

Planting in Raised Beds

When looking throughout the Discovery Garden you will notice several types of raised beds: the bookworm and the planter boxes in the Children's Garden, the hugelkultur bed in the Pollinator Garden, the raised beds in the Hoop House, and the herb spiral in the Vegetable Garden. What these beds all have in common is that the planting area is raised above ground level. Typically, the beds are enclosed in some sort of structure, though some gardeners do choose to build raised beds with no boarder.

Raised beds provide many benefits. Notice how the bookworm bed meanders and folds back on itself, adding interest and easy access, while providing more growing space than if the bed had been made in a straight line. Additionally, this bed's walls are very tall, accommodating people who have a difficult time bending or stooping over. Raised beds allow people with mobility difficulties to access the garden not to mention, tall beds are easier on the back to work in!

Raised beds can help keep the soil in the bed from getting compacted. Beds are usually narrow (24" – 48") and are typically designed to be tended without stepping in them. Many gardeners choose to build a little ledge on the edge of the bed so they can comfortably sit while reaching into the bed. The raised beds also make it clear where to water, where to improve the soil, or where a gardener might want to cover crop in the off season. Many raised beds can have a small hoop placed over them inexpensively and easily to protect the plants from early or late frosts thus extending the growing season.

One advantage of raised beds is that they warm up earlier in the spring, so planting can begin earlier. This warming in the bed will continue throughout the year so mulching becomes even more important to hold moisture and keep the soil cool during the summer months. Mulch acts as a sponge when it rains, absorbing and holding extra moisture and moderating temperatures. During hot and dry months, a raised bed with plenty of mulch acts as a buffer by slowing evaporation from your garden.

It is important to notice that all of the growing spaces in our Discovery Garden are mulched. This is because mulch helps hold in moisture, protecting the ground from drying out and damaging the microbiology just underground. Mulch can also act as a weed suppressant. Mulch, because it is organic, also breaks down slowly into the ground and adds nutrients to the soil (additional study: Carbon Cycle). Of course, the type of mulch you choose will breakdown differently, for example, pine needles are a great mulch to use between garden beds where you will be working and where you don't want weeds or plants. The acidity can prevent weed growth and it is hardy, so it takes longer to break down. Straw mulch is often preferred for putting in the growing bed, around plants.

Increasingly, people living in urban settings are turning to raised beds to grow herbs, food, and flowers in limited spaces. Beds can be built of wood, stone, brick, plastic, or galvanized steel and can be as deep as needed to serve the plants and the gardener. Though used in urban settings, they are also used in larger gardens, giving form and function to growing areas.

Website Resources

Planting your own raised beds:

<https://joegardener.com/podcast/raised-bed-gardening-pt-1/>

<https://journeywithjill.net/gardening/2018/02/13/7-common-mistakes-in-raised-bed-gardening/>

Video Resources

Why use raised beds:

<https://youtu.be/xxijbIcUeLY>

How to build a raised bed:

<https://youtu.be/92KTXmv2cFg>

How to plant beginner's vegetable garden in a raised bed:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5vdLac1fW8>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuF_ICy0JOE

Book suggestions from MCPLD collection

Raised bed gardening: low cost, high yield and simply done

Small-space vegetable gardens: growing great edibles in containers, raised beds, and small plots

Raised bed revolution: build it, fill it, plant it ... garden anywhere

Raised-bed gardening: how to grow more in less space

Mother Nature's Raised Beds: Using Hugelkultur & Permaculture Principles for High-yield,

Low Impact Gardens.