

Raised Bed Gardening around Bishop

Benefits

- Warmer soil temperature in spring/fall
- Better water drainage
- No problems with lousy soil
- Easy to enrich the soil
- More plants in less space
- Possible to build high and reduce bending see →
- Can protect plants from heat/cold/light/bugs...



How Big?

4' x 8' is a good size. Min 7" tall. Probably 11" better. Too high just wastes soil.

If your soil is OK, till up soil underneath beds and blend it in with your enriched soil. "Double digging" is overkill. Shorter beds fine over decent soil. Taller's better over bad soil.

Soil Management

Lots of plants in little space will require a lot of fertility and perfect root conditions. Mulching is important in raised beds in summer. Pine needles work great. Alfalfa hay or straw chopped up with a mower works well. Finely ground bark OK too.

Soil Mix

- About ½ good, topsoil (Dehy Sandy Loam in Bishop is fine)
- About ½ organic stuff (compost, peat moss, potting mix, etc)
 - At least ½ of the organic stuff should be compost
 - Plant derived compost is best
 - Minimize use of manure or horse litter either aged or fresh
 - Don't use fresh wood, bark, straw in soil; let it compost some first
- If in Bishop and not near the city park or east of it, add a big coffee can of limestone to each 4x8 bed (about 5-8 lbs.). Otherwise use gypsum instead.

The shorter the bed, the better the drainage must be: add more organic stuff (*at least ½*) and make sure soil is sandy.

Taller beds are more forgiving. 1/3 compost + 2/3 sandy soil works fine in 11" tall beds.

Add new organic matter each year. If your mulch will break down quickly, till that in in fall. A fall cover crop (vetch, clover, rye, etc.) can add organic matter, too.

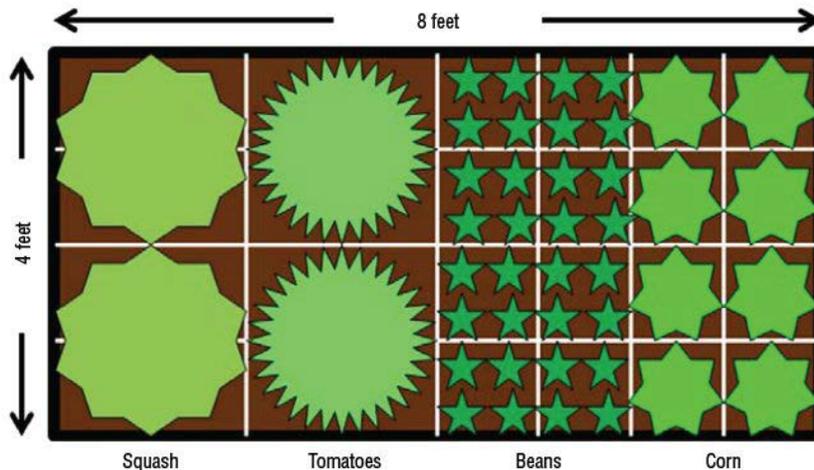
Planting Tips

Plant close enough so that mature plants just touch in the bed. The open space in the walkways is there to be used. Set plants closer to edge to grow over the sides. Don't have to be on a perfect grid! Shade on ground prevents weeds.

Use trellises to grow plants upward: cucumbers, melons, gourds, etc.

Try to have something in the beds most of the year. Rotate crops.

Don't want to garden in fall & winter? Plant crimson clover in September. Turn in in April.



An example of block planting. ("Square Foot Gardens") You can move plants toward outside and use that open space, too. Tall things should be on the north end of bed unless you want shade.

Big plants = more space.
Little plants = less space.

Plan to have something in the beds all year. Rotate crops.

Things that aren't all that good in a raised bed:

- Sweet Corn (works but takes a lot of space since it needs to be in a block and can blow over in high wind in loose soil)
- Pole beans (tends not flower well with all the fertility in the soil)
- Okra (grows great but tends to get too big; plant late and give at least 1 ft² per plant)

Extending the Season



In Bishop, frost season is about 2 weeks later in spring (and sooner in fall) than soil temperatures needed for growth. Raised beds give something to attach protection to. ½" PVC pipes work well. Hog panels are great. Cover with plastic or floating row cover at night. Hinged top on bed makes a cold frame. Lots of options...be creative!

In summer can use frame to provide 30-40% shade.

- **Last Frost** (Spring): 50% after May 5, 25% after May 14
- **First Frost** (Fall): 50% before Oct. 14, 25% before Oct. 6

Typically *soils* are warm enough to plant tomato transplants near April 7. Peppers and melons are about May 15. *** **Both dates are before frost season is over!** ***