

Raised beds for desert gardening



Raised beds, plastic

In areas where soils are infertile and hard to work, home gardeners often need to use raised beds if they are going to succeed in growing vegetables, fruits or flowers. There are many ways that raised beds can be helpful for people who have difficulty gardening in standard planting situations. People whose physical limitations prevent them from working at ground level need to raise the surface where they can plant and harvest. When weeds or other pests threaten to overwhelm a traditional garden, elevating the beds can literally put them out of reach of

the pest.

What is a raised bed? Several kinds of small garden plots can correctly be called “raised beds”. While they can be very different in appearance and content, they all do have certain similarities. Within each, the soil or soil mix is amended so that it is more fertile than its nearby environment. It sets apart an area dedicated to a specific type of plants or at least a group needing similar conditions for growth. For instance, a bed could be dedicated to leafy vegetables, such as lettuce, spinach, and mustard greens. Because of their similar needs, they could share a bed. Although each of these is from a completely different family, they all benefit from similar fertility and irrigation regimes. They are also more tolerant of cooler temperatures, even down to the 40°F mark.

Choosing which kind of raised bed to build really depends on the gardener’s needs and preferences.

Sometimes, all that needs to be done is to till a large enough amount of organic matter into moist soil so that the level is higher than the surroundings. In that case, remember to place some kind of barrier around the perimeter in order to keep this well-amended soil in place. Good garden soil should be about 5 percent organic matter.

Often, people create new planting areas by building containers with walls that can be two or even three feet high, although usually 20” is sufficient. Large beds require large volumes of planter mix, depending on its length and width. Those dimensions would be dependent on the size of the garden. For most convenient access, we usually recommend not making a bed any wider than about four feet. It is difficult to reach the center of a wider bed. It can be any length. Selecting materials for the walls can be an exercise in creativity. They can be wood, as long as it is not treated with a chemical that could be toxic. Redwood or cedar are very attractive and durable, but can be costly. Brick or block is certainly an option, especially when the bed will definitely remain in the same site for many seasons. Newer approaches include kits made of



Raised beds, wooden

plastic or even metal. Metal is probably not a good idea where temperatures can easily rise beyond 100°F. Any of these kits can be set up and taken down very quickly.

For those of us who try to garden in Southern Nevada, any one of these might be a lifesaver.

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