



## **RAISED BED GARDENING**

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**Definition:** Raised beds are planting areas elevated above the natural level of a garden.

**Advantages:**

1. Small, focused area.
2. Improved soil drainage, increased air and nutrient availability to plant roots.
3. Improved soil tilth and moisture availability.
4. Faster soil warm-up in spring promotes early growth.
5. Can screen out pests.
6. Easy access, less bending.
7. Foot traffic outside of growing area prevents soil compaction.

**Site Selection:**

1. Avoid areas with long winter shadows.
2. Select a site to maximize the sun exposure appropriate to your plants. For example, vegetables need 5 to 7 hours of direct sun exposure per day.
3. Water should be provided to each bed.

**Construction:**

1. A raised bed can be amended soil shoveled in to a mound.
2. Alternatively, construct boxes of lumber, railroad ties or concrete blocks.
3. Height should complement your soil conditions and desired plant size.
4. Make the beds no wider than twice your arm's length (4 ft.) so you can easily reach the middle of the bed.
5. Leave at least 4 ft. between beds for easy access and to avoid shadows. To maintain maximum production, never walk inside raised beds since walking compacts the soil.

**Soils:**

1. Use resident soil or purchased soil.
2. For resident soil: Add 30% organic soil amendment by volume and mix well into the top foot of the bed.
3. Purchase solid commercially: Look for prepared "Raised Bed Mix", see Landscaping Equipment & Supplies listing in telephone book yellow pages.
4. For all beds: Add organic amendments each fall and spring to replace what has decomposed.
5. For all beds: Provide mineral nutrients based on laboratory "soil" analysis report Recommendations. See: "Analytical Laboratories" listing in telephone book yellow pages.
6. For all soils: Adjustment of soil pH is seldom required.

- Management:
1. Practice crop rotation. For example, grass, vines, roots, leaves, empty.
  2. Maintain normal levels of soil fertility.
  3. Watering:
    - (a) Well drained in winter
    - (b) Water more frequently in summer
    - (c) Adjust for season and crop growth
  4. "Soil rejuvenation" is required every 3 years:
    - (a) Dig entire bed to full depth
    - (b) Add new organic amendment to full depth
    - (c) Solarize mid summer
  5. Waterlogged? – Bed is too shallow  
Desert-like? – Bed may be too deep.
  6. Use one bed for summer, one bed for winter/spring crops.
  7. Use floating row covers to help tender plants.

**Additional Reading:**

*Home Vegetable Gardening*, 1992, UC ANR Publication #21444.

*Ortho's Complete Guide to Vegetables*, 1997, J. Heriteau, Ortho Books, (pg. 5-29).

*Small Space Gardens*, 1979, by Michael MacCaskey, Ortho Books, (pp. 13-21).

*Square Foot Gardening*, 1981. By Mel Bartholomew, Rodale Press, Pennsylvania.

*Golden Gate Gardening*, 1993, by Pam Pierce, published by Ag Access, Davis, Calif.

*Improving the Soil*, 1994, by Erin Hynes, published by Rodale Press, Pennsylvania, (pg. 100-101).