What are raised beds?

Raised beds are wide growing areas in which crops are grown in blocks or, if in rows, then without footpaths between each row. Paths on each side of the raised beds let gardeners reach the middle of the bed to plant, weed or harvest without stepping on the soil around plantings. By using raised beds, the space between rows that would usually be used for footpaths can be planted with more crops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raised Beds</th>
<th>vs.</th>
<th>Traditional Rows</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-5 foot wide beds &amp; 1-2 foot wide paths (2 foot wide beds along fence or wall)</td>
<td>About 70% of area planted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 foot wide rows &amp; 1-2 foot wide paths</td>
<td>About 50% of area planted</td>
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</table>

Why garden in raised beds?

- You can grow more food in less space using raised beds.
- Plants grow better in raised beds because their roots have more room to spread out and don’t get trampled. The loose soil allows the roots to get the air they need to grow well.
- Digging is easier in raised bed gardens, since the soil is not walked on and compacted.
- Growing seasons are longer using raised beds, because they drain better and warm up more quickly. Crops will grow better in late fall, early spring and through the winter.

How are raised beds raised?

- Paths and bed areas are outlined with strings and stakes. Only the planting areas are dug. The compacted soil in paths will be lower than the loosened soil in the beds, which appear “raised.” Wood frames are purely optional. If you have shallow topsoil, you may want to add the topsoil from your paths to the planting area.
- Organic material such as compost, steer or horse manure, leaves or cover crops are added to the beds. This raises the beds higher and allows more air in them as it improves the structure of the soil.
DOUBLE DIGGING

Raised beds can be dug with a garden fork or a shovel. An optional way of making even more productive raised beds is by “double digging.” This involves removing the top 10-12 inches of soil, so that the next 10 or so inches of subsoil can be loosened. This process does not mix the upper topsoil layer with the lower, less developed soil.

Double digging helps to further improve drainage, nutrient availability and plant growth. Plants can be spaced closer in double-dug beds, because the roots will go deep instead of sideways, where they would compete with each other in a shallowly prepared soil. See Community Horticulture Fact Sheet #9 for “Intensive Plant Spacing.”

1. Dig a trench about one foot deep, one foot wide and three to four feet long. Put the soil aside.

2. Loosen the soil at the bottom of the trench. Try to go another 10 to 12 inches down.

3. Dig another trench next to the first, using the soil you dig to fill in the first trench. Loosen the bottom with a fork.

4. Continue trenching, filling and loosening along the bed. Use soil from the first trench to fill in the last one.

On poorly drained sites and very clayey soils, raised beds (planters) can be made with wooden forms 6 inches to a foot high. These boxes are then filled with compost, topsoil or other good soil. Always mix a few inches of your planter soil into the top few inches of the native soil before completely filling up the beds. This improves drainage and helps plant roots reach more nutrients.

Kennell: 7/00