

# Planning Your Raised Garden

□ Gemma Alexander □ January 14, 2019



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**Raised** beds have many advantages. Unlike planters, which are containers, **raised** beds are open on the bottom, allowing roots to extend into the ground. **Raised** beds can reduce weeds in planting beds, prevent soil compaction from stray footsteps, improve drainage, prevent erosion, and extend the growing season. Here's what you need to know to get started on your own **raised** bed garden for next season.

## Siting

When siting **raised** beds, sunlight is the primary consideration. The instructions on most seed packets call for 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight, but home gardeners rarely have such conditions. To make the best of the sunlight you have, study the light in your available space. Remember that 3 hours of morning sun is not as intense as 3 hours of afternoon sun and that your sunniest spots will shift over the seasons. You can take advantage of these differences to stretch your growing season or squeeze in warm-weather crops that wouldn't grow elsewhere in your garden. Don't forget to consider convenience. An extra half hour of sunlight farther from the house won't benefit your garden much if the distance discourages you from going out to water.





CONSIDER CONVENIENCE AS WELL AS SUNLIGHT WHEN DECIDING WHERE TO PLACE YOUR BED. PHOTO CREDIT: W-ONROAD, CC BY-SA 3.0, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

## Building

If you're not handy, you can pick from many **raised** beds kits that are easy to assemble. But building **raised** beds is a fairly simple project, even for carpentry beginners. Construction options for **raised** beds are limited only by your imagination and skill level, but most gardeners opt for simple and functional. Rectangular boxes 3 to 4 feet wide will allow you to reach the middle without stepping on the soil. Beds should be at least 6 inches high. Unless your underlying soil is very poor, there is little benefit to soil depths much greater than 12 inches.

You can get boards cut to order at most hardware or lumber stores. Alkaline copper quat (ACQ) and copper azole (CA-B) have replaced toxic chromated copper arsenate (CCA) for pressure treating. But if you want an organic garden, skip the pressure treated lumber entirely. Naturally rot-resistant woods, like redwood, cedar, and black locust, are the best woods to use for garden beds. Look for SFI-, or better yet, FSC-labeled wood. Boards can be joined at the corners with wood screws, or for really easy construction, you can buy connectors. In most cases, gardeners will purchase quality topsoil to fill their **raised** beds.



**RAISED** BEDS ARE OPEN ON THE BOTTOM, ALLOWING ROOTS TO EXTEND INTO THE GROUND. PHOTO CREDIT: OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY, CC BY-SA 2.0, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

## Growing

There are many approaches to **raised** bed gardening and many strategies to maximize your vegetable harvest. Numerous gardening guides give detailed instructions for **raised** bed gardening. What you plant and when you plant it will depend on your climate, your space, and your available time. Whatever methods you choose, your **raised** beds will provide an aesthetic and practical frame for your garden.

*Do you have a **raised** bed garden? Share your experience and tips with the community in the Earthling Forum.*

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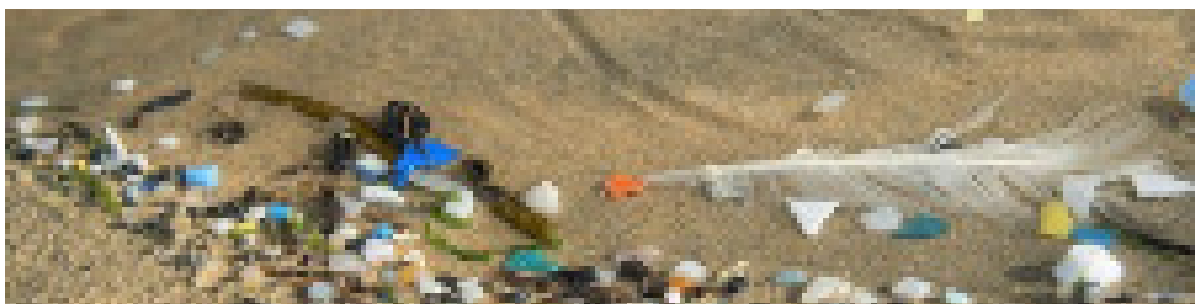


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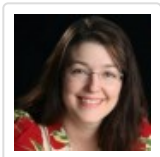
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Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).