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Category: Benefits of Raised Gardens

Subcategory: Organic Gardening

Tip: Organic Gardening and the Environment

Everybody's doing something about the environment, but nobody talks about it. Actually, a raised bed garden speaks for itself. We all know our food supply needs help and that pollution is a problem. You can nail two problems with one stone...or timber, or rubber tire...when you build raised garden beds. The environmental advantages of raised bed gardening include: Organic gardening compost to help raise healthy plants--sphagnum peat moss, organic manure, mushroom compost, leaves, grass clippings, rotted hay or straw--even leaves! Plants that are sustainable in any type of soil, even heavy alkaline Organic gardening that respects the seasons--if you've started your planting late, radishes, summer squash, lettuce, mustard greens, yellow wax beans, green beans, cucumbers and broccoli grow and ripen quickly. Roses are resistant to 100-degree summer heat, and raised garden beds make watering easier. Design that can use whatever you have on hand as a frame. Recycling! You don't have to bulldoze to have raised garden beds--all you might have to do is clear grass and topsoil. Your garden will say more about how you care for the environment than if you rant for an hour on NPR.

Tip: Raised Garden Beds and Crop Rotation

Crop rotation only concerns farmers in Iowa or Guatemala, right? You can practice crop rotation though, in your own raised garden. Crop rotation = good organic gardening, and good organic gardening = raised garden bed. Simply put, you can alternate crops between root crops (potato, rhubarb), legumes (green beans) and heavy feeders (all the rest of the veggies). Easy turnover and easy changeover are one of the advantages of raised bed gardening--especially since you can sometimes change the shape of your custom raised garden. In a well defined space, managing plants is easy. Plus, you can build a new raised garden and plant crops in the middle of the season. For crop rotation you need: Detailed plan of what you'll plant and when Weather almanacs Organic gardening compost to refresh the soil Topsoil supply--if the original soil is healthy, you can reuse it Cover crops that are tilled back into the soil (we suggest fava beans without the nice Chianti)

You don't have to move to a cornfield, go to market days in Provence, or carry a basket on you head to have a successful crop rotation--all you need are raised garden beds!

Subcategory: Raised Garden Beds

Tip: Gotta Have Air

Remember your elementary science? Plants have to breathe. You have to breathe. Even soil has to breathe. Giving air to your clay or sand-based soil, or soil aeration, is vital to organic gardening. It helps the soil: Be more moist but not too wet. Hold water whatever the soil texture--grainy or sandy soils may not hold water as easily.. Stay temperate, not too hot or too cold. Promote healthy bacteria growth--that's right, some bacteria assist plants. Have a low bulk density, which means the soil has better physical condition. Absorb organic gardening compost--just mix the compost with the soil.

One of the advantages of raised bed gardening is that you can aerate the soil more easily with raised beds or mounded soil. Raised garden beds limit the gardening area and make it easier to work with the soil. In addition, the height allows more air to permeate the garden. Congratulations--you still remember elementary science. Now if you could only reremember algebra.

Tip: Kid-Friendly Gardening

Your mom sent you to your room because you ran through her rhubarb. Now, your mom lives with you and she's yelling at your kids for running through the rutabagas. What do you do?

One of the advantages of raised bed gardening is that you can place raised garden beds or garden containers in high-traffic areas on your lawn, so kids don't squash the squash. You can lay out a raised bed from north to south to catch the sun, which works well if your kids like to zigzag north, south, east and west. You may have scattered the vegetables in various beds--it's all you have time for between work, your kids, your wife and your mom. But grouping the veggies and flowers together is perfect for the weekend warrior. You might even build a raised bed so your mom can enjoy organic gardening too. Your kids can even join in with less mess.

If your kids, your spouse and your mom complain about the manure you use for organic gardening compost in your flower beds, you can easily switch composts, since raised gardens are actually easier to fill and care for than conventional flower beds. Also, one of the advantages of raised bed gardening is that you keep out pests, which means your kids won't bring creepy-crawlies in the house for your mom (and you) to swat. You and your mom do agree on something after all! Now all you have to worry about is your kids and your mom bickering over who can grow the best chrysanthemums.

Tip: Up on the Roof

Greenery sprouting from your college dorm or apartment roof...is it time to call the

cops? Only if raised garden beds are against the rules in your dorm or apartment building. In addition to the early crops, soil health, and other varied advantages of raised bed gardening, the raised garden is portable for the iPod generation!

Organic gardening is totally tight with the college crowd. Grab your organic gardening compost (make sure your weird roommate doesn't mistake it for food) and plan a 4' x 4' raised bed garden for your balcony or roof. You can use that spare tire from your bike or order a custom raised garden kit. Don't forget to buy soil and use old plant cuttings, specimens from botany lab, wood shavings from the woodworking club, and so forth as organic gardening compost.

Raised garden beds are also great for condo complexes with shared lawns. But if you're not in a condo because you're working on that bachelor's or master's degree, transplantability is one of the other advantages of raised bed gardening. You can transplant veggies, fruits and flowers into larger raised beds or into the ground. Of course, by now you're in love with raised bed gardening...so is your weird roommate. You just don't want to know what he's growing.

Category: Building Raised Garden Beds

Subcategory: How To Build Raised Bed Gardens

Tip: Bend Me, Shape Me, Any Way You Want Me

Your wonderful octagonal cedar raised garden bed draws oohs and ahs. The one minor problem: it doesn't attract enough sun and your plants are dying on the vine. What do you do?

Your garden may be the wrong shape, or you may have placed your plants at the wrong angles. When you're building raised beds, make note of where the sunlight falls. If, say, you install an arbor or a statue that blocks the sun, your task becomes how to build a raised garden without necessarily moving either the garden or the statue. You can re-shape that raised garden with a stackable stake system.

Building raised garden beds becomes easier if you can expand them or change the shape--though you may have to replant tomatoes and cucumbers in an area with more sun exposure. Once you have the directions on how to build raised bed gardens from a kit, you can alter that octagon to make it, say, a hexagon or a pentagon. Or perhaps you want a star shape, because your garden is the star of your backyard.

Now with the knowledge of how to adjust and how to build raised bed gardens, your vegetables can shine like the stars...thanks to proper sunlight.

Tip: Building a dry wall for a raised garden

To build up a raised bed using dry rock – meaning rocks without mortar –; proceed in layers. After excavating the hole and laying the drainage rubble, fill it to nearly ground level with prepared soil, firmly packed, then place your first layer of stones. When completed, again bring the soil mixture to near level; then repeat. (The same applies if using railroad ties, pre-fabricated kits or even tires; what matters are a sturdy frame and a level bed.)

Tip: Collapse!

You've decided that you're going to use the lumber from the woodpile and not a store-bought solution when you're building raised beds. But you haven't chopped wood in years and you just got the woodpile because of high energy costs. How do you keep that homemade timber from collapsing or splitting and spilling your cucumbers all over the yard for the raccoons?

Here are our crash-course Boy Scout tips on how to build a raised bed garden that's collapse-proof. We had a little help getting our merit badge from show recaps of HGTV's Chris Dawson's "Seasoned Gardener". Cut the corners of your boards so that they'll form overlapping joints when you lay them. Stick to a standard board size--two inches thick by eight, ten, or twelve inches wide. The board should ideally be eight or ten inches long. Pre-drill holes so the wood doesn't split when you hammer spikes to secure the corners. You can leave one or two unsecured when you're adding soil from a wheelbarrow. If you're wondering how to build raised bed gardens that are tiered, say for L-shaped gardens, you only need four-foot lengths of board (or more depending on the shape). Follow the tip for hammering spikes in the corners. You might want to add stakes to the top tier to fasten it to the lower tier.

Now that you're a regular Ethan Allen, or at least a Cub Scout, you can have a feeling of pride every time you look at your woodpile--just keep the raccoons out of it since they can't get your vegetables!

Tip: Drainage for raised gardens

Fill the bottom of the bed with a 6- to 8-inch layer of crushed rock (medium-, not pebble-sized) to allow for good drainage.

Tip: Gardens of Stone

You don't want a heart of stone--you're an earth mother. But building raised garden

beds with stone doesn't mean you're cold--it means you want to protect your plants. Raised stone beds bring style, charm and elegance. But you've never considered how to build a raised bed garden using stones. Here are some rock-solid hints: Check your local garden or stone supplier to determine which stone is right for your garden. Some suggestions: tumbled concrete, field stone, pavers, granite. Make sure to dig a trench around the shape of your bed. The trench should be four to five inches deep, but the width depends on the width and type of the stone. Depending on how high your wall will be, fill the trench with crushed limestone. Don't add the soil yet! Lay the stones evenly, overlapping as boards do, and tilted inward so that they point to the center of the garden. Use a chisel to change the shape of the stone--don't forget safety gear such as goggles, gloves and a smock. Backfill the bed with crushed stone--check to see that it doesn't contain silt or limestone. Leave one of the stone walls open the way you do when you follow instructions on how to build raised bed gardens with a wood frame. Add the soil!

The crushed stone will prevent it from sliding away, and will provide natural drainage. Stone is good for building raised beds with wood frames too. Shirley Brenon, gardening enthusiast and writer of a weekly gardening column for the Palm Springs, California newspaper THE DESERT SUN, advises building raised garden beds with rocks and gravel in the bottom to help drainage and safeguard the soil. Even Mother Nature needs a fortress to protect her turf--so guard yours with great-looking stone when building raised beds.

Tip: Suitable for Framing

You knew planting a garden would be a rocky road...especially since you have rocky soil. When you're building raised garden beds, assuming you're not trying for a terraced garden on a slope, you want the frame to be even. Here are our even-handed tips on how to build raised bed gardens that are straight and level: Place the raised bed frame on the spot you've marked out--if it looks uneven, dig out the sod and topsoil, then replace and retest. No one will give you instructions on how to build a raised bed garden without suggesting you use a level to ensure all the sides are even. You may want a raised hill bed garden to drain the water easier, but check the incline with a level. Turf grass will typically break down once it's covered with soil, so you don't have to remove it to even the frame.

Now you can build perfectly proportioned, even raised beds--you have rocks in your yard, but they're not in your head!

Tip: Weeds and Leaves Be Gone

You've staked out a star-shaped spot where you'll be building raised garden beds. The

only problem: weeds. You keep spraying and mowing, pulling and yanking, tossing and turning, but you can't get rid of weeds and grass. Lawn grass can actually remain when you're building raised beds. HGTV's "Small Solutions" showed viewers how to build raised bed gardens with stone.

Gardening expert Marianne Binetti uses stacking cottage stones that you can place directly on grass. Binetti covers the grass with soil as you normally would in building raised garden beds. However, if you have a weed problem and lots of foliage, you wonder how to build a raised bed garden without clearing the soil, which is firm and ideal.

You can actually spread old newspapers on the ground--especially since you don't have time to read them because of your weed woes and learning how to build a raised garden. (Too bad--there was a tip on gardening on page B6.) Or you can use gardening cloth--just trim it in a star shape and do the same if you use newspapers. Then, you fill the star with soil. Mound the soil heavily and add compost just in case the weeds break through! So quit worrying about weeds and start enjoying building raised garden beds.

Tip: What Is a Raised Garden Bed?

Your image of a gardener is someone hunched over with back problems. And you always thought gardening was supposed to be relaxing, therapeutic, soothing, make you one with nature...not one with the aspirin bottle. Raised gardens may make pain reliever manufacturers reach for their own products. Building raised beds allows you to sit on a bench while you construct wooden geometric boxes.

Simply put, raised gardens are square, round, rectangular, octagonal, or trapezoidal planting containers. No matter what size backyard you have, you can build a beautiful garden without digging up the entire lawn and worrying about neighborhood kids tearing through the tomato plants you've sacrificed your posture to grow.

Building raised garden beds is pain-free and simple. They're ideal if your soil is rocky, alkaline (salty), or clay-based. All you need are: Instructions on how to build a raised garden Cedar wood containers Plans describing how to build a raised bed garden in the shape or pattern you want Soil and mulch Desired plants Plenty of aeration and irrigation Your imagination!

Now that you know why you should build raised bed gardens, you can reach for tips on how to build raised bed gardens. Leave the aspirin in the medicine cabinet!

Category: Celebrity Raised Garden Tips

Subcategory: Paul James

Tip: Paul James on....Soil Mixes

Into the mix! You love remixes of your favorite songs...but when it comes to gardening organic and choosing soil with raised beds, you need to be precise. Rebecca Kolls of "Rebecca's Garden" on HGTV and Paul James have the celebrity gardener advantage:

They make remixing look easy. What Paul James does when organic gardening in raised beds is to plant black-eyed peas and filet beans as well as perennials to attract beneficial insects and bug-eating birds, he prefers a precise soil mix.

He starts with 12 cubic yards of soil (you can vary this if you have a raised garden kit) and mixes this formula: 2 parts black topsoil 1 part mushroom compost 1 part composted cotton burrs 1 part builder's sand

Complete with shredded leaves for compost--if none are available, wait until you're raking leaves. Then mix and remix! Everyone loves a remix, and with Paul James' celebrity gardener wisdom, you can mix and remix your soil so your raised garden beds thrive.

Tip: Paul James on...Small-Scale Organic Gardening

Think a grand garden such as celebrity gardener Peter Strauss' Ojai Eden is ideal? Ah, but you don't have a vast supply of Miracle-Gro. And even celebrity gardener Paul James had to downsize. Who says celebrities don't live in the real world? Rebecca Kolls from Rebecca's Garden also plans manageable projects if you're intent on gardening organic.

Paul James chose to compost and plants several minigardens for organic gardening. In his organic veggie garden, he only tackles one section at a time, and the same goes for his perennial garden: pruning and weeding the upper portion today, finishing the lower portion tomorrow. He also plants low-maintenance green stuff, and adds mulch for easy care.

To live like a celebrity gardener, you don't have to be big or extravagant...just give your plants a lot of love and you'll have a sense of accomplishment. And as we've said, don't forget the Miracle-Gro!

Subcategory: Rebecca's Garden

Tip: Rebecca On...Raised Stone Gardens

You're a good friend and you want to help when you see your galpal gardening organic and wanting to protect her soil and plants with stone borders. What do you do? Call Rebecca Kolls, celebrity gardener host of HGTV's "Rebecca's Garden"! She and celebrity gardener Paul James have several answers for the gardening-challenged and the people who love them.

Rebecca advises that if you're doing organic gardening and want to transform a flat, unappealing space, a stone raised bed garden is an attractive choice. She recommends tumbled concrete, anchor Windsor block, 6- to 18-inch field stone boulders, or if you're willing to spend extra to help your friend, solid granite.

She cautions that you need to use a layer of crushed limestone for the base. Oh, and a qualified hardscaper from a stone yard works too. Besides, that qualified hardscaper is cute, and your friend's been wanting love in her life. Just call you Cupid. With a little help from Rebecca's Garden.

Category: Container Gardening

Subcategory: Container Garden Design

Tip: Container Garden Drainage

Your crock pot bubbles over if you put too much water in it--this is your first time cooking away from home. You were never domestically inclined. But you're planting a garden because, like knitting on movie sets, it's the cool thing to do. Whether you have a hanging container garden or a fiberglass tub, your container garden design needs to take drainage into account. Also, while you need to water a container garden more frequently than a raised bed garden, you don't need to water on a schedule, every day, three times a day.

Shirley Brenon, gardening enthusiast and writer of a weekly gardening column for the Palm Springs, California newspaper THE DESERT SUN, says, "Stick your finger in the pot. If it's damp, you don't need to water." Brenon says that most people make the mistake of over-watering and sticking to a rigid schedule. Some other container gardening and container vegetable gardening hints for the household hopeless: Hanging baskets need to retain water because the air will dry them out faster--container gardening tip: line them with peat moss, though master gardener Tony Avent derides it as overused and prefers composted leaves. If your hanging basket does leak from frequent watering, place it above another container garden. Place the fiberglass, plastic and wooden containers on blocks for better drainage. GardenGuides.com recommends

that holes in container garden boxes or tubs be at least 1/2 inch across for adequate draining. Line containers with newspapers to drain plants and keep away weeds or pests.

Your garden is growing, your stew is passable...it's not so bad doing this domestic business by yourself.

Subcategory: Container Vegetable Gardening

Tip: Moveable Feast

Everything is mobile now--why shouldn't your plants be? You're container gardening and your tomatoes are chattering on a cell phone. Uh-oh. Just kidding! Mobility is one advantage of creating a container garden. Shirley Brenon, gardening enthusiast and writer of a weekly gardening column for the Palm Springs, California newspaper THE DESERT SUN, says container plants are easily moveable.

One woman Brenon has interviewed grows tomato plants in a redwood container and arranges the container on a dolly or other platform with wheels. She can move her plants to follow the sun, especially since Palm Springs temperatures are surprisingly variable.

Flowers such as impatiens have to be moved when the 80-degree desert temperature drops and the sky becomes overcast. Buy some dollies from a home improvement store and start moving your plants around. But if your tomatoes use up your wireless minutes, take the phone away.

Tip: Vegetable Fertilization

Feed me, Seymour! Your plants may not need you to open a vein, but like Audrey in "Little Shop of Horrors," container garden veggies are hungry little beasts. Container gardening potting mixes drain water rapidly, so nutrients leak continuously even if you have prepared the soil with compost.

A container gardening tip: Compost regularly, even if your soil is all compost. The other solution to this constant plant hunger is to add fertilizer regularly. Create your container garden design so that you can easily draw up a fertilization schedule.

Five ravenous boxes may be as difficult to please as a plant hit with cosmic rays! Just as fish oil is good for you, fish emulsion is your friend in container gardening and particularly in container vegetable gardening. But if your plant starts advising you to become homicidal, it's time to toss the plants and take up stamp collecting.

Category: Create Your Own Raised Garden

Subcategory: DIY Raised Garden Bed

Tip: Raised Garden Bed Tools

Men and toys--it's a cliché because it's true. But women like gadgets too. And women usually organize their tools--though men can point to tools blindfolded and know which is which. What tools do you need for a DIY raised garden bed? We've asked the advice of several men and women. Here's a short list, and several of them work for a raised garden kit: Level for soil in the above ground garden Sod stripper for clearing space for raised garden beds Rented hand tamper for the soil Spade Pitchfork Shovel Rake Trowel Rototiller for the cleared soil and the initial soil you place in the bed Sledgehammer Drill and drill bits A square Mechanical pencil Saw

Now you have all the tools you need for making raised bed garden plots. You need your tools...and fortunately, you love them. Just call you the Tool Time Girl.

Subcategory: Raised Bed Garden Kit

Tip: Can't Break the Mold?

It's typical: Whenever you order something, your needs change the next day. That computer was obsolete two seconds after you took it from the box. You ordered a single-tier raised garden bed kit, and the next day your honeybear decided not to remove the grass on the lawn. Making raised bed garden, like making your computer faster, seems impossible.

Actually, here's a tip: Clean up all the extra applications Dell or Compaq installs on your computer--you won't use half of them. Get a cable or broadband connection. As for raised garden beds, you can send them back, can't you? Ah, but what if you can't exchange them? Even a DIY raised garden bed can suffer from lack of planning. What if you have to expand your above ground garden to eight feet and you only planned for four?

Many raised bed garden kit sellers will allow you to customize your kit or order additional timbers or tiers. You can use stackable joints to build a second tier on your above ground garden to combat that grass problem. You have your new superfast computer and you have raised garden beds that work. You know how to adapt to change--but gaining two pounds after you bought that killer little black dress? Now,

there's a change that makes you want to build more raised garden beds to work off the weight.

Tip: Lost in a Maze

You saw "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire." You just had to have that maze to keep people from discovering the secrets of your gardens. Alas, there are no prefab maze kits for raised garden beds that feature pugilistic shrubs.

If you're making raised bed garden mazes, you can't buy an all-in-one raised bed garden kit, and you're not a magician who can conjure up a DIY raised garden bed. However, you can buy several different shapes and varieties of a raised bed garden kit and arrange them in a maze, assuming you have the lawn space of Hogwarts. If you don't, you may have to settle for planting several raised garden beds around a path intersection and an octagonal above ground garden in the center.

You can create a mini-maze--buy overgrown shrubs that reach out to grab you, add a Harry Potter cutout, and voila, instant magical maze. However, if you start stunning people who wander into your garden, we'll be tempted to sic the unpleasant Professor Snape on you.

Tip: Whatever Floats the Boat

You'd live on a boat, but you get seasick. So you decorate your home in a nautical theme. You even want an above ground garden that's boat shaped. Your friends who are making raised garden beds tell you you're boat crazy. Can you buy a raised bed garden kit to suit your nautilomania?

Actually, yes. If you can't buy boat-shaped kits for raised garden beds, you can choose a customizable kit for a DIY raised garden bed. You can even combine triangular raised garden beds with two-tiered raised garden beds--they will look like cruise ships! Just be sure to outfit your boat-shaped above ground garden with plenty of life preservers, er, fertilizer.

We love boats too--but insisting on being called "Skipper" and doing a Leonardo DiCaprio "King of the World" impression is annoying. Stick to making raised bed garden plots.

Category: Raised Garden Design

Subcategory: Garden Planning

Tip: Raised Gardens: Stake Your Claim

While your friends scramble to grab the next hot property, the only property you're interested in is your raised garden. But with an entire backyard to play with, how do you stake out your territory? Sorry, but computer simulations won't help in garden planning--time to get out the drafting paper or a sketch pad.

For example, HGTV's "Seasoned Gardener" Chris Dawson mapped out an L-shaped garden on paper and marked off the perimeter, where the landscape edging will go, with measuring tape and stakes. Dawson built a raised garden from scratch, but measuring tape is important in raised garden bed design that involves a kit. The perimeter of your landscape edging will determine how much soil you use, how evenly your plants will be spaced and where the sun or shade will fall.

If you mark off the perimeter and garden edging of, say, rectangular beds along a north-south line, you'll be all set for preferred sun exposure. Talk about a hot property--not too hot though! Also, if you outline the bed, you can make adjustments in the garden landscape edging in case you have any thick roots or barriers, or unexpected shade in the afternoons.

So let your friends scramble for that Ventura County townhouse. You're sticking to your garden, thank you--and an attractive garden just might make your house a hot property.

Tip: Rooftop Garden Planning

Up on the roof...when this old world is getting you down, go and garden up on the roof. But your raised garden is wilting despite the natural wood or rubber landscape edging. Looks like your garden planning is getting you down.

What do you do? Raised garden bed design lends itself to hot spaces such as a roof, especially if you use cooling material such as stone garden edging and a built-in mini-sprinkler system. Also, you can actually lay down an area of sod and enclose it with stone garden landscape edging on just about any roof. A flat roof is easiest to work with.

Worried about water seeping through the attic? Irrigation actually improves roofing system insulation--just be sure to have the drainage system cleaned. To prevent other damage, check your organic gardening compost for material that might erode the roof. If your roof starts leaking, you'll be down in the dumps! Many rooftops have ventilation or heating ducts, especially apartment building roofs--place your garden away from extreme heating and cooling spots.

Actually, your whole garden can be a cooling spot--the EPA has encouraged roof gardening as a way to cool and purify the air. Doing your part to stop global warming and pollution should give you a lift--all because you had an idea for rooftop raised bed garden design.

Tip: Tall flowers for raised gardens

Raised beds, especially small ones, are rarely appropriate for trees and large shrubs. Use tall annuals or perennials to add focus and height: Ornamental grasses, ferns, foxglove, coreopsis tripteris, bee balm, some black-eyed Susans, balloon flowers and delphiniums are among the plants that can reach four feet or more.

Tip: Tall flowers for raised gardens

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Tip: Vegetable Spacing and Garden Planning

You bought that perfect couch, but it's too large for your house. Oops. You have difficulty judging space. Don't just rush out and buy or select landscape edging before you select your plants. Determining what you'll plant is part of your vegetable garden plan and good raised garden bed design.

You may have only 4 feet by 4 feet if you buy a raised garden kit with wood garden landscape edging. Planting experts recommend that, for example, cauliflower and cabbage plant centers need to be 15 to 18 inches apart. Overcrowding with your plants will wear out the soil faster and prevent your veggies from thriving.

Similarly, that huge sectional is blocking you from walking through your living room. Don't guess at how much space you have--grab your handy measuring tape, and remember, objects appear a lot smaller in a wide furniture store or online.

Subcategory: Landscape Edging

Tip: Heavy Metal, Soft Soil

You're a soft touch but you want to use metal garden edging in your raised garden bed design. How do you keep the metal from shifting about in soft or friable (that's easily crumbled) soil? You can dig a trench and compact the soft soil (which you need to do

anyway as a step in your garden planning once you get to filling in-between the landscape edging.)

Although you hate ramming the point home, hammering metal garden landscape edging into soft loose soil will secure the garden edging. Use a board to cushion the hammer impact and make the border an even height.

If your aim is to prevent pests such as gophers and invasive weeds from getting past your garden landscape edging, hammer the metal garden edging at least two inches below the surface. You do have a metal fist in a velvet gardening glove...and your attractive raised garden design is as smooth and strong as you are.

Tip: Railroad Tracking

Pardon me sir, is that the Chattanooga choo-choo? No, it's just the railroad ties you're using for garden landscape edging. If you're gardening without a lot of green, you can do your garden planning on a budget with inexpensive materials such as railroad ties for garden edging.

Railroad ties work best as landscape edging on straight and level ground, and can be placed horizontally or vertically. They make a strong, decisive statement--you don't even need the signal lights or a train whistle. You can use railroad ties to enclose any raised bed garden design, although it's best to stick to square or rectangular sections--just make sure to dig a trough in hard soil and hammer the ties firmly.

Don't worry about damaging older railroad ties--they actually last longer and look better than newer ones, which can leak creosote and other toxins into your soil. Now if you could just keep your kids and hubby from building a train set around your garden, you'd be fine.

Category: Raised Garden Maintenance Tips

Subcategory: Raised Bed Gardening Technique

Tip: Cover Cloth Maintains Raised Beds

Drape your raised garden bed in cloth? Certainly! You're a sewing and fashion maven--silk cloth? Linen? Cotton?

Here's a fashion raised bed gardening tip: Cloth mesh works better than designer cloth in raised bed gardening. Clothes aren't just decorative--they keep out the pests (except

for that guy in the bar last week). Many gardeners use the raised bed gardening technique of placing bird mesh around the narrow bed. Suspend the bird mesh on flexible conduit frames, especially around your tomato plants.

While raised beds are an effective gardening technique to control temperature, especially in rows of leafy crops, you can use cheesecloth if you want to maximize the heat. Plastic cloche greenhouses are another attractive option.

You can start plants under plastic covers and never have to transplant them--they'll grow to full maturity! Besides, you'll look a little nutty or "green" if you drape your raised bed in gabardine.

Tip: Mulching raised gardens

Simply because raised beds are raised, they can be harder on the back to mulch. Buckwheat hulls, while more expensive than wood mulch or leaf mold, are a great option: They're very light and easy to spread, they're decorative, and add nutrients to the soil as they rot down. As with any mulch, keep the hulls from touching the base of the plants themselves, and don't mulch too deeply. Two inches is adequate, four inches is too much.

Tip: No Acid Trip

Acid. Acid rain is bad. Folic acid is good. Acid trips...those are so 1960s. Acid soil? Forget it. Actually, most plants need acidity to some degree. Proper gardening technique will help you work with acid or alkaline soils, especially if you've used your existing topsoil for raised bed gardening.

While most soil is either 6.0 or 7.0 pH or the median between acid and alkaline, certain areas of the country, such as the South, have more alkaline soils. Most of the plants in your raised garden bed will probably need more pH--in this case, a higher number means less acid.

Here's a raised bed gardening tip, not a trip: While you're maintaining your garden, add more limestone in powdered form to lower the acidity if you grow clematis, and sulfur to increase the acidity and lower the pH if you grow heather. Raised bed gardening gives you more control over your soil. You usually need to add extra lime for alkaline soils every year, since raised beds don't percolate water.

Water percolation gives your garden a shot of lime. So to sum up, acid trips can be a good raised bed gardening technique, but if you did too much acid in the 1960s, you'll be happier if your garden goes cold turkey, man.

Tip: Water, Water Everywhere

"Mom, can I have some water?" That's the stallion tactic at bedtime. Your plants will tell you with yellowed leaves when they need water, especially if you have a raised garden bed.

Raised gardens are easier to maintain, but here's a hot raised bed gardening tip: Your attractive beds need more irrigation--the plus: they don't waste water. Raised bed gardening doesn't require the normal gardening technique flooding with the hose. Shirley Brenon, gardening enthusiast and writer of a weekly gardening column for the Palm Springs, California newspaper THE DESERT SUN, says that if you have a large raised bed, you should install an irrigation system right when you're building the bed for raised bed gardening.

Build a PVC hose and spigot inside the bed. An effective raised bed gardening technique is to install a drip irrigation system on a timer. Brenon likes drip irrigation because it delivers water right to the plants. She never uses overhead watering, which is wasteful, especially in hot, dry climates, and causes weeds.

Keep up the watering since raised beds do dry out faster. After all, your four-year-old actually does drink that water she so sweetly asks for.

Tip: Watering raised gardens

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Category: Raised Garden Planting Tips

Subcategory: Raised Bed Planting

Tip: Mulching and Succession Planting

Get a little more height, raise up your radishes (tip: not too high, and always cover the

root ball), and your problems will be over, right? You thought having a two-story home would be ideal, but you have to clean twice as much. Similarly, you have to maintain your raised garden, especially if you're doing succession planting.

All the experts on how to garden agree that mulch, like manure and compost, will ease the task of gardening raised beds. Raised beds drain quickly and have better soil, but you'll want the right soil preparation when you're succession planting. After you harvest the spinach, you want to plant kale.

In your raised bed planting, make sure you supply plenty of mulch at the base of the bed and around the plants. This will take care of any weeds that somehow got past the raised bed foundation. Mulch also: Prepares the soil for succession planting with nutrients, especially in summer Makes the soil friable or crumbly without drying out Warms the soil--be careful since raised beds already warm up faster and plants for the winter months don't like heat Keeps plants thriving in raised beds since you plant one to three more rows-per-foot than normal when planting raised beds

And that height? Raised beds tend to dry faster, while mulch conserves moisture, so be sure to install an irrigation system for plants that like plenty of moisture--plants that require low moisture in succession planting will benefit from mulch and raised bed planting.

Gardening raised beds for succession planting is easier in the smaller space, but still requires gardeners' aids such as mulch. Just as you need to vacuum those stairs and wash the upstairs windows. Still, when you look out over your tomatoes and then your winter lettuce, the height is worth it.

Subcategory: Soil Preparation

Tip: Shifting Sands

Heavy soil is better, right? You prefer a heavy down comforter packed full of feathers. Heavy on the mustard. But heavy on the soil? Forget it. Heavy, crammed-together soil compacts more easily and doesn't work for planting. When deciding how to plant a garden, you start with the soil, and healthy aerated soil is one of the advantages of raised bed planting.

There are many excellent soils that are a mix of silicia, sand, loam, and topsoil. If you can't find one of these for your soil preparation, mix your own when gardening raised beds. You need a mixture of 3 parts garden soil, 3 parts organic matter, and 1 part sand or perlite. The full list of ingredients includes: Washed sand such as coarse river sand Loamy soil Limestone with the right pH balance Organic material for compost--bark, peat moss, leaves Nitrogen to make the compost break down faster

Layer the soil together with the compost ("Gardener's Black Gold") in another raised bin. Some soil amenders and compost materials require that you keep the mixture on hand for several weeks or even months.

Learning how to garden with this loose soil mixture is not a heavy responsibility and doesn't take heavy reflection--just some careful planning and soil preparation. After all, you need to lighten up sometime.

Category: Raised Vegetable Gardens

Subcategory: Herb Garden

Tip: All Decked Out in Herbs

Imagine being able to stroll out on your deck and pick fresh thyme, oregano, marjoram, and basil. While you're at it, imagine you've won Powerball. You might not be a lottery winner...but you can have an herb garden off your deck without fearing that foot traffic will squash your savory.

Raised herb garden boxes are ideal for decks, because you don't have to squat down and you can spread out all your tools over a large workspace, and sit on a bench while tending your herbs. Make sure that your deck is placed in an area that gets the most sun so that dill, for example, soaks up all those rays. Deck vegetable garden design depends on good sunlight without the vegetables in your vegetable garden or herbs in your herb garden being overexposed.

Writer Jennifer Wickes of Suite 101 advises that chervil, for example, likes the sun but not the heat of the day, so place chervil in a raised vegetable garden bed near the back of the deck, preferably under an overhang. While you may not be able to spend the whole day lounging about on your patio unless you win Powerball, you can use herb garden design to make the most out of your time soaking up the sun.

Tip: Herbs in Raised Gardens vs. Kitchen Gardens

You want fresh herbs to spice up your tomato sauce. You've seen the sprouters and herb kits that you can use in your kitchen. Much easier than maintaining an entire herb garden along with your vegetable garden, right? After all, you just got your raised vegetable garden off the ground, pun intended.

A kitchen herb garden may be convenient, but herbs may need more sunlight and water than you think! Some need extra warm temperatures--rosemary is a good example. You

can build another raised garden to add to your vegetable garden design. Or you can plan to plant herbs when you rotate your crops.

Several herbs are friends to vegetables, so herb garden design takes note of this. Basil, for example, benefits everything. So does oregano--good news for your marinara sauce! If you're unused to growing herbs, try the kitchen herb garden first and then transplant your oregano and basil into a vegetable garden or a prepared herb garden.

Note that some herbs, such as basil, do need to be replanted every year, but you'll soon get the knack. Now stew those tomatoes and make that pasta sauce! Move over, Mario Batali!

Tip: Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme...or Just the Rosemary

The aromatic scent of rosemary inspired a song and caused Shakespeare's Ophelia to go into melancholy. But you just love it for cooking--and a few sprigs of it in the cupboard or crisper keeps food fresh.

The question is, can you include rosemary in your vegetable garden design? Is it good for a raised vegetable garden? Rosemary is perfect for a raised herb garden, since the herb requires lots of drainage.

Too much water will cause your rosemary to turn yellow (also too much sun). If you want a rosemary bush, you may want to let it stand on its own since they spread out wildly--you can even give it its own container. You also may want to shape it around a trellis if you're planning to plant it alongside other herbs.

On the other hand, if you buy a smaller rosemary plant, you can vary your herb garden design--rosemary can even take root next to the beans in your vegetable garden. Rosemary benefits just about anything, especially cabbages. Just watch out for any would-be folksingers and maidens with a tendency to moon over Hamlet.

Tip: Raised kitchen gardens

Soil in raised beds warms up faster in the spring than ground soil does, so they can extend your growing season. A small raised garden by the back door is ideal for a kitchen garden filled with vegetables and herbs, many of which are annuals.

Tip: Succulents and Raised Beds

Succulent isn't just a gastronomic term...it's a type of plant with fleshy stems and leaves. You may want to grow cacti even if you don't live in the Southwest--believe it or not,

people actually eat cacti, which you can plant in a raised herb garden or raised vegetable garden.

In particular, the appetite-suppressant hoodia has attracted a lot of attention--though because of its foul smell, you may not want to consume it with your salad! Vegetable garden design with raised beds can include succulents, which are suited to raised beds because of the excellent drainage a raised vegetable garden provides.

You'll need plan your vegetable garden so that your succulents have the right soil--you may want to grow your cacti in cactus soil just to be safe. Plant clinatro in your herb garden and kale, lettuce or spinach in your raised vegetable garden so that you have the ingredients for a delicious cactus salad. Just watch out for the spines. Mm-mm. Succulent...and healthy.

Subcategory: Raised Bed Vegetable Garden

Tip: Raised Garden Beds in the South

Hurricane season may have played havoc with the South, but you might want to start to rebuild by planting a garden...you can donate fresh veggies to survivors in shelters. Trouble is, the weather in the South can be brutal...maybe not for okra or fried green tomatoes, but for many other plants in your vegetable garden.

A raised vegetable garden or herb garden is ideal for Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky and Florida--let's not forget, raised garden beds produce 1.4 to 2 times as much vegetables as ordinary garden beds...just think of all the evacuees that can feed! Raised vegetable garden design allows more drainage and less dryness, so your plants won't wilt in that famous Southern humidity. Just to be safe, choose plants that are designed to be as tough as Scarlett O'Hara: Arugula Bush Bean Pole Bean Early Wonder Beet Broccoli Raab Broccoli De Cicco Danvers and Scarlet Nantes Carrots Bok Choy Mini White Cucumber Long Purple Eggplant Red Russian Kale Beefsteak Tomato Seven Top Turnip

In your vegetable garden, rotate your southern crops according to the principles of organic gardening, and throw in some heat-resistant basil for a combined vegetable and herb garden. When you're growing vegetables, you're helping the reconstruction effort. True, there have been scads of green raised, but raised beds are a tangible way to make a difference.

Tip: Veggie Tales of Raised Bed Woes

Oh no, cry the characters of Veggie Tales, Laura Carrot and Larry the Cucumber. We've

raised ourselves up, but can we thrive in a raised vegetable garden? Why are there no herbs in Veggie Tales--isn't the herb garden worthy of illustrating moral lessons? But we digress.

Actually, all veggies will grow well in a raised bed vegetable garden such as one that's four feet by four feet or is triangular. The exceptions might be squash varieties, also certain types of fruit such as melons, which need large spaces and wider, longer raised bed gardens.

However, you can include carrots and cucumbers when you plan your vegetable garden design and herb garden design. Asparagus in particular benefits from a raised vegetable garden. After all, everyone is welcome in God's kingdom, and everyone can be raised up. Although we have a few questions for Larry and Laura about the herbs...

Category: Terraced Gardening

Subcategory: Gardening On a Slope

Tip: Accessibility on a Ramp?

While buildings with wheelchair ramps are mandatory and more common in California, say, than on the East Coast, too great a gradient is a barrier. Raised bed gardens are a boon to people with disabilities who love to garden, but what about gardening on a slope? Carry On Gardening offers several hints.

Many terraced garden designs feature gently sloping paths that are a 1 to 15 inch gradient--in other words, they rise one foot every fifteen feet. Also, shallow steps with four-inch risers are desirable, if you're frustrated over how to build a terraced garden that's accessible and enjoyable. When you're walking or riding on your elevated garden paths, you might want to stop and rest, or sit and compost your elevated gardens.

You can remove parts of the earth to provide flat areas. While you're resting, you might be worried over how to tend all of your terraced garden. Try interspersing rocky gardens on steep slopes with accessible raised beds and ground cover plants such as ajuga, berberis, lavender, and rock roses in inaccessible areas.

Now if your local movie theater would provide a ramp instead of steep steps, you'd be happy--after all, you can't spend every day in the garden.

Tip: Slip Sliding No Nos

Tackle terraced garden designs on the weekend? No problem! Then you'll rewire your house...time to cut back on your caffeine. Rewiring the house takes longer than a weekend. Similarly, building elevated gardens is an attractive option if you have poor soil and a hilltop house, but don't underestimate the difficulty level.

Before you run out and buy a book on how to build a terraced garden, take a cue from our weekend warrior hints: Whatever material you use--railroad ties, stones, timbers--be sure it's sturdy and anchored well. Just because you can't see the moisture in the soil, you shouldn't think that your elevated garden is free of water hazards. If you plop a stone wall down without testing the soil first, your elevated garden could resemble a scene out of a disaster movie. If you're building elevated gardens, you should probably limit yourself to a manageable size--King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had thousands of workers, but unless you employ a professional engineering team, you may want to build your walls only one to two feet high. Don't start at the top! A reliable trench dug at the bottom will anchor the project. Don't use timbers or stone or a pre-fab kit without reading the supplier's or manufacturer's instructions--they may recommend a maximum height. Don't start digging without calling your utility company or your city's public works department to determine if there are underground pipes, electric wires or gas lines on your property.

Your terraced garden designs will take longer than a weekend, but they'll be worth it--and it wouldn't hurt to call an electrician for the house.

Tip: Slippery Slopes?

You thought that beach house or house on a hill would be paradise, until you tried to garden on a rolling, rocky slope. Fortunately, you're not in a California mudslide area. Besides, rocky slopes with less-than-ideal soil are perfect for elevated gardens. Some of the advantages of terraced garden designs include: Better views--the bay windows from that beach house will show off your sloping terraced garden. When deciding how to build a terraced garden, you can choose a mix of shallow and deep-rooted plants. You can use attractive circulation pathways for easy access to your elevated garden. You can break a long slope into short slopes with slanting timbers or stones--just be sure to prepare the ground and soil composition the way you would for a raised garden on a flat slope. You can use a drip irrigation system--works great for water conservation!

Now that you've built your new terraced garden, you can feel flush and relaxed as you lounge on your deck before tending your garden...unless it looks as if your beach is sliding into the ocean!

Tip: Soils and Slopes

You may not be dirt poor, but your dirt is poor or rocky. The beauty of raised gardens and elevated gardens is that you can use any kind of soil. There are just a few tips for making your dirt as rich as you wish you were: Soil on an elevated slope drains even more quickly than in raised gardens. While a raised bed may need composting every few months, a terraced garden on a slope will probably need composting every week. If you build on clay soils and have sandy or granular soil strata on top, your soil can become wet and squishy quickly. When you're deciding how to build a terraced garden, decide whether it will need drainage pipes in retaining walls or elevated garden timber frames. Remember how you felt when you moved on up? Took some adjustment, didn't it? Your new soil in your terraced garden designs needs time to adjust--especially if you've moved the soil. Although you don't want too much soil compaction, with a terraced garden, the soil should settle for a few weeks or even months. Some gardening experts recommend planting annuals the first year. Plant lavender in sunny areas where the soil can dry out too easily. You're not nouveau riche, but you're comfortable--and finally, so are your elevated gardens.

Subcategory: Terraced Garden

Tip: Planning the dimensions of a raised bed

When planning the dimensions of a raised bed, it's important to remember that all gardens need maintenance. The stunning effect of a very high or very wide bed is lessened if it's choked with weeds or spent blooms; consider access points in planning. Wide terraces can include paths or steps for easy access, or decorative flat rocks can give the gardener a place to step.