



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Consider Raised Garden Beds (March 9, 2024)

by Pam Wallace, Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardener

It's time to get your summer vegetable garden planted. The older I get, the more my body – especially my back – complains after gardening work. Bending over, digging with a shovel, hoeing weeds – they all take their toll.

Raised veggie and flower beds can be a real back and knee saver and are very easy to maintain. They even allow gardeners with limited mobility a chance to continue to play in the dirt. Furthermore, with raised beds, you have better control over the quality of soil you'll be growing your vegetables in.

If you're not handy with power tools, there are kits you can purchase for your raised beds. Although they will probably cost more than building your own, they can still be affordable, especially considering this should be a one-time purchase.

If you decide to build your own raised beds, you can make them as simple or elaborate as you like. Do a quick internet search, and you'll find a myriad of instructions and how-to's. The recommended height for raised beds is 12-18". This will allow plenty of space for your veggies' roots. The taller your bed, the less bending over for you.

Depending on your budget, there are many different methods for building your raised bed garden: cement construction blocks, wood, bricks, galvanized metal tubs (be sure to drill holes for drainage), wine barrels, or even fabric planting bags that you can group together. Raised garden beds should not exceed 4 feet in width, as you want to be able to reach comfortably into the middle to plant, weed, or harvest. The length of your bed depends on the type of construction material and your available space.



A simple method is to purchase cement construction or landscaping blocks and place them end to end in any shape that fits your space. Layer them on top of each other to get the preferred height. These are a nice choice because they're heavy enough to hold the soil without bowing, and they will last much longer than wood. Also, their width allows for comfortable seating while tending to your plants.

If you prefer a raised bed out of wood, cedar or redwood is recommended, as they both are more resistant to rot than other types of wood. The most common method of construction is to screw your wood planks into corner 4x4 posts. Six feet in length or shorter is recommended for the wood planks, as the weight and pressure of the soil can cause the wood to bend and bow, so anything longer would need more bracing in the middle to maintain shape. We built ours with a top edging plank, which allows for comfortable seating while weeding or planting.

Your raised beds should be in a sunny spot that receives at least 6 hours of sun during the day. Once your beds are built, you might consider laying some weed cloth in the bottom, especially if you're placing your beds in an area where you've had a weed problem. If you have a problem with gophers, lay some fine mesh chicken wire at the bottom before adding soil. Raised beds provide control over the health of your soil. If you don't have access to good garden soil, you can purchase it in bags or in bulk. Remember that your soil is the backbone of your vegetable garden, so it's important that it be balanced and nutrient-rich. No matter what type of soil you use, you should amend it with compost and potting soil. Combining several different types of bagged soils can give you a nice variety of texture, and you do want your soil to be loose and well-draining.

After filling the raised bed with the soil of your choice, add fertilizer in the form of a balanced 16-16-16 fertilizer, worm castings, or well-aged manure. Adding fresh manure to your bed will burn your plants unless you till it in and then wait for several weeks for it to decompose.

A drip irrigation system is easy to install, and when used with a timer, your garden beds will be easier to maintain. You can also use soaker hoses or water by hand if you prefer.

To keep weeds down around your new beds, lay down some pea gravel, rocks, or just some good walk-on bark. Add a few stepping stones, and you are all set to plant. For more information on vegetable gardening, visit our webpage: https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/Local_Gardening_Articles_-_Info/Vegetable_Gardening/

If you already have raised beds, remember the nutrients in the soil will be depleted by the growing season, so you should amend your soil yearly by adding bags of soil amendment, potting soil, or mulch. The more diversified your soil, the better for your plants, so use different methods or mixes each year.

Raised garden beds can be attractive and make it much easier to tend your garden. They are perfect for square-foot gardens. Weeds are fewer in raised beds. No more back-breaking tilling and hoeing? Sign me up! Happy Gardening!

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse North parking lot
March 9 - Luis Nursery Plant Clinic, Caldwell & Mariposa, Visalia - 10 am - 2 pm

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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