

CREATING A RAISED GARDEN BED

1) Location and Setup:

- Like all plants, vegetables and herbs need a certain amount of sunlight everyday to grow. For optimum plant health and growth, your raised bed garden should be placed in a location that receives at least six or more hours of sun a day.
- Before placing or building your raised garden, you need to prepare the location. Be sure to remove grass or weeds from the area. Use a garden fork or a tiller to loosen the existing soil to a depth of 6" to 10". Doing this will help improve the drainage of your raised bed and it also means that with a 6" high garden bed, your plants will have 12" plus inches of soil to grow in. That provides plenty of room for things like carrots, potatoes, or full-size tomato plants to grow.
- Raised beds can be any size you want, but for a standard, rectangular bed, we recommend one about three to four feet wide by six to eight feet long and ten to twelve inches high. Those dimensions allow a gardener to reach in to plant, weed, and harvest without walking through it.
- Make sure you place your raised garden bed near a hose spigot. While this isn't 100% necessary, it will make life easier on you when you don't have to drag a long hose across the yard or make multiple trips with a watering can.

2) Adding Soil:

- Making sure that you have good soil in your raised bed is important when growing herbs and vegetables. When purchasing soil for your bed, there are several different options to consider:
 - i. Figure out how much soil you need. There are multiple online soil calculators to help you determine soil amounts.
 - ii. If you are doing a small to medium bed, consider buying soil by the bag. We recommend Miracle Gro Raised Bed soil.
 - iii. If you want to create your own soil mix, consider a triple mix of top soil, compost, and peat moss. A blend of 60% top soil, 30% compost, and 10% peat moss or potting mix is generally a good ratio to work with.
 - iv. Lastly, if you are doing a large bed or multiple larger beds, you can buy soil in bulk and have it delivered. Like making your own mix, you will want to work with the supplier to get a triple mix of top soil, compost, and peat moss.
- Amending the soil in your beds during the season is important as well. If you harvest plants during the season, not only will you be removing some of the soil, but those plants will have depleted the nutrients in the soil. Topping your bed with compost will help add nutrients back into your soil so it is ready for your next planting. In addition, at the end of the season, consider adding the mulched leaves from your yard to garden bed to breakdown over the winter. Remember, maintaining the health of your soil is essential so make sure you add organic material to your bed every year.

3) What to Plant:

- Deciding what to plant in your raised garden bed is the fun part. Whether you're doing all vegetables, all herbs, or a combination of both, think about these things when deciding what to plant:
 - i. What do you like to eat? If you like to eat a lot of salads, consider planting things like head lettuce, a lettuce cutting mix, cucumbers, radishes, carrots, and cherry tomatoes. If you are the culinary expert of your home, plant things like basil, cilantro, thyme, onions, peppers, potatoes, tomatoes, and leeks. The combinations you can do are endless.
 - ii. Once you decide what you are going to plant, take a moment to create a planting plan for your bed. Research the spacing and growing habit of each plant and then consider whether that plant will require stakes, ladders, or cages.

TIP: If you have planted in this space before, be sure to think about crop rotation. Crop rotation means not planting the same plants in the same spot two years in a row. By utilizing crop rotation, you help replenish soil nutrients and it helps to interrupt any unseen disease or pest cycles that may be present. This is especially true when planting tomatoes.

Once you have determined these things, create your layout. The trick is growing as much food as possible without over crowding the plants. If you overcrowd your bed, your plants will never reach their full potential because they will be stressed due to poor air circulation and they will be competing for water, root space, and nutrients.

4) When to Plant:

- There are multiple factors to consider when determining when to plant your garden:
 - i. The first thing to consider is what type of herbs and vegetables are you putting in? Certain vegetables such as lettuce and broccoli, can tolerate cooler weather. Others, such as tomatoes and basil, have a higher chance of being damaged when temperatures get lower than 40 degrees. Refer to the planting guide document on our herb and vegetable page to help you determine the best time to plant each crop.
 - ii. Other important things to consider are the frost dates and soil temperatures. In our growing zones, the prime gardening season falls between the first and last frost dates. You should not plant cold sensitive plants until all danger of frost has passed. In our area, this is typically between May 11-May 20.
 - iii. Lastly, soil temperature is another important consideration. Most plants thrive when the soil temperature is between 60 to 70 degrees. Again, while some plants may grow in cooler conditions and soil, most won't grow properly until the soil temperature is at our above 60 degrees.

5) Maintaining Your Garden:

- The rewarding part of a garden is getting to enjoy the spoils of your hard work, yet it's the hard work of maintaining your garden that allows you to enjoy those spoils. Here are some maintenance tips to help you get the most out of your garden:
 - i. **Weeding:** Make sure to weed your garden. Weeds compete for moisture, nutrients, and root space with your plants so you will want to remove them as soon as they

appear. You may have to do this weekly in the earlier months, but by mid-summer you shouldn't have to do it very often.

- ii. **Watering:** In an ideal world, Mother Nature will provide you with at least an inch of rain every week to keep your plants happy. Since that isn't always realistic, you will probably have to do some watering to help your plants thrive. Consider putting in a rain gauge to keep track of how much rain has fallen. While this helps give you an indication of how much moisture has fallen each week, your hands are still one of the best tools for determining water needs.

Stick your fingers down into the soil to around the root zone of the plant. This should be around 3 inches. The soil should feel slightly damp. Think of a sponge that has been wrung out. You should do this once a week.

If you do need to water, consider using a watering wand because they deliver a lot of water quickly, but make sure to spray around the base of the plant and not the foliage because watering the foliage can promote disease. You can also use a soaker hose or a soaker hose with a timer to water while you are at work or away on vacation. Again, check the soil with your fingers once you are done to make sure your bed got thoroughly watered.

- iii. **Fertilizing:** To improve plant health and productivity, you should consider fertilizing your plants. It is recommended that you feed your plants at planting time and then again midseason. Consider using a granular, organic all purpose fertilizer.
- iv. **Pest Control:** Pests and animals are part of gardening. Below are some tips on dealing with pests and animals in your garden:
 - If you have a rascally rabbit eating your carrots, consider putting up garden fencing or chicken wire around your garden bed. Make sure to set it up high enough so they can't jump over the fence.
 - When dealing with bugs, remember most bugs are good bugs so know what you are dealing with before you start spraying your plants. If you do need to spray your plants, make sure to read the product label because different products have different lead times between treatment and harvest.

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