

Exploring Garden Types

For Oklahoma Gardeners



Oklahoma gardeners have diverse options when it comes to choosing a garden style that suits their space, soil, and sustainability goals. Five popular methods—raised bed, container, square foot, hugelkultur, and keyhole gardening—each offer unique benefits and considerations. Understanding their design, pros, and cons helps gardeners make informed decisions.

Raised Bed Gardening

Raised bed gardening uses framed beds filled with a soil mix above ground level. Beds are typically 4 feet wide and can be built from wood, stone, or other materials. Raised beds warm earlier in spring, improve soil drainage, and allow for precise soil amendments. They reduce soil compaction, making root growth easier, and are ideal for areas with poor native soil. However, construction costs and the need for irrigation in hot summers are drawbacks. Beds must also be replenished with organic matter over time. Despite these considerations, raised beds produce high yields and simplify maintenance, especially for gardeners with limited mobility.

Container Gardening

Container gardening involves growing plants in pots, tubs, or other containers rather than directly in the ground. This method is excellent for patios, balconies, or small yards.

Containers allow for control over soil composition and mobility to adjust light exposure. They are ideal for annual flowers, herbs, and vegetables. Pros include minimal weed problems, flexibility, and suitability for renters. However, containers dry out quickly, requiring frequent watering, and plant roots may become restricted in small pots. Fertilizer leaches easily, necessitating regular feeding. With careful monitoring, container gardens can thrive and offer an attractive, space-efficient solution.

Square Foot Gardening

Square foot gardening divides a raised bed into 1-foot squares, each planted with a specific crop based on spacing recommendations. This method maximizes space, reduces weeds, and simplifies crop rotation. It is well-suited for urban gardens or limited spaces. The main advantage is efficiency, as it produces high yields in a small area while conserving water and fertilizer. However, intensive planting may require vigilant pest monitoring and consistent soil fertility management. For those who enjoy orderly planting and easy access, square foot gardening is a practical approach.

Hügelkultur

Hügelkultur is a sustainable method that uses decaying wood and organic matter to build raised mounds that function as self-composting gardens. As the woody core retains moisture and releases nutrients over time, hügelkultur reduces the need for irrigation and fertilization. Hügelkultur beds improve soil health and promote biodiversity. The initial labor of building the mound and sourcing woody materials can be a challenge, and decomposition causes settling, requiring periodic maintenance. Over time, however, hügelkultur offers a low-input, resilient gardening system that aligns with sustainable practices.

Keyhole Gardening

Keyhole gardens are circular raised beds with a wedge-shaped access path and a compost basket in the center. OSU's Oklahoma Gardening program highlights that these gardens are designed for arid environments, using compost to enrich the soil while conserving water. The central compost basket allows for continual nutrient input, while the design maximizes growing space. Keyhole gardens are drought-tolerant and highly productive, making them suitable for Oklahoma's dry periods. On the downside, initial construction may require significant effort, and the design is less flexible than traditional raised beds. Nevertheless, keyhole gardens are an excellent choice for sustainability-focused gardeners seeking efficient water use.

By exploring raised bed, container, square foot, hugelkultur, and keyhole gardens, Oklahoma gardeners can match methods to their needs. Whether aiming for productivity, space efficiency, or environmental stewardship, these techniques—supported by Oklahoma State University Extension—offer proven pathways to successful gardening.

Resources

Oklahoma State University Resources on Subject Gardening Methods:

[Raised Bed Gardening](#)

[Container Gardening](#)

[Square Foot Gardening](#)

[Hügelkultur/Lasagna or Sheet Mulching](#)

[OKG: Building a Keyhole Garden, Pt. 1](#)

[OKG: Building a Keyhole Garden, Pt. 2](#)

[Concepts Gardens](#)

Image credit: "[Plants in a backyard raised bed garden](#)" by [Alabama Extension](#) is marked with [CC0 1.0](#).