

Raised Garden

Some people would love to start a vegetable garden but just can't find space in their yard. A good way to discover space is gardening in a raised bed. This method will help the gardener overcome the space issue and other problems such as poor soil and bad drainage. A raised bed can be as simple as mounds of soil in your yard to several large boxes made of treated lumber throughout the gardener's property.

In this case we want to keep the bed about 4 feet wide and as long as desired by the gardener. Keeping the garden width at 4 feet makes it easy to tend the garden from either side without getting inside the bed area. If you desire to place beds side-by-side then leave 15 to 20 inch paths between the beds to allow access for maintenance and harvesting. To create a decorative path, keep down the weeds and allow for a dry surface to walk on, use mulch or pea sized gravel between the beds.

Raised beds warm up earlier in the spring and dry out quicker. This allows the soil to be worked and planted earlier, extending the season a week or more. The wide edges are handy to sit on while weeding or harvesting. Because the paths need no water, fertilizer, soil amendments or tilling, the amount of labor has been greatly reduced along with overall cost. Raised beds boxed with timbers are less likely to be stepped on, so the soil stays loose and porous much longer and is easier to work each year.

Because the soil is improved and there is no need to walk between plants, vegetables can be spaced more closely. This increases the yield per square foot. Tomatoes can be spaced about two feet apart with the rows staggered. Gardeners can use vertical space for sprawling plants, by installing a trellis purchased or homemade, for those climbing vegetables such as cucumber vines, small varieties of squash, pole beans, and snap peas. This also aids in easy picking during harvest season.

When building a raised bed, the box should be a minimum of 12 inches high. This is normally a good depth of soil for most plants. The existing soil should be tilled in about eight to ten inches, after the box has been erected. Insert landscaping cloth to prevent the growth of weeds and to deter the entry of unwanted guest (voles). Build up the bed by adding quality garden soil and compost. Soil should be about three inches from the top. The best way to improve the soil condition is to add organic materials. The use of homemade compost is encouraged. Also add slow release fertilizer and till in the mixture.

Because the plants are being grown in a large container, gardener's you can mix the soil to exact requirements, providing better growth and production. Use quality garden soil mixes; avoid inexpensive soils that just say topsoil or compost. Poor top soil could come from over used farmland and be completely depleted of nutrients. Because the bed is raised and can be tended from the sides the soil will remain loose and well drained.

Pruning the Bushes

The best time to trim and prune a bush is in the winter when the bush is dormant. Here in the Tidewater area this can be any time between January and March. Start with the dead branches. If there are a lot of dead branches, go slow. You don't want to shock the plants system too much. If you have diseased looking branches, trim them too. Once you have the dead or diseased branches cut away, take a step back and look at the bush or tree in full. Are there any other problems such as a branch growing in the wrong direction. Or maybe the shape of the whole bush is lopsided. Now is the time to shape it a little bit.

When pruning use sharp cutting tools. Each cut you make should be clean and smooth. If your tools are not sharp then you'll find yourself breaking and splitting remaining branch parts, and this causes stress and injury to the bush. If you want your bushes to bush out a bit and become fuller looking, then make your pruning cuts just past a "knuckle" or "joint" in the branch. This usually causes new shoots to form on either side of the knuckle when the bush wakes up in the spring.

Enjoy the garden