

WSU Making a Difference

As we inch our way towards spring, it's time to start thinking about the upcoming gardening season. It is a great time to try vegetable gardening in a raised bed.

While growing your own vegetables can seem overwhelming, it's not as complicated as it sounds and the benefits are numerous. Vegetable gardening can improve your health by increasing the consumption of healthy vegetables. When you eat them fresh from your garden, the vitamin content will be at its highest. You also know exactly what's in your food and what's not. Gardening also provides physical activity and mental exercise, helping to keep your mind sharp. It is a natural stress reliever and can provide a tremendous sense of accomplishment when those beautiful vegetables are harvested.

Now that you are convinced about the health benefits of a vegetable garden, it's time to talk about the benefits of using a raised garden bed. Raised bed gardening is a simple technique that can improve the health and productivity of your garden. Raised beds have better soil structure and drainage, allowing the soil to warm up earlier in the season and give you a head start on spring and a longer growing season. Stubborn weeds are generally less of a problem and these gardens can "grow" with you as you get older, raising the height to keep it at a level that is comfortable.

There are several types of raised beds: raised ground beds, supported raised beds, and containerized or framed raised beds. The raised ground bed is the simplest type. It is a flat-top mound usually six to eight inches high. It requires no materials other than additional soil but generally requires initial tilling before adding the soil, compost, or well-rotted manure. A supported raised bed is a mound with an edging of some sort. The edging can be wood, brick, stone, or plastic. It adds a more finished look and acts as a barrier between the garden and lawn, which can grow into the garden. The last and most versatile method is the containerized or framed raised bed. There are many options available; purchased or homemade, heights starting at 10 – 12" up to 36" to accommodate wheel chairs and individuals with trouble bending. These can be made of inexpensive concrete blocks, cedar, galvanized metal or combinations of materials. Railroad ties, unless extremely well weathered, and treated lumber are harmful and/or toxic to plants and should not be used for raised beds, as the chemicals they contain can be toxic or harmful to plants. One tip when building a raised bed is to make sure that it isn't too wide. You should be able to reach the middle from either side. Once in place, fill it with a mixture of compost and garden soil or topsoil in a 1:2 or 1:1 ratio. Each year add two to four inches more as the soil settles and ages. Keep in mind that the raised bed will dry out more quickly if the weather is hot and dry.

If the thought of building a raised bed seems daunting consider renting a raised bed from the Mason County Master Gardeners. You can rent a raised bed for only \$15 or \$20, depending on the bed size, for the entire growing season at our Catalyst Park Garden in Shelton. Not only do you get a wonderful raised bed and water, you will gain valuable knowledge by working with and learning from local Master Gardeners. All bed rentals come with monthly gardening workshops to provide information on relevant gardening topics. Applications, which can be found on our website, at the Extension office, or at our next Through the Garden Gate Workshop, are due by February 28.

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For more information regarding the Mason County WSU Extension office call [360-427-9670](tel:360-427-9670) Ext. 680, or visit our website at <http://mason.wsu.edu>

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