

RAISED BEDS FOR INTENSIVE GARDENING

Intensive gardening is a way to get maximum crop yields with efficient input. Vegetables are raised close together, in successive plantings and crops are interplanted. The key is to use raised beds.

Raised beds provide better drainage, and they warm up faster in the spring so the growing season can be started earlier. The raised-bed garden is easier to weed, irrigate, mulch, and harvest. By using raised beds, only the area of the garden that is under production, and not the paths through it, are watered, fertilized and mulched. This leads to savings in both time and money. By never walking on the beds, the soil is not compacted and better-quality vegetables are grown. Space is saved by raising more crops in a smaller area. And the garden is attractive and a joy to look at!

Planning is important for success. Plan careful layout of the beds and the productive use of the vegetable garden.

In planning the layout of the garden, place the beds for maximum sun exposure and for good drainage. Once the beds are constructed, they are never walked on. All cultivation, planting, harvesting, etc., is done from the path between the beds.

Plan bed width so the gardener can easily reach the center of the bed from the paths on either side. This usually means beds are 4 to 5 feet wide. They may be of any length and paths are 1 to 2 feet wide. Once you determine the dimensions, marked out the garden with stakes and string.

Now comes the hard work. Good preparation of the beds is vital to the success of the garden. In the "Biodynamic French Intensive" method, beds are double-dug to a depth of 24" and then left to

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settle for a few days. Beds are double-dug a second time and nutrients are added. Instead of double-digging, many gardeners work the beds as deeply as they can without disturbing the soil stratification too much. They then work in the nutrients. Whichever method is used, the nutrients are the same. A soil test will indicate the requirements for potassium, phosphorous, magnesium or calcium. Nitrogen can be added in the form of well-rotted manure or mineral fertilizer. Use 2 to 3 pounds of 10-10-10 garden fertilizer per 100 square feet of garden space. A generous amount of compost will help improve soil structure.

Once the bed has been worked, the soil will be 4 to 8 inches above the paths. At this point the gardener may either mound the bed or enclose it.

If mounding the bed, rake soil so that the sides slope up at a 45 angle and the top of the bed is flat.

If the beds are to be enclosed, planks of insect and decay resistant wood such as cypress, redwood, cedar or pressure treated lumber should be used. If cost is a factor, some gardeners use recycled lumber treated with wood preservative, but this will be less durable. The boards are cut to size and then held upright by 2 inches by 2 inches stakes or steel rods or pipes. Railroad ties and cement blocks, held in place by steel rods or pipes, can be used. Once the enclosure is made, the soil inside is raked flat.

The beds are now ready for planting. Careful planting is needed for maximum yields. Vegetables are planted in blocks instead of rows. Interplant crops which mature at different times. Plant successive plantings of the same crop so harvest is spaced over a longer period of time. A list of books that may help you in choosing crops has been provided. With care, the gardener will have a beautiful garden, bumper crops and much fun growing them.

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FURTHER READING

Raised Bed Construction

SUNSET GARDEN & PATIO BUILDING BOOK - Lane Publishing Company

Intensive Gardening

BETTER VEGETABLE GARDENS THE CHINESE WAY - Peter Chan and Spencer
Gill

GARDEN WAY'S JOY OF GARDENING - Dick Raymond

BACKYARD BONANZA - Editors of Organic Gardening Magazine

HIGH YIELD GARDENING - Marjorie B. Hunt and Brenda Bortz

Prepared by Peg Baseden, Master Gardener

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HG> Danny:

HG> I am intrigued by your mentioning of "plants on

HG> raised beds".

HG> How high were they raised and why?

The farm land here is very flat and we use a lister plow to form these beds anywhere from 6 to 12 inches high. The purpose being as we flood irrigate down these rows. It is not uncommon to have half mile long rows here. Very few fields less than 40 acres with quarter sections (160 acres) being the norm. Primary crops grown here are short staple cotton, milo, corn, wheat, and a smattering of vegetables. Our average rainfall here is around 18 inches per year making irrigation necessary. Our irrigation water comes from the Aqualia aquafier. This is a band of underground water that stretches from Nebraska to South Texas as I remember... To get this water to the surface six cylinder or V-8 engines powered by natural gas is the norm with some electric powered wells. Depth to water can vary from 200 to 450 feet.

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Regards DD