



Installing a Raised Bed Garden

Building Instructions and Maintenance

What Makes It A Raised Bed?

A raised-bed garden is nothing more than a plot of soil that is raised up above the natural soil level. In fact, a raised bed can be created simply by mounding soil somewhere on your property, but unless the beds will be located within a large-scale garden plot, typically it's more effective to contain the soil inside a frame to help prevent soil loss. While raised-bed frames can be constructed from many different kinds of materials—brick, concrete, plastic, even sand bags—Growing Places has chosen untreated hardwood for its frames. Wood frames are simple to construct, easy to install (or reinstall if need be), food-safe and biodegradable.

Safety First: Although research is still inconclusive, some suggest treated woods may leach toxic chemicals into the soil. Until further research can be conducted, it's best to avoid treated lumber, including pressure-treated, when food gardening.

Benefits

The benefits of raised-bed gardening are many—far outweighing the few special considerations you'll need to keep in mind. Because raised beds are, by definition, above ground, they tend to warm up quicker in spring-time, allowing you to get a slight jump on planting. You also have the luxury of ignoring any concerns you may have about the soil in your yard because the raised-bed frame can be filled with an ideal soil mix. Growing Places will provide you with roughly 1 cubic yard of compost per bed, mixed with vermiculite to improve drainage and chicken manure as an organic fertilizer. Despite the rich soil, weeds are easier to keep under control in the contained space and, depending on the height of your bed, require less bending over to pull them. On top of it all, the precise measurements of the raised bed make square-foot gardening easy.

Things to Keep In Mind

You may be wondering, with all these positives, just what are the negatives? The biggest consideration is tied to ensuring raised beds' good drainage: you'll need to water—or at least check the soil to see if it needs watering—a bit more frequently than you would with traditional garden beds. As a member of the Growing Places program, the other typical concern with raised beds, the initial cost, has been removed for you.

As with all gardens, the soil will need regular amending to keep it healthy, and the frames, if wooden, will need eventual replacement. Growing Places hardwood frames last up to 5 years, and redwood frames can last up to 10! Frames constructed from other less-degradable materials like brick or stone can be permanent additions to your yard.

If you would like to construct your own wood frame, below you'll find the method and the materials Growing Places uses.

Frame Building

Step 1: Preparing 8-foot boards with A35Z Angles installed

Materials

- (3) 2-inch x 8-inch x 8-foot boards [Cut, or have one board cut into two four-foot boards.]
- (4) A Z35 angles 12-8dx1½ [Simpson Strong Tie ESR-2523; #44315-39360]
- (24) #8x1¼wood screws; head #2 [Simpson Strong Tie #44315-08821]

Tools

- (1) DeWalt 12v cordless power drill
- (1) 3/32 drill bit
- (1) Phillips-head screwdriver bit

Examine the wood for flaws and damage. The goal is to have solid square ends for corners.

Look at the wood grain. If there are growth rings showing, have the open end of the ring arc facing inward when the frame is constructed. However, if this will result in a damaged top edge on any corner omit this step.

Mark the board with “Top” to indicate the correct orientation.

Using the pre-fabricated L & R patterns for A35Z angles, mark and drill three holes, which will be used to attach one A35Z angle to each end.

Attach an A35Z to each end, and you are done! [Note: using the pre-fabricated L & R patterns assures that the angle has the open end down. This allows for any adjustment that may be needed when putting the frames together if the boards are warped.]

Step 2: Assembling the frame

Materials:

- (2) 2-inch x 8-inch x 8-foot boards, angles installed
- (2) 2-inch x 8-inch x 4-foot boards
- (4) NS2 Nail Stoppers [Simpson Strong Tie #44315-76010]
- (20) #8x1¼wood screws; head #2 [Simpson Strong Tie #44315-08821]

Tools:

- (2) 5-foot pipe clamps
- (1) DeWalt 12v cordless power drill
- (1) 3/32 drill bit
- (1) Phillips head screwdriver bit
- (1) 12-foot tape measure

Tools Continued:

- (1) black magic marker
- (1) hammer
- (1) mallet

Take the two angle-mounted 8-foot planks and two 4-foot planks to a clear construction area. All planks should be marked with “Top” on one side for orientation.

Set the two 8-foot planks on edge with “Top” up and the planks facing each other. Now place one 4-foot board between the ends of the 8-footers fitting them up against the installed A35Z angles. Use the 5-foot pipe clamp to hold the boards together by placing it across the outside of the ends and tightening the clamp.

Now place the other 4-foot board in a similar fashion at the other end of the 8-foot boards. Place another 5-foot pipe clamp on each corner and tighten to hold the ends securely. You now have a rectangular box.

Starting at one end, look to see if the ends are squared up with one another and, if not, adjust them with the hammer. In one corner, drill three holes in the 4-foot board using the A35Z angle for a guide. Starting at the top hole, attach the bracket to the 4-foot board using wood screws. Do the same for the other corner of the frame. [Note: If it appears that the boards are not snug after putting in the top two screws, loosen the pipe clamp, move it to the bottom of the 8-foot boards and tighten again. This will draw in the warped boards. Now screw in the final screw to secure the ends.]

At the other end of the frame, start at one corner and drill three holes. Again, using wood screws, attach the corner bracket to the 4-foot board. Now do the same for the last corner of the frame, again watching for a snug fit and using the pipe clamp if needed.

Place a NS2 nail-stopper tie on top of the adjoining corners, making sure the edges of the nail-stopper tie do not stick out anywhere over the edge of the board. This is to prevent gardeners from getting cut on the edge of the tie. Hammer the tie into the wood to secure it and then using the power drill put in screws in each of the holes at the ends of the tie. You will not usually need to pre-drill these two holes.

Do the same for each of the remaining three corners.

Finally, using a magic marker and a tape measure mark off 1-foot lengths on each of the tops of the four sides of the frame. Make sure to start measuring in the same place for each side so that marks will align with one another. When installing the frame outside, add nails at these marks and loop string around the nails to designate areas for square foot planting.

Congratulations! You have now completed an 8-foot x 4-foot frame!

Our Soil Recipe (per 4-foot x 8-foot raised bed)

1 yard of soil + 1/3 of a 2-cubic-foot bag of vermiculite + 96 ounces of Chickity Doo Doo chicken manure