

## Raised Vegetable Beds

I plan on using a raised planting bed for my vegetable garden this year, and need advice on what combination of materials I should use to fill it. The bed may be large, possibly up to three feet deep, so please help me with what to use and where to find it.

### Answer

There are many reasons gardeners use raised garden beds. They allow better utilization of limited space, the soil warms earlier, they are placed for ideal sun exposure, and are physically easier to reach. The options for raised bed designs are extensive, including watering troughs, easy to build kits, or complete plans for construction available on line. For more information on site selection, irrigation, and construction, please see the links below. It sounds like you may have already planned your raised bed, so let's get down to the question at hand.

Some people in our area want to build raised beds because they think the Yolo County soil is poor. While the soil here varies significantly and can be quite high in clay and therefore "heavy," it is usually a very good starting point for a raised garden. Clay soils hold moisture well and are generally high in nutrients, but they can be improved significantly by adding compost. When possible, start filling your bed with native soil and purchased compost.

You will need to calculate the amount of material needed to fill a large raised bed. You can do that by measuring the length, width and depth of the finished bed. A bed that is four feet in length, two feet wide and 3 feet deep requires 24 cubic feet of soil, almost a cubic yard! Vegetables and annual flowers don't need more than 12 -18 inches of soil depth. If you want the top of the bed to be thirty-six inches to make it easier to reach, you can raise the bed on legs. You will then need to put a bottom in the bed. Cedar boards are typically used to do this. You can easily pull up plans for an "elevated garden bed" on-line.

The amount of soil needed for even a relatively small raised bed argues for buying soil in bulk from a bulk soil and rock vendor. There is no legal definition of top soil, so it is important to research potential vendors before buying. It is wise to look at the soil before you purchase. Make sure it has few rocks and seems to break up easily. It should have an "earthy" smell indicating a good percentage of organic matter. One good option is the 50/50 soil and compost blend sold by many vendors. Potting soil, whether purchased in bulk or bags is not a good choice.

### Additional Resources

<https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8059.pdf>

<https://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=2562>

<https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/library/gardening/building-a-raised-bed-garden/>

<https://mgsantaclara.ucanr.edu/garden-help/vegetables/vegetable-garden-basics/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AlTx49r4z0>