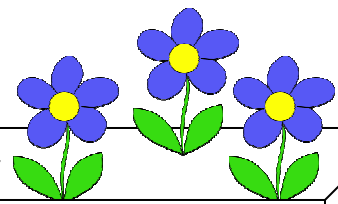


# Raised Bed Gardening



Raised bed gardening is any kind of gardening where plants are grown in soil above ground level. This can occur in a structure (for example, a bottomless wooden box) or a mounded pile of soil. Raised bed gardens can be big or small, and can grow vegetables, flowers, or both!

## Are Raised Beds Right for You?

Call your city, county or MN Pollution Control Agency to see if they can conduct a lead or arsenic hazard test or recommend someone who can. For more information about soil contamination see the factsheet "Urban Gardens and Soil Contamination" ([http://misadocument.s.info/Urban\\_Soil\\_Contaminants.pdf](http://misadocument.s.info/Urban_Soil_Contaminants.pdf)). There is also a list of companies that can do a complete test for soil contamination

To test for soil nutrients, contact UMN's soil testing lab at 612-625-3101, (<http://soiltest.cfans.umn.edu/>)

Do you need your garden to be handicapped accessible?

Yes

Accessible gardens typically used framed raised beds—a comfortable height for most wheelchairs is 24" (See References on reverse)

No

Do you plan to host youth programming in your garden?

Yes

Raised beds are useful for distinguishing between pathways and growing areas, which prevents people from walking on the beds and disturbing their delicate soil structure. Therefore, raised beds may be a good design option for youth gardens, to highlight the difference between areas for their feet and areas for the plants!

No

Is your soil contaminated?

Yes

Raised beds make gardening on top of contaminated soil possible. If your soil is contaminated, you can bring in compost and build a mound of clean soil on top of existing soil. Soil does not need to be deep—6-8"!

No

Not Sure

Are you looking to extend your growing season?

Yes

Soil temperatures in raised beds are typically warmer in the spring and fall, allowing for earlier seed starting, later harvests and an overall longer growing season!

No

Is your space covered with an un-plantable medium?

Yes

Raised beds can be constructed over nearly any surface and can help to address difficult design conundrums (uneven ground, cement, rocks, pavement, etc).

No

Raised beds are probably **not necessary** for your gardening needs. That being said, some people just like their aesthetic, or find them easier to maintain than in-ground beds. On the other hand, in most instances raised beds are more expensive than in-ground beds to put up and maintain, and their construction may be intimidating to inexperienced gardeners.

Raised beds need care to make sure water doesn't run off when it is watered or rained on. They also drain more than in-ground beds, and may need to be watered more often, particularly during dry spells.

Raised beds may for be the **best option** for your gardening needs. Now you'll need to decide whether to do framed or unframed beds. *Flip the page* to find out which design is best for your garden situation.

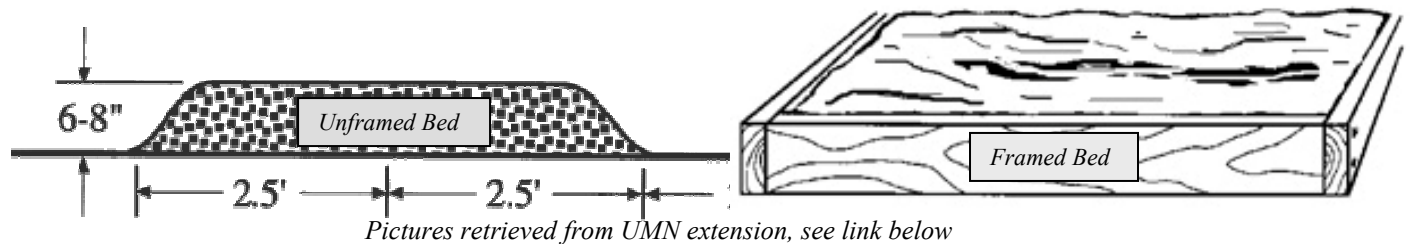


# Framed vs. Unframed Raised Beds

Many people think that raised beds must be framed beds. In fact, raised beds can be framed or unframed: the pros and cons are detailed below to help you make the right decision for your garden.

## Both Framed and Unframed Beds:

- Can be used to address concerns of soil contamination
- Enables more intensive planting than in-ground beds - popular for square-foot & french intensive methods
- Protects Soil from getting compacted from foot traffic, which helps in the production of roots and tubers.



## UNFRAMED BED

### Advantages

- Low maintenance and set up → simple!
- Low, if any, start-up cost
- Intensive planting methods increase actual space to grow on exposed sides

### Disadvantages

- Sloping sides are more vulnerable to erosion - can be improved by amending soil, mulching, effective watering practices, and strategic planting
- May be more susceptible to invasive plants, animals or foot traffic than framed bed

## FRAMED BED

### Advantages

- Handicap accessible, and can be as high as needed for the user. (see references below)
- Creates physical barrier to unwanted foot traffic & invasive plants (think kids & weeds)

### Disadvantages

- Can be expensive; the taller, the more materials needed
- Will need to find and get materials to site
- Requires some construction know-how
- Will need to be maintained and eventually replaced.

**Before building raised beds, ask yourself or garden group:** What is the best use of funds in the garden? Who will be gardening and what are their needs? What do you want to grow? Are there concerns of soil contamination? If skills are not with garden group, is there someone locally who can help with building raised beds?

**CAUTION** Do NOT use treated lumber or other materials that may leach chemicals into the soil for making raised beds. Untreated redwood and cedar wood is rot-resistant. Other good options are cement blocks, bricks or tree trunks—be creative!

If you are concerned with soil contamination, bring in soil for your raised bed and avoid disturbing the soil. If no concerns, you can take soil from pathways to make a raised bed. Continue to add soil nutrients through homemade compost. See Gardening Matters' website for more on [Soil Contamination and Composting](#).

*References—In addition to talking with other gardeners—call Gardening Matters to connect!*

- “Raised Bed Gardens” University of Minnesota Extension.  
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/M1254.html>
- “Building Accessible Raised Bed Gardens” Dowling Community Garden, Minneapolis.  
<http://www.dowlingcommunitygarden.org/pages/projects.htm>



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