

Raised Bed Gardening

Raised bed gardening is a good option for the sometimes tough soil of Oklahoma. There are several benefits to raised bed gardening including the ability to amend the soil without waste, water conservation, fewer weeds, the ability to enjoy an extended growing season, and better pest control. Raised beds can be created in any size and shape the home gardener desires. Beds that are so big that you cannot reach across them to pick vegetables or weed may be a problem, so take overall width of the bed into consideration when laying out your garden. Height of the bed is also optional. Taller beds may be good for those who have limited ability to kneel, or who like to sit while gardening. Typically, raised beds should be 6 to 18 inches off the ground in order to enhance drainage and give plenty of soil space for plants to grow. Another element to consider before creating your raised bed is sun exposure. Most vegetables and herbs have minimum sunlight requirements and need full sun during most of the day, so spend some time watching the area you intend to build on to determine if there is enough sunlight. Plan your beds so they are aligned north to south, with taller plants on the north side of shorter plants so the taller plants won't shade out smaller plants. Raised beds can be made from many different materials such as rocks, brick, lumber, or recycled materials. Due to the chemicals used to treat railroad ties, they are not recommended to use unless they are well aged.

Soil is very important in a raised bed garden and should consist of light loose soil with lots of organic material. For those with clay soil or soil or soil with low nutrients, raised bed gardening offers a great solution as the soil can be easily amended. Break up the soil to be used in the bed and add lots of organic material such as compost, manure, or leaves which have broken down. You may have to resort to bagged soil if you have heavy clay or if your soil is heavily compacted.

When your raised bed is framed and filled with soil, you can begin to select plants. There is no need to plant in rows in a raised bed garden. Feel free to maximize your space with many varieties of plants, paying close attention to recommended spacing between plants indicated on packaging, or you can refer to [OSU Extension Fact Sheet HLA-6004](#). Tomatoes will need to be staked or caged and pole beans will require support. Maximize your planting space by under plant slower growing plants with faster growing, smaller plants such as lettuce or radishes. Tall plants such as okra or corn can be grown in raised beds but plant these taller plants on the north side of the bed.

Creating a raised bed can take many long hours, but you will enjoy the benefits of all of this hard work for years to come. You will be rewarded with healthier crops and potentially higher yields and the greatest benefit of all....less back strain and weeding!