

Raised Bed Gardening



As warm weather approaches, many gardeners are eagerly anticipating growing fruits, vegetables, and herbs. I know I am counting the days until I can get my shovel back in the dirt. For the first time, this year's fruits and vegetables will be in a raised bed garden. Raised bed gardening is a great option to consider to avoid many soil challenges and has several benefits when compared to traditional in-ground beds. Raised beds may actually provide higher yields, an extended growing season, better soil, improved water conservation, and fewer weeds and pests when compared to traditional gardens. With some planning and preparation, you can create a raised bed garden that will yield successful crops for many years.

To be totally transparent, the first year of establishing a raised bed garden requires a significant amount of time and work. So, let's get started!

Raised beds are designed in many different sizes and shapes. Be mindful of keeping the width of the bed narrow enough to easily reach all areas, allowing for easy planting, harvesting, and weeding. Typically, four feet is the maximum recommended width because an average adult can reach in about two feet. The height of the bed can vary significantly, from 6 to 24 inches, but should have at

least a six-inch increase in height above the ground to allow for adequate drainage. Make it convenient for you to easily work the bed.

Location of the bed is also a key component to consider. Most vegetables, fruits, and herbs require full sun for most of the day. So, placing the bed in an area that receives adequate sunlight is a must. Beds should be positioned in a north to south orientation to allow for best sun exposure for all plant sizes. Planting the taller plants on the north side and the shorter plants on the south prevents the over-shading of the smaller plants by the taller ones.

Raised beds may be constructed from a variety of different materials, including lumber, concrete blocks, rock, brick, or recycled material. One type of typical raised bed is 4 feet wide by 6 feet long, 24 inches in height, and is constructed of wood.

Proper soil preparation is also an essential component for a successful raised bed garden. Raised beds are especially helpful for those who struggle with difficult soil, like clay, because the soil in raised beds can be easily amended. Bagged top soil or sandy loam may need to be added if heavy clay soils predominate the area of the raised bed. Organic materials such as compost, rotted grass clippings, or manure should be added to the raised bed, allowing for desired loose and well-draining soil combined with proper nutrients and pH. Soil in raised beds typically warms faster than that in traditional beds and can be worked earlier, offering the advantage of an extended gardening season.

A wide variety of plants may be grown in raised beds. Be cognizant of the recommended spacing for each plant when planning the layout of the bed. Intercropping fast-maturing crops with longer-season ones will help maximize space in the raised bed. Tall plants, such as corn or okra, should be planted on the north side of the bed. Shorter growing plants, such as lettuce, radishes, and Chinese cabbage should be planted on the south side. Tomatoes will require the use of stakes or cages. Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries perform well in raised beds, as do assorted herbs.

Water conservation is an advantage of raised beds because watering is specifically targeted to the bed alone. Additionally, heavy rains can penetrate the loose soil of raised beds better than the more compacted in-ground gardens, with less risk

of erosion. Raised beds are the perfect place to use drip irrigation. You will have less work and it will actually improve garden production.

The closely planted crops in the raised bed provide less room for weeds, while the easy rotation of crops from bed to bed decreases the occurrence of nematodes and other persistent pests.

Although the initial preparation of the raised bed may seem daunting, the benefits your hard work can be enjoyed for years to come.

Additional OSU Extension Fact Sheets that may be helpful:

[HLA-6004](#) Oklahoma Garden Planning Guide

[HLA-6033](#) Raised Bed Gardening