



# How-To: CREATING NEW GARDEN SPACES

*Garden beds can take many forms. From large, in-ground gardens, to a sunny patch of soil by some steps, to raised beds and a wide assortment of containers, the possibilities are endless! Here's how to weigh the options and build your own.*



YOUTH IN THE BRADDOCK UFIT PROGRAM PREPARE A CONTAINER FOR PLANTING



RAISED BEDS AT THE FRICK KITCHEN GARDEN, WITH WOOD CHIPS IN THE WALKWAYS



THIS LARGE-SCALE RAISED BED HAS PAVERS FOR EASY ACCESS

## CONTAINERS

Containers are the quickest gardening area to create; they simply require a vessel and potting mix. They are impermanent and can be easily replanted if a crop fails. However, containers must be large to accommodate most edible plants, and the smaller growing space requires very regular watering. To create a container garden:

1. Select plants that will grow well in smaller spaces and can handle drying out a little. Herbs and flowers generally thrive.
2. To plant vegetables in containers, choose dwarf or compact varieties, and plan as much space as possible for each plant. For instance, peppers and tomatoes do best with one plant per 5-gallon container or larger.
3. Make sure containers have drainage holes; create them if necessary.
4. Fill with sterile potting mix (not garden soil) and add compost or organic fertilizer.
5. Plant!
6. Water and fertilize regularly throughout the season. Consider creating or purchasing self-watering containers to cut down on day-to-day maintenance of the garden.

## RAISED BEDS

Raised beds need a little more effort to set up and are more permanent than most containers. They clearly define the garden area and keep foot traffic (from children or groups of adults) off the beds. If lined, they can act as a large container. If unlined, they can add a defined area of rich soil on top of existing land. To create a raised bed garden:

1. Select a reasonably flat area with 6 hours of sun per day or more.
2. Test the soil to determine whether heavy metals are present.
3. If lead or other heavy metals contaminate the soil, plan to line the bed with landscape fabric or a commercially available liner.
4. Plan the size and location of beds and walkways. In general, 3' is a comfortable width for beds. Allow around 2' width for walkways. To maintain walkways, mow or cover with cardboard and mulch.



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IN-GROUND BEDS AT THE SHILOH FARM, WITH BOTH MOWED GRASS AND WOOD CHIP PATHWAYS



THIS IN-GROUND GARDEN USES GRASS AND STRAW WALKWAYS

5. Purchase a pre-fabricated bed or materials to build a bed (can include rot-resistant wood like cedar or white oak, bricks, or stone). Build and place bed on desired location.
6. Place cardboard over the ground to smother weeds and turf, then fill with a 70:30 mixture of topsoil and compost. (For lined beds, simply line the bed and fill with soil – no cardboard is needed.)
7. Plant!

## IN-GROUND BEDS

In-ground beds are a great option when the soil is decent and where there won't be a large amount of foot traffic through the garden. In-ground beds need a little prep and maintenance, and they can be productive garden spaces for years to come. To create an in-ground bed:

1. Determine where the garden will go. Vegetable gardens need 6 or more hours of sun per day.
2. Test the soil to determine whether heavy metals are present.
3. If lead or other heavy metals contaminate the soil, consider testing a different location or opting for a lined raised bed or container garden.
4. Plan the size and location of beds and walkways. In general, 3' for beds and 2' for walkways works well. To maintain walkways, mow or cover with cardboard and mulch. Consider placing edging around the beds to define them and reduce weeding by keeping walkway plants from encroaching.
5. Add amendments needed based on the soil tests. Add compost to increase fertility and benefit soil structure; at least 2 inches over the growing area is a good rule of thumb.
6. Plant!

To create a garden on turf or weedy areas, choose one of the following methods, then add compost and amendments based on soil test recommendations:

- For small gardens, turn turf upside down with a shovel.
- For large garden areas, rent a sod cutter to remove turf. Compost turf or reuse on other areas. Use a rototiller to loosen the garden soil.
- Alternatively, for large gardens, use a rototiller to break down turf and incorporate it into the garden area. (Wait for a week or two to plant small seeds, as the seedbed will be rough until the grass decays.)
- For small or large gardens, bury turf under a layer of cardboard. Layer organic materials like grass clippings, leaves, old manure, and compost. Ideally, wait for organic materials to decompose before planting. These layered "lasagna" gardens can be created anytime but work especially well if they are built in the fall for the next year's growing season.