



Ground to Grow: Your Simple Raised Bed Gardening Guide



Perfect for Beginners!

A Beacon Ranch Studio Project

Why Raised Bed Gardening?

Raised bed gardening gives you complete control over your growing environment with significantly less work than traditional gardening. By elevating soil 6-24 inches above ground level, you'll enjoy better drainage, higher yields (30-50% more per square foot), and reduced maintenance—all while avoiding backbreaking work.

Getting Started

To start raised bed gardening successfully, focus on these simple steps:

- 1. Choose the Right Location** Select a spot that receives 6-8 hours of direct sunlight daily and is close to a water source. Position beds where you can see them from your home to encourage regular care.
- 2. Perfect Dimensions** Maximum 4 feet wide if accessible from both sides, 2-3 feet if against a wall. Length of 4-10 feet works best for most gardens. Height of 6-12 inches minimum, 12-18 inches ideal for vegetables.
- 3. Pathway Planning** Leave 18-24 inches between beds for comfortable walking, or 36-48 inches if you need wheelbarrow access.
- 4. Start Small** Begin with one 4'x8' bed to learn the system before expanding.

Raised beds create an optimal growing environment that's separate from existing ground conditions. The enclosed, elevated design provides excellent drainage while allowing you to start with perfect soil regardless of what's underneath.

💡 **Pro Tip:** Orient long beds north-south to minimize plants shading each other



Building Your First Raised Bed

The right materials make a significant difference in your gardening success. When building your first bed, prioritize these key factors:

🔧 Materials for a 4'x8' Bed

Basic Materials Needed:

- Three 8' lengths of 2"x6" lumber (cedar recommended)
- Eight 3" exterior screws
- Basic tools: drill, saw, measuring tape, level

💡 Simple Construction Steps

Step-by-Step Process:

1. Cut one 8' board in half for the ends
2. Form a rectangle with boards on their narrow edges
3. Secure corners with screws (pre-drill to prevent splitting)
4. Check square by measuring diagonally
5. Position and level in your garden space

Material Considerations

🪵 **Cedar/Redwood** Naturally rot-resistant, lasts 10-15+ years

🔧 **Pressure-treated** Good durability at moderate cost

🌲 **Pine/Fir** Budget option, lasts 3-5 years

💡 **Pro Tip for Beginners** Cedar offers the best balance of durability, safety, and plant-friendly conditions.

Best Soil Mixes for Raised Beds

⚠️ Never Use Regular Garden Soil

Regular garden soil is never suitable for raised beds. It compacts easily, drains poorly, and can introduce weeds and disease. Always use soil mix specifically formulated for raised beds.



Good raised bed soil achieves three essential functions:

1. Provides adequate drainage
2. Retains appropriate moisture
3. Supplies nutrients for plant growth

Commercial Soil Options

Classic "Mel's Mix" Recipe:

- 1/3 compost (from multiple sources)
- 1/3 vermiculite (coarse grade)
- 1/3 peat moss or coconut coir

Budget-Friendly Alternative:

- 50% topsoil or garden soil
- 50% compost

🔧 How Much Soil Do You Need?

For a 4'x8'x12" bed: 32 cubic feet (about 1.2 cubic yards)

💡 Money-Saving Tips:

- Make your own compost from kitchen scraps
- Check local municipal compost programs
- Split bulk deliveries with neighbors
- Fill bottom third of tall beds with logs and branches

Maximizing Space with Square Foot Gardening

Divide your raised bed into 1'x1' squares for organized, high-yield planting that can increase yields while reducing work.

Plant Spacing Guidelines

Proper spacing based on mature plant size:

- **Extra-large plants:** 1 per square (tomatoes, broccoli, peppers)
- **Large plants:** 4 per square (lettuce, kale, basil)
- **Medium plants:** 9 per square (beets, bush beans, spinach)
- **Small plants:** 16 per square (radishes, carrots, onions)



Layout Strategy

Best practices for arrangement:

- Place tall plants on north side to prevent shading
- Group plants with similar watering needs
- Install trellises on north side for vining crops
- Practice succession planting for continuous harvest

💡 **Success Secret:** This systematic approach is particularly well-suited to raised beds and can increase yields while reducing work!

Watering Techniques for Raised Beds

Proper watering is the most critical skill for raised bed gardening success. Raised beds have different watering needs than traditional gardens because they drain more efficiently but also dry out faster.

🌱 The Simple Finger Test

How to Check: Insert your finger about 2 inches into the soil - if it feels dry at your fingertip, it's time to water. If it feels moist, check again tomorrow.

Best Watering Methods

💧 **Drip irrigation** Most efficient, reduces water waste by 30-50%

🌊 **Soaker hoses** Easy to install, good for smaller gardens

🪣 **Hand watering** Best for small setups, allows close plant inspection

❌ Common Watering Mistakes to Avoid

- Shallow watering that only wets the surface

- Waiting until plants wilt before watering
- Keeping soil constantly soggy
- Letting containers sit in standing water



General Watering Schedule

- **Daily:** Hot, sunny weather
- **Every 2-3 days:** Moderate conditions
- **Every 3-4 days:** Cooler weather



Remember: Always check soil moisture rather than following a strict schedule!

Fertilizing Raised Bed Plants

Raised bed plants need regular fertilizing because nutrients in the limited soil volume become depleted more quickly than in-ground gardens.

Beginner-Friendly Options



Slow-Release Granular Fertilizer Mix into soil at planting time, then reapply every 4-6 weeks



Liquid Fertilizer Dilute in water and apply every 1-2 weeks during active growing season



Signs Your Plants Need Fertilizer

- Pale green or yellowing leaves
- Slower than normal growth
- Fewer flowers or smaller harvests




Fertilizing Best Practices

- Always follow package directions - when in doubt, use half the recommended amount
 - Reduce fertilizing in fall and winter when plant growth naturally slows
 - Start with quality soil mix containing slow-release fertilizer
 - Add 1-2 inches of fresh compost each spring and fall
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Extending Your Growing Season

One of raised beds' greatest advantages is the ability to extend your growing season both earlier in spring and later into fall.

Season Extension Methods

 **Cold frames** Box structures with clear lids, extend season 4-8 weeks

 **Hoop houses** Curved frames with plastic covering, add 4-6 weeks

 **Row covers** Lightweight fabric providing 2-4°F frost protection



Best Cold-Weather Crops

Focus on growing cold-hardy vegetables that thrive in cooler temperatures:

- Leafy greens (kale, spinach, lettuce)
- Root vegetables (carrots, beets, radishes)
- Brassicas (cabbage, Brussels sprouts)

Temperature Management

Vent cold frames and hoop houses when temperatures exceed 70°F, close before evening to trap heat overnight.

Getting Started Successfully


Start Small Begin with one 4'x8' bed to learn the system before expanding.

Keep Records

Note what works best in your specific conditions and climate.

Budget Wisely Materials: \$30-300+ per bed depending on materials Soil: \$50-200 for a standard bed

Be Patient Your first season is about learning. Each year gets easier and more productive!

 **Success Secret:** Raised beds naturally warm faster in spring, allowing earlier planting and extending your harvest season on both ends!



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