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Are your Veggie Beds on the Rise?

by Ken Vaughn, Master Gardener

Recently the sun came out which made me eager and anxious to get my veggie beds in shape for spring planting. So grabbing my shovel and rake, off I went to the backyard. But soon I was asking myself, "Was the ground farther away from me this year or was I feeling being another year older?" Obviously I knew the answer to that one, so I started thinking about raising the veggie beds up some to make it easier for me to work. Raised veggie and flower beds are a great idea and a real back and knee saver and are quite easy to make and maintain.

So off I went to my local lumberyard and returned home with several 2 x 12 boards that were 8 feet long. I cut off 2 feet and turned them into a wooden frame that was 6 feet long by 2 feet wide and 1 foot high. Three inch screws or nails worked great for putting them together. This is now my new raised veggie bed.

After making four more frames, I now have 5 total or about 60 square feet of veggie beds. These boards can be cut into any size you need; 7 x 1, 6 x 2, 5 x 3, or 4 x 4, so they can fit anywhere in your yard. Just make sure you place them in full sun for the veggies to grow.

Another great idea for raised beds is to use the 8-inch x 16-inch cement blocks used for construction. You can just place these end to end in any shape you want and they are heavy enough to hold the dirt in without anchoring them down. Make sure you place them with holes in the block facing up, so that when you are ready to plant you can put some of your favorite flowers or succulents in the holes to surround your veggie beds.

If you should have a problem with gophers, lay some fine mesh chicken wire at the bottom before adding soil. If good soil is in short supply then consider checking in with your local cemetery. If you call ahead, they can even help load it for you. Swimming pool construction companies are also a good source to check. I always add a bag or two of potting soil and compost to my beds to keep the soil nice and loose, and 3 or 4 good handfuls of a 16-16-16 fertilizer to make sure there are plenty of nutrients.

If you wish to decorate around your new beds, lay down some pea gravel, or salt and pepper gravel, or just some good walk on bark, with a few stepping stones and you are all set to plant.

This last year I planted two beds with tomatoes, one with carrots, one with a variety of lettuces, and one with onions, and we have had a nice selection of produce from spring through fall. After fall we planted some winter veggies: cauliflower, broccoli and more lettuce and onions.

I prefer to water my beds by hand as it gives me time to check for problems or insects or weeds, but a nice drip irrigation system is easy to install and will save even more time and labor.

These beds have worked great for my family and my back and knees are also happy. It has been a fun and easy project that everyone enjoys. So this spring get out there and raise those veggies in your new raised veggie and flower beds. Happy Gardening!

