

Raised Bed Styles

So lets talk about raised beds...and why do so many people use them...Soil compaction and lack of organic material are two of the most common problems in poorly performing gardens. They are the two key things to avoid. Building raised beds, either by double digging or constructing framed beds helps you avoid these problems. We'll go into how to build each type in upcoming chapters, but for now, lets do a brief comparison.

Double-dug raised beds

This is the no-frills traditionalist approach. There are no materials to buy or frames to construct. Its more digging work at first: the Double dig process is not for the faint of heart. But if done properly can be a great workout that won't hurt your back. These beds drain well : and warm up early in the spring just like framed beds. In order to double dig a bed, you will be removing the first foot of soil incrementally in a narrow trench and then using a garden fork to break up the subsoil to add aeration and organic material before adding the top layer back. After the process, the result is the beds have been fluffed up and are raised about 8 inches above the ground. This is the traditional approach taken in bio intensive agriculture that has been used for hundreds of years. You can either start with the soil you have, or if you don't have any good material in the ground you can dig out a garden bed and fill it with new or amended material. Once a bed is prepared you want to avoid walking on it and only plant and weed from the side or by using a digging board that disperses your body weight and minimizes compaction.

Framed raised beds

Framed beds require more expense up front but less digging overall. You'll need to acquire some building materials and assemble the frames and acquire enough soil to fill the beds: This approach will get you the same aerated soil structure as the traditional beds once they're set up. People sometimes go this route when they don't want to double dig, or they have really poor soil. and want to install an above ground option. In this case you can build up from the ground and have a nice border on your bed. Other benefits include having the working surface higher up so you bend over less, They also heat up early in the spring so you can work the soil earlier and they provide good drainage. If you go this route, you will still be needing to work in the same amount of organic material into the soil. One disadvantage is it can be a bit more difficult to get around and work the soil in a raised bed at times, compared to a double dug bed, and eventually any wooden frames will rot and have to be replaced.

You can use found materials for frames:

bricks / stones / cinder blocks

scrap wood/ / or recycled redwood or cedar are best.

Buying new lumber can get expensive if you are installing multiple beds. But if its just one or two, its not cost prohibitive to buy new lumber.



Avoid pressure treated lumber or railroad ties, which can leech toxics into the soil.

Try to avoid using boiled linseed oil as a sealant for wood in the garden beds as it also has unhealthy chemistry that can leech into the soil. If you're using pine or some other wood that would work best with sealant, I'd suggest installing a heavy gauge plastic liner along the sides, which will keep it from rotting for several years longer. Of course if you're in a rainy climate you might want some more weather resistant wood. Our wood doesn't rot as fast here in the high desert.

4 foot by 8 foot is easy to start with.

At least 12 inches deep and up to three feet deep.