Raised Bed Gardening

Raised beds generally refer to permanent structures that are bottomless for drainage purposes and contain a large amount of soil. Cost may be prohibitive factor for many homeowners, but having one or two raised beds may be all that is needed to provide adequate gardening space.

For optimal use, build the raised beds as large as possible, utilizing as much space and make reachable from all sides. Gene Rothert, Director of the Enabling Gardens for People with Disabilities at the Chicago Botanic Garden and author of "Enabling Gardens: Creating Barrier-Free Gardens" states the following advantages of having raised beds:

- You can customize soil height. This helps minimize bending at the waist, and provides access to gardening for people who can't easily get up and down from the ground or if ground-level gardening is beyond reach, as is the case for many wheelchair users.
- Contains a large area of soil, so a wider diversity of plants can be grown in them.
- Requires less frequent waterings by virtue of its larger soil volume and, therefore, greater moisture-holding capacity.
- Generally quite durable, lasting many years with no maintenance.
- Stable and heavy enough for you to sit on the edge or lean on for support without moving or tipping.
- Offers the most comfortable access to a greater amount of gardening space for the person who uses a wheelchair or must sit while working.
- Warms up quicker in the spring than ground level beds.
- You can control the soil mixture that you use for your intended plants.
- Depending on the height of the raised bed, you can plant short plants that will be eye-level.

Considerations in Constructing Raised Beds

The most important consideration in any gardening project is to determine how long you can do a task comfortably. A raised bed that is 5 feet wide is ample to be considered accessible from all sides and allow most gardeners to reach the center of the bed. For a raised bed garden to be accessible from one side, a maximum of 30" wide bed should be used. The optimal height for a raised bed is 24” high. This will allow an individual in a wheelchair to comfortably garden. If a person is standing, he/she does not have to bend over to garden. Other height considerations for a raised bed include 18" with a seat platform that allows an individual to sit on the edge of the bed (the platform needs to be at least 8" wide, with 16"-18" as standard), and 30" for a gardener who cannot bend at all. A raised bed that is 30" would be appropriate for someone in a wheelchair or children.

Although standard dimensions are provided for raised beds, taking measurements for individual users will be important. For accurate measurement, sit parallel at a table and measure how far you can reach comfortably, both with and without hand tools. This will give you a measurement for a one-sided bed. Double the measurement for a raised bed that will be accessible from all sides. For measuring the width of a raised bed while standing, stand next to the table and bend comfortably to measure.

Materials to Use for Raised Beds

There are many materials that can be used to construct raised beds. It depends on monetary and labor resources to determine what materials to use.

Bibliography