



Getting Dirty Garden Guide™ 107 Advantages of Raised Planting Beds

The Ultimate Guide to Raised Gardens

Benefits of Raised Gardens

Raised gardens offer numerous advantages over traditional in-ground gardening. Here are some key benefits:

- **Improved Soil Quality** – You have complete control over the soil composition, allowing for better drainage and nutrient retention.
- **Better Drainage** – Water doesn't pool as easily, reducing the risk of root rot and other moisture-related issues.
- **Fewer Weeds and Pests** – Elevated beds make it harder for weeds to invade, and some garden pests are less likely to reach your plants.
- **Extended Growing Season** – The soil in raised beds warms up faster in the spring, allowing you to start planting earlier.
- **Less Strain on the Body** – Raised beds reduce the need for bending and kneeling, making gardening more accessible.
- **Aesthetic Appeal** – Raised beds create a structured, organized, and attractive garden layout.
- **Efficient Watering with Drip Irrigation** – Raised beds pair well with drip irrigation systems, which provide consistent moisture directly to plant roots, reducing water waste and preventing overwatering.

Best Plants for Raised Gardens

Almost any plant can thrive in a raised garden, but certain vegetables, herbs, and flowers perform exceptionally well:

Vegetables:

- Tomatoes
- Lettuce
- Peppers
- Carrots (love growing in the loose soil of a raised bed)
- Radishes

- Beans
- Cucumbers
- Onions

Herbs:

- Basil
- Thyme
- Rosemary
- Parsley
- Cilantro
- Mint (best grown in a contained space within the raised bed)

Flowers:

- Marigolds (help deter pests)
- Nasturtiums (edible and attract pollinators)
- Zinnias (add color and attract beneficial insects)
- Lavender (repels insects and smells wonderful)

Techniques for Building a Raised Garden

Creating a raised garden bed doesn't have to be complicated. Here are some key techniques:

- **Selecting a Location:** Choose a spot with at least 6-8 hours of sunlight per day.
- **Determining the Size:** Standard raised beds are typically 2-3 feet wide and 6-8 feet long, with a height of 12-30 inches depending on how much or how little you want to bend over.
- **Soil Preparation:** Use a mix of topsoil, compost, and organic material for nutrient-rich soil.
- **Drainage Considerations:** Line the bottom with coarse gravel or perforated landscape fabric to enhance drainage.

Materials for Raised Garden Beds

There are several material options for building raised beds, each with its pros and cons:

Wood:

- **Pros:** Affordable, natural look, easy to work with.
- **Cons:** Can rot over time unless treated or sealed. Avoid chemically treated wood for vegetable gardens.
- **Best Choice:** Cedar, Douglas Fir (Least costly of three) or Redwood (naturally rot-resistant and most costly).

Metal (Corrugated Steel or Galvanized):

- **Pros:** Durable, modern look, resists rot and pests.
- **Cons:** Can become hot in direct sun; may require lining to prevent soil contact with metal.

Concrete Blocks or Bricks:

- **Pros:** Extremely durable, can be stacked to any height, provides thermal mass for heat retention.
- **Cons:** Heavy, may require mortar for stability. Poor aesthetics.

Recycled Materials (Old Pallets, Tires, or Composite Wood):

- **Pros:** Sustainable and cost-effective.
- **Cons:** Some materials **may contain harmful chemicals**; ensure safe sourcing.

Drip Irrigation for Raised Gardens

Drip irrigation is an excellent option for raised beds, offering precise and efficient watering. Here are some benefits and setup options:

Benefits of Drip Irrigation:

- **Water Conservation:** Delivers water directly to the roots, minimizing evaporation and runoff, requiring up to 70% less watering.
- **Weed Reduction:** Since water is only applied where needed, fewer weeds sprout in dry areas.

- **Prevention of Fungal Diseases:** Keeps foliage dry, reducing the risk of mold and mildew. Run Drip or Mist irrigation early in the morning which will allow any water on leaves to dry by night time.
- **Time-Saving:** Automates watering, reducing the need for manual watering. **Early morning watering is best as water temps in black irrigation pipes are cooler at the time and will get extremely hot during the day and could scald leaves and roots.**

Drip Irrigation Setup Options:

1. **Soaker Hoses** – Porous hoses that allow water to seep slowly into the soil.
2. **Emitter Drip Lines** – Tubing with built-in emitters that release water at specific intervals.
3. **Micro Sprayers** – Small sprinkler heads that provide light, even moisture over a larger area.
4. **Automated Timers** – Set up to regulate watering times and durations for consistent moisture levels.

Maintenance Tips for Raised Gardens

- **Mulch Regularly:** Helps retain moisture and suppress weeds.
- **Water Consistently:** **Raised beds drain faster**, so consistent watering is crucial. Drip irrigation can simplify this process.
- **Add Compost Annually:** Replenishes nutrients to maintain soil health.

Final Thoughts

Raised garden beds are a fantastic way to improve the health and productivity of your garden while adding structure and beauty to your space. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just getting started, a raised garden can help you grow a bountiful harvest with less effort and better results!