



Raised bed gardening refers to gardens whose surfaces are higher than the surrounding ground, whether they're in the yard or on a patio or deck.

### Advantages of raised bed gardening

Raised beds can be highly productive, as most gardeners tend to plant their vegetables closer in raised beds. Properly designed, there's no need for paths between rows of vegetables, as all of the plants can be reached from outside the bed.

The soil in raised beds warms up more quickly in the spring, so most raised bed gardeners can plant a little sooner than those who garden on a more traditional plot.

The soil in raised beds won't become as compacted as soil in a traditional garden, because there's no need to walk on it.

You have greater control over the quality of the soil in a raised bed. If your soil is heavy clay or very sandy, building a raised bed enables you to create a garden environment with rich, loamy soil... which you can purchase or create with the use of lots of compost.

Garden maintenance is much easier in raised beds. Intensive planting and good mulching will significantly reduce weed growth. And, since everything is easily within reach, raised beds are easier to weed and spray as necessary.

Raised beds can be very attractive and can provide a neat and clean border between your lawn and your vegetable garden.

The only disadvantage to raised bed gardening is that there is a small upfront investment of time and money; but, the investment will quickly pay huge dividends.

### How to Create Raised Beds

1. Choose a location that is fairly level, if possible, and one that will get at least 8 hours of sunlight each day.
2. Remove any existing turf, as this will significantly reduce the amount of weeding you'll need to do later.

## RAISED BED GARDENING

### A Quick Reference Source

3. Till the soil where you'll be adding your raised bed. Add sand, if your soil is heavy clay; and, add [compost](#), regardless of the soil type. This will enable you to have both good drainage and a productive foundation for deeper roots. Mix the compost and sand to improve your soil's tilth and fertility.

4. Build the walls of your raised bed with untreated lumber (cedar is ideal, composite lumber is also okay), or use bricks, concrete or decorative blocks for a more decorative bed. Ideally, raised beds should be about 8 inches higher than the surrounding ground. If you're using 2 x 8 lumber on edge, secure the lumber with 2 x 4 support stakes. Drive the supports at least 18" into the ground to prevent the walls of your raised bed from collapsing.

5. Free-standing beds – accessible from both sides – should be about 4 feet wide. If your bed is bordered by a fence or building, make it 3 feet wide, so that you can reach into it without walking on the garden's surface.

6. If you are building multiple beds, leave enough space between them so that you can easily mow the grass or create pathways with shredded wood mulch. (Don't use shredded wood mulch for the vegetable garden, though, as it tends to deplete the nitrogen in the soil.)

7. Fill the bed with good garden soil, which can be either purchased or created. The best soil for most vegetable gardening is loamy soil that drains fairly well – that ideal medium between clay and sand. Each year you can improve your soil by adding compost and [tilling](#) your soil.

8. Plant your raised beds intensively; give the plants enough room to mature, but you don't need to allow space for walking. Indeed, one of the main benefits of raised bed gardening is that you don't need to walk on the beds.

9. At the end of the gardening season, add compost to the soil and till it. Cover the soil with a layer of mulch – a layer of shredded leaves and grass clippings, which can easily be tilled into the soil at the beginning of next season.

**For more information, please contact Dr. Franklin Chukwuma coordinator of Off-Campus Centers, 601-877-2312 or [franklinc@alcorn.edu](mailto:franklinc@alcorn.edu)**

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