

## Container Gardens, Raised Beds

It is finally starting to feel like spring this year. Now is the time I really start to anticipate the gardening season. I know most of us have started to prepare our gardens for spring and summer plantings. But what about those of us who have no space for a garden because we live in a rental, an apartment, a townhome, or other location without garden space, or those who cannot get around to do the traditional outdoor gardening? Container gardening or raised gardening is an option for everyone to replace, or add-to, traditional gardens.

Container gardening is when you plant into a gardening pot, but you can plant into most anything as long as it has a drainage hole. I have seen people plant into shoes, pallets, boxes, ceramic containers, whiskey barrels, tires, and cow tanks, besides the normal containers you buy in the garden centers. All of these things can be planted into either from a chair or placed on top of a table and moved into position later, depending on the size and weight. Container gardening is a great option for people who have disabilities that restrict them from bending over all the way to the ground. It is also a great option for those who live in apartments or rental properties where they have no lawn to dig up to plant into. If you have a deep container, you can fill the bottom with crushed pop bottles or cans, or packing peanuts to save on soil used and weight in the container.

Container gardens can be less work because it is easier to keep the weeds out of a smaller location. They do need to have the soil replaced in them every year as the nutrients will all be drained out of the soil after the first growing season. One issue with container gardens is that they dry out much faster than regular gardens because the plants have no other location to move their roots into to get more water. A solution to this problem is to water in the morning and in the afternoon. You might also want a soil mix that contains water-holding pellets. You would also want to avoid containers made of clay as those materials are porous and can take water away from the plant. Annuals are the most commonly used plant in a container, but perennials and vegetables are great choices too.

Raised beds are gardens built up higher than their surrounding soil level. Raised beds can be made without an enclosure as a berm or with an enclosure using landscape timbers or old railroad ties, as long as creosote does not still ooze from them. Raised beds can typically be much larger than a container garden, but you want to make them only as wide as your reach to the center for weeding purposes. This is a gardening option for those with disabilities that restrict their abilities for traditional gardening or for those of us with terrible soil or a black walnut near our garden.

Raised beds can also be made from a straw bale. This is a type of gardening where you plant directly into the straw bale to raise the garden off the ground just like a raised bed. You should place newspaper underneath the bale to reduce the presence of weeds. You need to condition the bale, by watering thoroughly for 3 days, fertilizing with ½ cup urea for 3 days, fertilizing with ¼ cup urea for 3 more days, then water and plant into by day 11. If you plant seeds into the bale, you will need to add compost and soil to the top of the bale. You may also need to stake larger plants or they will fall over.

Nicole Stoner, Extension Educator

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Gage County • 1115 West Scott Street, Beatrice NE 68310

P: 402-223-1384 • fax: 402-223-1370 • email: [nstoner2@unl.edu](mailto:nstoner2@unl.edu) • website: [gage.unl.edu](http://gage.unl.edu)

facebook : <http://www.facebook.com/NicoleStonerHorticulture> • twitter @Nikki\_Stoner