

## RAISED BED GARDENING /SQUARE FOOT GARDENING

### **What Is It?**

Raised bed, or square foot gardening as it is often called, is a highly specialized but extremely easy way to produce high yields of high quality produce in a small space. This is a form of gardening in which the garden is marked off into squares of space for crops rather than planting in straight rows. The name comes from partitioning blocks of garden space that are 1 ft. x 1 ft.

### **Why Should We Garden the Square Foot Way?**

It takes 90% less!!!...Less time, less space, less weeding, less watering, less bugs AND no tilling or special tools! It's a better use of less space! A 4 foot by 4 foot box will grow more than a conventional garden that is 8 foot by 10 foot.

Raised beds can contain a wide variety of crops that are picked and eaten fresh and can provide varieties that are not found at grocery stores or local farmers markets. Raised beds may include herbs, flowers and food for the family. They can be ornamental as well as functional.

This smaller size garden makes it easy to control bugs and weeds, and it is easy, quick and convenient to harvest. You will get a jump start on spring planting and extend your fall growing season: the raised bed soil warms more quickly and this small size garden is easier to protect from frost & cold.

### **Locate your box**

Find an area that gets 6-8 hours of sunshine daily. Stay clear of trees and shrubs where roots and shade may interfere. The area should not puddle after a heavy rain. Place it close to your house for convenience. Remember the quality of existing soil is not really important, since you won't be using it.

Always think in square foot: lay out 4 foot by 4 foot planting areas with wide walkways between them. Your raised bed can be made longer but not wider. Build garden box frames no wider than 4 feet so you can reach all parts without walking on your bed.

If you plan to have more than one garden box, separate them by 2 or 3 feet to form walkways. You can use boards, lawn grass or mulch to cover your walkways. If you use lawn make sure your boxes are placed so walkways are lawnmower width.

### **Build the box**

Frames can be made from almost any building material. While most often boxes are 4 foot wide, shorter widths may be better suited for your site. For example, a 2 foot by 2 foot works great on patios and 3 foot by 3 foot box is ideal for kids.

1 by 6 or 2 by 6 lumber is ideal, and comes in 8-foot lengths. Most lumber yards will cut it in half at



little or no cost.

This box is made with 2 x 6 tongue and groove lumber called center-match.

Screw the box together using 3 inch green deck screws. Green deck screws work best because they will not rust.

When placing frames over grass dig out the grass, scalp it with a lawnmower or cover it with cardboard or landscape cloth to discourage grass and weeds from coming up through your new garden soil.

Staple small grade chicken wire or hardware cloth to the bottom to keep animals out.

Make a brace to keep the sides from spreading.



## Soil

The soil mix is the most critical element to success with your raised bed! You are creating a mix that will be free of weeds & pests, be light & fluffy to allow the roots of your plants to expand & grow with

ease, and provide good drainage while maintaining nutrient and moisture levels necessary for the plants that are growing so closely together. Do not use topsoil in your raised beds!

**Fill frame with a mixture of 1/3 compost, 1/3 sphagnum peat moss, and 1/3 coarse vermiculite.**

Use various kinds of compost. Buy one of every kind you can find until you have enough for your garden. When buying vermiculite, be sure to get the medium or coarse grade. It is much more economical to purchase 3 or 4 cubic foot size bags. Sphagnum peat moss is the brown flaky type that is available in tightly compressed bales.

Here's an example of how to figure your mix:

- Soil mixture for a garden 8'long x 4'wide x 1.5'deep= 48 cubic foot of mix
- 48 cubic foot divided by 3 (elements) = 16 cubic feet of each. You will need: 16 cubic feet compost, 16 cubic feet peat, 16 cubic feet vermiculite
- Apply one layer of compost, one layer of vermiculite, & one layer of peat. Mix together and repeat layers until the box is full.

## The Grid

The grid is the unique feature that makes the whole system work. This grid divides the box into one square foot sections.



Look at your 4 foot by 4 foot box with the grid on and imagine up to 16 different crops.

Grids can be made from nearly any material; wood, plastic strips, old Venetian blinds, etc. Leave the grid in place all season.

## Planting

Depending on the mature size of the plant, grow 1, 4, 9, or 16 equally spaced plants per square foot. If the seed packet recommends plant spacing at 12 inches apart, plant one plant per square foot. 6 inch spacing is 4 per square foot. 4 inch spacing is 9 per square foot. 3 inch spacing is 16 per square foot. Make a shallow hole with your finger and plant one or two seeds in each spot. Thinning is done later with scissors. Remember extra seeds can be stored cool and dry in your refrigerator. Plant only as much of any one crop as you will use.

Make good use of your space. Grow your gourds, cucumbers, watermelons, cantaloupes, pumpkins, squash and tomatoes vertically by using a trellis or support. Sow the seeds of a fast and slow growing vegetable together in the same square. For example, radishes (fast maturing) and carrots (slow maturing) can be sown together. Another method is to alternate squares of fast and slow maturing vegetables, such as planting a square of leaf lettuce between squares of tomatoes. When cool-season crops, such as lettuce, spinach, radishes, and peas are harvested, replant with beans, beets, turnips, carrots, or Swiss chard for a later crop.

### **Water**

Water only as much as each plant needs. Water often, especially at first, and on very hot dry days. The special soil you filled your box with will hold water better than a garden with ordinary top soil. Compost holds 10 times more water than top soil.





