

Finding the Best Raised Bed Kit

□ Gemma Alexander □ January 7, 2019



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Raised garden beds have many advantages: They keep grass paths from spreading into planting beds, prevent soil compaction from stray footsteps, improve drainage, prevent erosion, and can extend the growing season. Filling raised beds with quality soil is also cheaper and less backbreaking than amending your entire garden to improve soil texture.

As DIY carpentry goes, building raised beds is a fairly simple project, but if you're not particularly handy, it can still be intimidating. Fortunately, there are many kits that make installing raised beds easy for even the clumsiest of green thumbs. Which raised bed kit is the best for your garden and the planet?

First of all, raised beds are not the same as planters. Unlike containers, raised beds are open on the bottom, allowing roots to extend into the ground. The best raised bed for your garden depends on several factors, including aesthetics, ergonomics, and construction material. The material used for a raised bed can affect aesthetics and ergonomics, and is the biggest factor in environmental impact. Raised beds are most commonly made of natural wood, composite, plastic, or metal. Each of these materials has costs and benefits, and there may not be a clear-cut environmental winner for all circumstances.

Plastic

Although they may be made from recycled plastic and are technically recyclable, we will not evaluate **raised** beds made of HDPE, because so few communities are able to recycle plastic in practice and because of the role plastics play in ocean pollution.



GREENES FENCE COMPANY CEDAR **RAISED** BED. IMAGE: GREENES FENCE COMPANY

Wood

Naturally rot-resistant woods, like cedar and black locust, are the best woods to use for garden beds. Redwood is an excellent choice if you can find a sustainable source. Since the EPA banned the sale of wood treated with chromated copper arsenate (CCA) for residential use, alkaline copper quat (ACQ) and copper azole (CA-B) have become the standard treatment. However, organic standards preclude pressure-treated wood of any kind.

- **Naturalyards**

Oregon-based Naturalyards cedar **raised** beds are held together by rust-free aluminum pins and screws, requiring no tools for assembly. The CE1-certified wood is saturated with

and crossbars, requiring no tools for assembly. The SFI-certified wood is saturated with a nontoxic sealant that protects the boards from rot. It does not include UV protectors, so the cedar will fade naturally to silver-gray. Naturallyards raised beds come in rectangular, hexagonal, octagonal, and L- and U-shapes, with optional trim, trellising, and custom sizing.

- Greenes Fence Company – Cedar

Based in Ohio with manufacturing and distribution centers throughout the U.S., Greenes Fence Company makes untreated cedar raised beds assembled by sliding planks into grooves in the posts. Among the least expensive raised bed kits, their simple modular design allows for stacking or combining into more complicated L or U shapes.

- Gardener's Supply Company – Cedar

Gardener's Supply Company's 15-inch deep cedar beds are made with SFI-certified, untreated Western red cedar planks screwed to aluminum corners with plastic caps. All are three feet wide and available in several lengths.



DURABLE GREENBED COMPOSITE RAISED BED. IMAGE: DURABLE GREENBED

Composite

Most composite is a blend of wood fiber and UV-protected, recycled polypropylene. Because composites are made from waste materials and do not rot, they have been hailed as a sustainable alternative to natural wood. However, because they are made from two different waste materials that cannot be separated, wood/plastic composite lumber is not recyclable.

- Gardener's Supply Company – Sienna Composite
Textured to resemble wood, Gardener's Supply Company's composite boards are made from 38 percent post-consumer recycled plastic and 62 percent sustainable hardwood fibers, with corner brackets made from ABS plastic resin. Although made from recycled materials and expected to last decades, you can't recycle composite boards.
- VegHerb — Sienna Composite
Made from responsibly sourced wood, recycled plastic, and natural fibers, the VegHerb **raised** bed resists rot.
- Durable GreenBed
This Oregon-based company makes **raised** bed kits out of Faswall, a unique woodchip/Portland cement composite with at least 60 percent recycled content. All-natural, biodegradable, and nontoxic, these beds are available in several different sizes and configurations, including tiers, rectangles, and L shapes. They are tall enough to sit on. A potential bonus is that the rough texture of the walls may deter slugs.



GARDENER'S SUPPLY COMPANY MODULAR METAL **RAISED** BED. IMAGE: GARDENER'S SUPPLY COMPANY

Metal

Galvanized steel is recyclable and rust-resistant, lasting from 30 to 70 years. However, the galvanized coating contains zinc and chromium, which may leach into soil over time. These essential micronutrients are toxic in higher amounts. Galvanized containers are generally recognized as safe because high levels of zinc or chromium would kill plants before they could grow to be eaten; however, a definitive answer to the question of whether galvanized steel is appropriate for food crops is not available.

- **Greenes Fence Company – Metal**
Available in only one size, this bed assembles without tools by sliding together with a keyhole locking mechanism. Made from pre-galvanized powder-coated steel and available in four different colors.
- **Gardener’s Supply Company – Modular**
With nine possible configurations, this Australia-made galvanized steel, Aluzinc-coated raised bed offers a 15-inch planting depth. The clip-on PVC strip on top of the rolled edges is not sustainable but improves safety. The Aluzinc powder coating is supposed to extend the planter’s life up to six times longer than regular galvanized steel.

Comparison Chart

To download our printable comparison chart, click the image below.

Earth911 **raised** Bed Kit Comparison Chart

Brand	Material	Sourcing	Promised Lifespan	Recyclability	Price
Naturalyards	Treated SFI cedar	Made in the US	5-15 years	Compostable	\$90-\$2,100
Greenes Fence Company Cedar	Untreated cedar	Unknown	5-15 years	Compostable	\$25-\$165
Greenes Fence Company Metal	Galvanized steel	Unknown	30-70 years	Recyclable	\$70
Durable GreenBed	Faswall, a woodchip/Portland cement composite	Made in the US	25-30 years	Can be crushed for use as soil amendment	\$300-\$850
Gardener’s Supply Company Modular	Galvanized steel	Made in Australia	lifetime	Recyclable	\$200
Gardener’s Supply Company Cedar	SFI cedar	Made in Vermont	at least 10 years	Compostable	\$150-\$380
Gardener’s Supply Company Sienna Composite	Wood/plastic composite	Made in the US	20-30 years	Not recyclable	\$170-\$60



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Do you have a favorite **raised** bed kit? Share your experience with the community in the *Earthling Forum*.

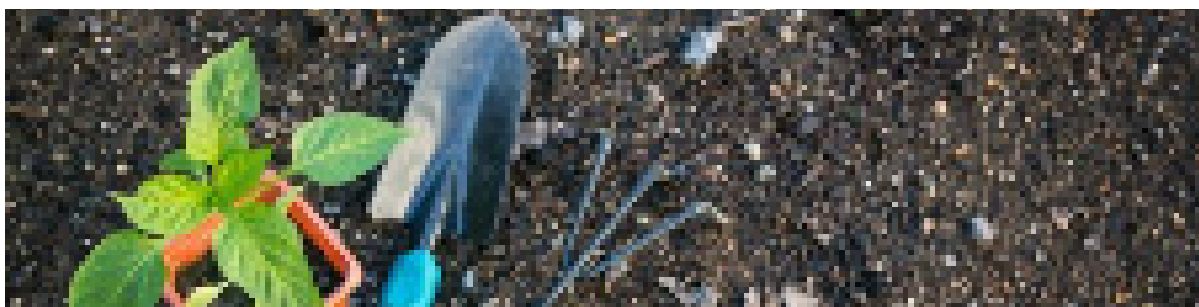
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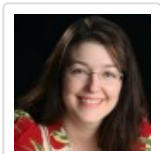
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Shine On: 5 Green Lighting Tips



Gemma Alexander

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](#).

