

Raised Bed Immunity Gardens  
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The number of people growing vegetables increased last year. This year, the trend is to plant an immunity garden; which is still a vegetable garden.

If catchy trends encourage people to grow healthy vegetables, then I'm all for them. They can make gardening more fun and garden planning more mindful.

If you'd like to start a garden but have hard or compacted clay soil, making it difficult to grow much of anything, two options are improving soil over time with organic matter and reduced tillage, or using raised beds.

Raised beds are worked from the edge so there is no foot traffic compacting soil. The soil warms faster in spring so it can be worked and planted sooner; and it drains better than ground level gardens.

Raised beds range from soil mounded six to eight inches above ground level all the way up to three foot tall structures built to hold a planting medium. While raised beds are only three to four feet wide, they can be as long as you have space for.

To make a free-standing bed, or a shallow one supported by 2 inch x 6 inch untreated rot resistant lumber, select a site in full sun. Till or deeply spade the soil that will be beneath the raised bed to loosen it. Next, add six inches of finished compost or well-rotted manure to the existing area and lightly till again.

Ideally, manure is incorporated in fall rather than spring to reduce the risk of bacterial contamination. If used in spring, it must be very well rotted and decomposed. And as always, practice good hand washing when preparing fresh vegetables.

After incorporating organic matter, mound the soil into a flat-topped bed about six to eight inches high. Taper the sides to a 45 degree angle unless you plan to build a support around the bed. Wait at least one to two weeks before planting to allow the soil to settle.

Building structures for taller raised beds that act like containers can be expensive and time consuming. Some gardeners like their appearance and others use them if they have back issues or trouble bending or kneeling. Raised beds are often used by wheelchair gardeners.

Put some thought in to how tall you need these to be. Will you be gardening from a standing or seated position? From a seated position, raised beds are built to about 27 inches high. To garden while standing, they are about 30 to 36 inches tall. It depends on the height of the person gardening and their abilities.

Raised beds dry out more quickly and attention to watering will be needed. Because of increased watering frequency and improved drainage, attention to fertilization will also be important. Weeds are less of an issue in raised beds.

Another advantage to raised beds is they allow more to be planted in a smaller space. In place of having rows spaced 12 or more inches apart, the entire bed can be planted. While there is no need to follow the row spacing recommended, it is important to follow the spacing recommended between plants.

And if your goal is to plant an immunity garden, there needs to be more than Irish potatoes and onions. While these are nutritious, the more colorful the food on our plate, the more varied nutrition we receive.

When planning the garden, include a variety of colorful vegetables like tomatoes, green beans, radish, carrots, greens, bush squash and the list can go on.