



Building raised bed garden plots is not difficult. However, having built two complete sets over the years, I think I can offer some useful suggestions to the novice. This article will not be of interest to the person who wants to incorporate raised beds as a part of their landscaping scheme. My beds are purely functional, though they present well enough as a garden. Also, I grow vegetables organically ... or as organically as I possibly can.

I build my beds out of 2" x 8" x 16" undressed hemlock boards. These are most economical if purchased directly from a lumber mill. This size is substantial enough for the lumber to last many seasons before showing serious signs of decay. My first beds were 10 years old and still had a few years of service left when I sold my property and relocated to the country. Don't be tempted to use treated lumber to extend the life of your lumber as treated lumber leaches toxins into the soil.



Each bed is 3' x 16'. The three foot width allows one to work the bed from either side without having to stretch too far. I dig a hole about 6" deep the size of the bed to create a total depth of 14" in which to add soil. When I built my first set of beds I used the soil on the property and made up the needed 8" with home made compost (from grass clippings and leaves) and purchased black earth and peat moss. It took about three years to build the soil up sufficiently to grow a decent garden. When I built my present beds, I brought in a load each of organic topsoil and well rotted manure. I mixed the two at 50/50- a bit of overkill on nutrients. However, I had an extremely productive garden the first year... and a lot of weeds. If you want grass between your beds, leave enough space between beds to allow for your lawnmower to pass freely.

A word or two about soil amenities! Manure purported to be organic is not always organic. For instance, the farmer from whom you buy manure may not spray his crops, but he may give his cattle feed which had not been grown organically. Don't make compost from vegetable and fruit peelings bought from the local grocery store as they are most certainly not organic. I make compost from grass clippings (the grass having been fed organic fertilizer), leaves and stocks and harvested plants from the garden. Compost is preferable to manure as a fertilizer because manure will sprout endless amounts of weeds that create work. We also fertilize the beds frequently with organic kelp due to the intensive planting and the special needs of some particular plants.



Weeding! Weeding a raised bed is easy. Since the soil remains friable because no one walks on it, the weeds are easily plucked. Besides, if you plant intensively, and weed diligently during the month of June, the vegetables will crowd out competition. Good compost as opposed to manure will virtually eliminate weeding.

Raised beds are easily converted to mini greenhouses that extend your growing season and increase your yield. All of my beds are equipped to support plastic covers, though I don't use more than three or four beds as mini greenhouses in a given season. For example, I will cover early plantings of broccoli. The broccoli bed then becomes a mini greenhouse. In the fall I cover green pepper plants to extend their season. I rotate crops every year. So the following year when the broccoli moves to the adjacent bed, the bed is already equipped to support a greenhouse.

Here is how I build the mini greenhouses. On the outside of the long sides of each bed I attach 6" pieces of 1½" rigid ABS pipe at 4' intervals with screws and plumbers pipe strap. I then insert lengths of 1¼" ABS flexible tubing into the 6" pipe pieces to create hoops. The hoops are cut so as not to exceed a height of about 2 feet above the garden soil. I secure two or three 1½" wide lengths of lumber strapping to the hoops with 11" all purpose plastic ties. I then cover the whole bed with a suitable thickness of greenhouse plastic, securing the ends with bricks or rocks to prevent the wind from dismantling the set up. Sometimes I erect the greenhouse frame without any plastic and use it as a trellis for cucumbers. **Don & Mary Helen Deakin**