

Greener on the Other Side

A Beginner's Guide to Getting Started With Raised-Bed Gardening

Keem Anna

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Introduction

As a child, I fell in love with raised-bed gardening while watching my mother and grandmother turn our home into a haven for growing plants. They showed me that starting a garden can be possible no matter where you live. This lesson has stuck with me for many years.

Now, I want to take my knowledge and spread it to you. If you're one of the many who want to garden but either gave it up or never began because you felt your yard wasn't fit to grow plants, then you're in the right place. This book will debunk the misconceptions behind gardens, and allow your green thumb to flourish, no matter where you are.

There are many benefits of having a raised-bed garden that ground-level gardens do not offer. You'll be able to control the quality of soil better. The maintenance is much easier and more convenient, especially for those with limited mobility. They are also perfect for gardeners with little backyard space to plant. In addition, a raised bed provides the convenience of planting in any area that will give your plants the nutrients that they need.

You'll find an array of options that are sure to fit your budget. There are tiny raised beds that will allow you to test it out before jumping right in. Some will take two minutes to assemble and some will take longer and require more elbow-grease. For those who are renting their homes, you'll even be able to get temporary and moveable raised beds, something that is impossible when planting in the ground.

You will need to follow some dos and don'ts to find success. We'll discuss locations, sizes, timeframe, most effective soils, and a budget to help you get started on the right track. This book will also cover cost analysis, which types of plants to choose, and how to fertilize and mulch your garden. We'll also look at how to properly choose your plants, and how to ensure that they don't get overrun by pests or different diseases.

Once you have everything you need to begin, we will go over best practices for a successful raised-bed garden. We will discuss different types of plants, what they need to flourish, and practical techniques that will give you the best results.

By the end of this beginner's guide to raised-bed gardening, you should have a clearer understanding of what it is, what you need to do, and how you can make this endeavor successful.

I'm excited to share my experience and tips with you. While I was growing up, watching and observing my mother and grandmother plant their gardens, I knew I wanted to learn as much as possible about the art of planting.

Now that I have a successful garden of my own and, through trial and error, have found out what works and what doesn't, it is time to share my knowledge with you.

This book is not written specifically for beginners; I assure you that many seasoned gardeners can benefit from this book as well. Even if you've been doing this for years, there may still be tricks of the trade that you are still unaware of that could provide some enlightenment.

So, before going and buying everything you think you need, you must first understand the concept of a raised-bed garden. In this first chapter, you will learn exactly what it is, its advantages, and the raised beds that will work best for you and your plants.

Chapter 1: Understanding the Concept of a Raised-Bed Garden

Before we get started, we need to dive in and get a full understanding of the concept of a raised-bed garden. In this chapter, we will cover a few key points, including:

- What exactly is raised-bed gardening? What are its benefits? How does it differ from traditional gardening, and what exactly are its advantages in contrast to traditional gardening?
- What are its primary advantages?
- What are the different raised-bed gardens? What are the specifics of each different type and what are their specific advantages?

Raised-bed gardening is when your soil is above ground level and enclosed in one of several different ways. How high you raise your bed is entirely up to you. Some beds are just a few inches off of the ground. While others are waist high, or even higher.

The shape of the beds is often rectangular, and though there is no standard size for building your bed, people will often make them between eight and 12 feet long, and three to four feet wide. You'll need to decide which depth and diameter are better for you, and this will depend on the space available.

Raised-bed gardens date back to medieval times, but more recently gained popularity in the 1970s. Farmers began using raised beds to promote larger harvests in smaller spaces, making it more accessible for those who didn't have the yard for it.

This is the major difference between raised-bed gardens and traditional ones. Traditional gardens depend on your land and factors that are out of your control. Now, for many who have the space for a large garden and all the nutrients in their soil that their plants need, there is nothing wrong with the traditional style. Having a raised bed simply allows a solution for gardeners who can't use the traditional style of gardening.

There are several types of raised-bed gardens, and we will go over them at the end of this chapter.

Many people who are beginning their journey into this style of gardening often ask what are its benefits. It's a significant question and one that has a few different answers.

What Are the Benefits of Raised-Bed Gardening?

First, planting in a raised bed allows you to control the soil. If you're planting in the ground, you don't always know its composition, or if it contains everything essential that a plant needs to thrive. If you build a raised bed, you can purchase the soil that best accommodates the plants you are planning to fill your garden with, giving them a much better chance of not only surviving but flourishing in their environment.

Raised beds also mean better drainage for your soil. This can be especially helpful in marshland areas, and areas that are prone to flooding. For areas like those, often a raised bed is the only option for gardeners who would like to make the most of their planting season.

Better drainage also allows you to plant earlier in the season. Better drainage means that it will dry out and warm faster in the spring than the soil in the ground will. You will be able to regulate the temperatures much better than you would if you were simply using the traditional method of planting.

The ground in your yard can also provide other challenges. These can include, but are not limited to, tree roots scattered all over your yard or other species of plants that can make it difficult to dig and plant.

When you use a raised bed, you're essentially starting fresh. You don't need to worry about which kind of yard you have, because your plants and soil will be a safe distance above the ground.

Even if you're renting an apartment or house, you might still be able to pursue your dream of gardening. You will have to ask your landlord permission, but many renters have been successful in dealing with this because of its aesthetic beauty. If you have a landlord who still says no, there are also portable boxes that you can plant in and take wherever you go. Raised beds can be temporary, and this can be ideal for those who don't own their property.

Another massive plus side to this method is that it is less labor intensive. Even for the able-bodied, getting on your hands and knees to plant is not a simple task. By using a raised bed, you take much of the twisting and bending out of gardening. This is also perfect for those who suffer from any physical disability. There are many people out there who don't just want to use a raised bed because it offers certain advantages. They use this method because it is the only one which allows them to spend much-needed time in their gardens.

What Are the Different Types?

There are four basic types of raised beds.

- Raised ground bed
- Supported raised bed
- Containerized raised bed
- Elevated raised bed

Each of these types comes with its own sets of advantages and disadvantages. I'll go over the distinct features of each one, and what they are best used for, to provide you with a better understanding of which raised bed you'll need for your garden.

A raised ground bed is your most basic and cost-effective choice. This is because it requires no other materials besides the soil you decide to use. These beds are normally between six to eight inches high. This is generally the choice for those who are beginners, and also operating on a budget, as it allows you to dip your toes into the raised-bed gardening world without many initial expenses.

They're also great for gardeners with a lot of room to plant but who aren't too keen on dropping the funds to build all the frames needed for the other raised beds (Malin, 2021). We often refer to them as built-in raised beds, and while they're the simplest option, they're not always the best one. Frames help contain the soil, and if an unframed bed is left unattended it could erode and sink back to the same level as the surrounding soil. You can have success if you keep a watchful eye on it, and you'll likely need to build it back up every year or two. Next on the list is a supported raised bed. This will require some more materials as you will need to build a frame or an edge to surround your soil. We can build the frame out of several materials, which include wood, stone, metal, or plastic. Adding the frame helps protect your plants, and will also give your yard an aesthetically pleasing appearance, because of the finished look. Another benefit of using a supported raised bed is that it is perfect for yards that might be uneven.

The solid frame that you will need to build will help keep the plants nice and upright, despite certain challenges that your yard might possess. However, it's no secret that you'll have to shell out some cash when building your frame.

The third type is a containerized raised bed. These are perfect for people who suffer from any physical disabilities because they're built higher off of the ground, approximately ten inches or more.

Different materials, including wood and steel, can make them. There are even types that are built with wheels to help maneuver your garden. You can place them almost anywhere, including your deck, lawn, and even your walkway.

If you decide to build yours out of wood, I recommend using cedar wood because it prevents warping and rot because of insects. Cedar allows you to place your containerized bed wherever is best for you, without having to worry about outside factors that could potentially cause damage.

Lastly, are elevated garden beds. These are pretty much the same as containerized raised beds, with the only major difference being that they come with adjustable legs that allow you to raise your bed even higher. Again, these are preferable for those who have limitations on their bending and twisting. It allows people to raise the bed to a level that is comfortable for them.

How To Decide The Best Type For You

You need to consider the size. The width and length will depend primarily on the size of your yard, and how far you'll need to stretch to access your plants. Remember that you need to be able to reach the middle of the bed without needing to step inside it. For many, the ideal width is four feet.

This is one example where containerized and elevated beds have an advantage. By raising the height, you're making it easier on your back and also ensuring that you don't compact the soil with your feet by walking on it. Elevated beds can reach 36 inches in height, and that can be very comfortable for many.

You will also need to think about materials, and whether or not you're going to buy a raised bed kit, or if you're going to assemble it on your own. This is where your simple raised-ground bed will come in handy, because there isn't much to do in terms of installation and product purchasing.



Cedar Wood is Highly Recommended

If you decide to use wood for your raised bed. Professionals often recommend using Cedar. There are a few reasons cedar is an excellent choice. It is:

- It is water-resistant
- It is insect resistant
- It is sturdy and able to handle heavy amounts of soil
- It is attractive to look at

Cedar is a prime choice because it truly offers a lot. If you buy a kit or decide to DIY, I suggest you open it at the bottom. This will allow optimal drainage, which is perfect for plants that require it. It is perfect for fruits and vegetables, as well as other types of flowers.

Going back to the aesthetics of raised beds, you will not get a bed that is more visually stunning than one built with natural cedar. The aroma is intoxicating, and it is just lovely to look at. You'll feel proud of the work you're doing if you decide to go this route.

This type of wood is great for a small budget-friendly raised bed, but can also be perfect for those who are looking for a larger containerized bed. Since the wood is so sturdy, you can build solid legs for the bed, putting it at a comfortable level, with the knowledge that your plants and soil are safe.

You might fork out a few more bucks to either build or purchase a kit of cedar, but again, it all depends on your space, your needs, and what types of plants you intend to garden.

Beginner Budget Options

If you're on a budget, and you just want to see if it's something that will interest you. You can purchase a small one-piece molded polyethylene tub. These are small, about two feet long, and between nine and ten inches deep. There isn't room for a lot of soil or water, but they can be beneficial for beginners who only have a few plants. This tub is ideal for someone who only has a few vegetable plants or herbs. A few tomatoes or lettuce plants would work perfectly (Debbie Wolfe, Glenda Taylor, 2022)

It won't cost you an arm and a leg, and as far as assembly, there's next to none. If you want caster wheels on the bottom of your raised bed, then you'll need to put those in, but this will take a total of two minutes to install.

As I mentioned, it won't hold much in terms of a wide variety of plants, but it's a good starting point for those who are unsure about whether they want to dive deeper into it financially and spatially.

You can also find kits that are specifically for beginners. An issue for many first-timers and even many seasoned gardeners is knowing when their plants need to be watered and precisely how much is enough.

Certain raised beds can be challenging if you're unsure of how much moisture is at the bottom of your bed. Some beds like the Keter Urban Raised Bed feature a tube that runs through the entire bed. This tube, with the help of a little plastic flower, will alert you as to how much or how little water your bed has(Wolfe & Taylor, 2022)

This little plastic flower does a great job of notifying gardeners. It will tell you when it is time to add some water, but not only that, it will also tell you when it's time to drain the water. There are normally drainage plugs attached to the bottom of the bed, which will make it incredibly simple to drain your water.

These types come in all different shapes and sizes but if you decide to use the Keter Urban Raised Bed, you'll see that they are about 30 inches tall, and 32 inches wide, and inside the bed, there will be six 12-inch deep boxes. These planting boxes are perfect for beginners because they keep the roots from being tangled, and ensure that your first array into the land of raised bed gardening will be as smooth as possible.

It's a great place to start, and once you get the hang of it, you can check out other designs, and decide if you want to add to your garden, because I'll let you in on a little secret, once you start, it's challenging to stop. For many, nearly impossible.

I know, I might be getting ahead of myself. I understand that this is a lot of information to digest, and I promise to go over all of this in further detail as the chapters of this book progress.

I'm simply ecstatic at the prospect of curating this entire book on a topic that I have always held near and dear to my heart. If this first chapter has captured your interest, like I hope it has, then please follow me into the following chapter, where we will discuss in further detail the best ways to plan your raised-bed garden.

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