

## **Building frames for raised beds:**

In this video we'll go over the basic steps for making frames for raised beds.

The first step is to look at the chosen location. Make sure it is in a place with enough sun exposure during the growing season. You'll want at least 6-8 hours of sun per day with few obstructions.

If it's not perfectly level, that's alright. You can dig in the beds a bit to make them level. But the more level the location it is, the easier it is to install.

Mark the edges with flour or string, and measure the basic dimensions of the space.

There are many shapes and sizes but today I'll be making a standard 4-foot by 8-foot bed that will have a frame 18 inches high.

I'll be using two boxes basically that will stack on top of each other. The lower portion is using 2 by 12 inch lumber and the upper portion is using 2 by 6 inch boards.

Many lumberyards will pre-cut the lumber for you, which can save you some time. You may also be able to buy pre-cut sizes like 4 feet or 8 feet long. Either way. You will need four sides to your bed at whatever size you choose. The longest lasting wood types for outside use are cedar and redwood. They tend to be more expensive and redwood is a diminishing resource. So I tend to use some sort of pine or fir and accept that I will just need to replace it earlier than cedar. I live in a desert climate so it will last a bit longer here. This is why some people use stone or rock in raised beds since it lasts indefinitely, but I still like the look for wood for the frames.

It's easier to assemble them on a flat surface, so I like to use my garage floor.

You'll need some basic tools:

- a drill, with drill bits and a driver bit for screws.
- counter-sink drill
- a saw for cutting, if you're going that route
- a level
- a speed square
- pencil
- About 40 or 50 exterior decking screws

**You'll need four boards** for each bed. Your absolute minimum depth on a raised bed should be 12 inches. I would suggest 18 inches. But you can get by on 12.

\*in that case, the more you break up and amend the soil below the bed, the better off your plants will be in the long run. All you will need for the 12 inch deep bed are the four 2 by 12 inch boards.

If you want to build a bed 18 inches like this one, you need a **second set of boards** the same lengths but 2 by 6 in this case to make the fully constructed frame 18 inches high.

**Four corner posts** 4 by 4 inch lumber should be plenty stout. (I'm using some scrap fencing lumber recycled from a local golf course for mine.) Since the beds will be 18 inches high, that will be the length of the corner posts. If you are doing 12" high boxes, then just cut them to 12 inches.

**Four side braces** for the middle of each side of the frame will prevent bowing. They can be 2 by 2's or 2 by fours or other scrap lumber. Cut them 4 to 6 inches longer than your bed height since the lower length will be under ground level to help brace the sides.

Cut your boards to the proper lengths, in my case four feet and eight feet. Pre-drill screw holes in the ends of one set of boards where they will attach to the other sides.

I like to counter-sink the holes so the heads are recessed. Then line up the corners so they are square. You can use a 4 by 4 post to help stabilize the corner. Two pair of hands can be helpful for this step. Drive the screws in to connect the corners on all four sides. Construct the second set of boards for the upper layer. Move the boxes outside and put in place. You can cut into the soil a bit in the high places and level out the bed. Use a level on the top of the bed to make sure the frame is level.

### **Install corner posts.**

The easiest way to secure them at the right height before the second layer of boards is installed is just to measure the width of the second board and make a mark on the post. Place that mark on the top of the first board, and when the second one is installed, it will be level with the corner post. Eventually you want to screw all boards to the corner posts.

If you're planning on installing a drip feed watering system, now is the easiest time to at least install the supply line so you can run it nicely under the bed frame and have it come up inside the frame on one side. You can simply run the supply line under it and leave it unfinished to trim out later. You can install it later if you don't have time now. It will just save you a little digging if you do it when the bed is still empty.



Loosening up the soil below the bed is very helpful for improving drainage and can be done before you put the bed in place, but I find it easier to do it after. Just use the garden fork to thoroughly loosen the soil.

**Add the side braces** to avoid bowing on the mid sections of each side. The side braces should protrude a bit below the bed to stabilize the sides. Just cut these 4 to 6 inches longer than the height of your bed, and then hollow out a hole for them to drop below the bed. Before you screw them in, make sure the tops are below the level of the sides. You can tap them down with a hammer to make them level before you screw them in.

I got ahead of myself on this frame and started filling it with soil before I installed the side braces, so I just moved some soil back and installed them out of order. If you do it before you start putting material in the frame, its much easier. I also add leaf mold and composted organic material in the lower part of the bed to improve the soil structure.

Add your soil or soil and compost mixture to fill the lower section while you still can. It will become more difficult to do with the wheelbarrow once the top section is on.

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\*\* If your materials are dry, it's good to incorporate water and intermingle the layers as you fill the bed. Depending on how much organic material is in your soil to start, this is the easiest time to get some good material into the lower levels of the bed. You don't want any newer raw materials in there. You're looking mostly for old leaves, or the best option, which is finished compost.

I will add a total of a couple inches of leaves total for the entire lower foot of the bed or about 1 inch of compost.

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Drop in the second set of boards over the corner posts and tap into place. You can then build a ramp to get further wheelbarrows of material into the bed, or do the remainder by shovel. Remember to walk around the bed and drive screws into any boards that weren't attached to the corners or side braces. And it's ready to use.

**Variations:**

Pre-made metal corner braces can be substituted for the corner posts  
Kits with pre-made or partially assembled beds are available.  
You can also build them out of many other materials, including rocks, cinder blocks, logs, and other items.



But do be aware of these general tips on materials:

Don't use any pressure treated lumber, due to the chemicals embedded in the wood that can leach into the garden soil.

Avoid railroad ties for the same reason.

No Boiled linseed oil, for same reason of leaching chemicals. Boiled linseed oil has petroleum additives that can transfer into garden soil.

If you have a pre-made bed with questionable materials you are concerned about but don't want to rebuild, one middle ground option is to use heavy plastic liner to separate the material from the soil.

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