEDS

In an urban setting, raised beds gardens are used to create “islands” of fertile, clean soil in areas where none exists. If they are carefully planned and built, raised beds will provide garden space for many years.



RAISED BEDS AT THE FRICK

WHY RAISED BEDS?

There are many reasons to build a raised bed garden! If any of the following describe your garden space, raised beds may be a good fit for you.

Lack of Good Soil

Raised beds can be built on asphalt, or in areas with thin soil or heavy metal contamination. *Please note that we recommend soil testing for any type of garden site. If heavy metals exist, a raised bed may be built on top of a heavy barrier that keeps the contaminated and safe soil from mixing.

Poor Drainage

Raised beds lift the growing area above ground level. This can make a big difference for waterlogged areas that could otherwise drown plant roots.

Accessibility Needs

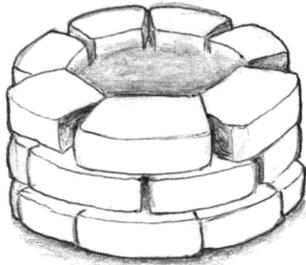
Raised beds can be built to any height, which makes them a great fit for gardeners who are unable to bend to ground level.

Many Visitors

Because raised beds have clearly defined edges, they work well in spaces with lots of foot traffic. Raised beds protect the garden areas from being trampled and compacted. Raised beds are especially well suited for children's gardens!

Raised beds also look tidy, which can be important in highly visible locations. They extend the season, as they warm up more quickly than the ground. Because the soil inside is lighter and less compacted than the surrounding land, they can be easier to plant, regardless of the weather.

There are a few drawbacks with raised beds as well. The materials can be expensive, and it's labor intensive to construct and prepare them the first season. However, once raised beds are built, they require very little money and maintenance.



RAISED BED BUILT FROM BRICKS

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Location

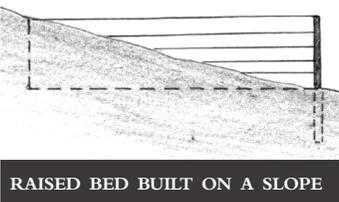
Raised beds work best on flat sites. If there is a gentle slope, dig into the hill when installing the raised bed so the bed sits level. This will help prevent soil from eroding from the bed when it rains.

Bed Dimensions

We recommend beds 3' wide or less, to make the whole bed easily reachable. Lumber should be at least 1" thickness and 8" height. Alternatively, you can stack two boards to make a deeper bed.

Walkways

Consider the dimensions of walkways, too. You'll want to be able to move easily and possibly maneuver larger items like a wheelbarrow or mower between beds.



RAISED BED BUILT ON A SLOPE



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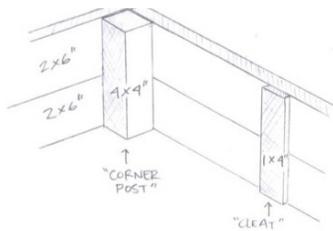


THIS RAISED BED WAS JUST BUILT AND IS READY FOR PLANTING

Decide whether to grow a groundcover in the walkways and mow it regularly, or put down mulch.

For the Frame

A variety of materials can be used to build the raised bed structure. A bed made out of untreated lumber is easiest to install. We recommend cedar, hemlock, larch (tamarack), or black locust. Do not use treated lumber for beds or trellises you will grow food in/on, as this wood is treated with chemicals that have not been approved for food gardening. Please see the chart for more information on each type of lumber, and the Resources section for information on sourcing. Clean bricks, landscaping blocks, Belgian blocks, or rocks could also be used for the edges of the bed.



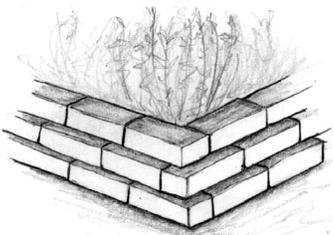
SECURING CORNERS AND MULTIPLE, STACKED BOARDS

If you plan to stack two boards to create a deep enough bed, secure the boards together with a “cleat” – a short piece of 1"x4" or 2"x4." (Please see diagram.)

Bed corners are the first to show signs of wear and tear. Building them well can add years of life to the bed. Plan to order and use 2"x2" or 4"x4" posts to secure the interior corners of the bed. (Please see diagram.)

Soil

For filling the beds, we recommend a topsoil: compost ratio in the range of 70:30 to 50:50. You can purchase bags of topsoil and compost for a small bed, or find a local nursery or compost supplier to deliver a larger amount of materials. For beds that are 18" deep or more, treat the raised bed as a large container, and avoid topsoil, which can be too heavy. For these deep, container-like beds, we mix 5-gallon buckets of materials in the following ratio: 2 buckets compost, ½ bucket vermiculite, ¼ bucket peat, ⅛ bucket sand.



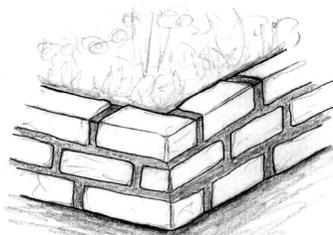
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Hardware

Choose galvanized or zinc plated screws meant for outdoor use. Lag bolts, lag screws, or deck screws will work. Pre-drill holes, as the lumber could be very dense or may split easily. Metal corner braces are not necessary but can help with construction.

Liner

A liner is not needed, unless there is no soil beneath the bed or the soil underneath the bed is contaminated. Liners are commercially available and keep the soil in the raised bed from seeping out the side of the frame, or mixing with the soil beneath the raised bed. After the bed is built and placed in its final location, lay down cardboard if you are not using a commercial liner. The cardboard will smother weeds or turf and will eventually break down.



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