KPOV — *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good At It

“Consider Raised Bed Gardening”

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Establishing a successful backyard garden can be a challenge in Central Oregon. Our soil is sandy and porous, which makes it unlikely to hold nutrients or moisture. Our extreme temperature fluctuations and cold, dry conditions cause plant growth to slow. One solution to consider is to plant your garden in a raised bed. Raised bed gardening has many advantages, including: higher yields, better soil, water conservation, an extended growing season and better pest control.

The first step to plan any home garden in Central Oregon is to choose a site that will provide good sunlight and have easily accessible water. You’ll also want to know if the soil drains well, is on a slope or level ground and whether or not there are large rocks beneath the surface. Plants growing in the area must be removed; their roots as well as lava rock must be dug out completely.

Stake out the area that you intend for your bed. You’ll want to be able to easily access the center portion of your bed which means a bed about 4 feet wide. Consider how wide the pathways between your raised beds will need to be to move equipment such as wheelbarrows. If you’d like to have a larger growing area in one raised bed, you can make a pathway within the bed with stepping stones or pavers.

This is a good time to decide what type of irrigation you’ll be using. Setting up inline irrigation systems is easiest at this point because they may require water lines to be placed in the beds before filling with amended soil.

Raised bed kits are available at most garden centers and home improvement stores that you can assemble in your garden. You might already have usable scrap lumber or prefer to purchase it. Whatever you decide to use, if you’re growing vegetables or fruit, be sure the material has been not been treated with creosote or other chemicals that might leach into your garden. Avoid railroad ties and other pressed or treated wood. Also, keep in mind that the frames should be reinforced to help prevent the weight of the soil from pushing the boards outward. “L” brackets or corner braces can be used at each joint to connect the beams.

Once you’ve assembled the framing walls, you can begin to fill the bed. Purchase or prepare a soil mix with high organic matter and good water-holding capacity. Good landscaping companies offer separate mixes for different uses. Be sure to find one designated for vegetable gardening. The Deschutes County Knott Landfill composts yard waste to create various soil mixes available to the public. If the framing material is sitting on top of native soil, dig down at least 6 inches to loosen the earth. As you fill the bed, mix the high nutrient soil mix into the native soil. This will allow for deeper plant root growth.

Make a list of the crops to be grown. This will help determine how much space is required. When growing crops that sprawl, such as squash or watermelon, consider putting them in a bed by themselves. This will keep them from covering other crops. The idea of growing crops in single file rows began with the use of a horse and plow and continue with the use of tractors to cultivate crops on a large scale. In a smaller home garden enclosed within a raised bed, vegetables may be planted closer together to avoid wasted space. All of those vegetables will require plenty of organic matter which decomposes and disappears. Continue to add enough nitrogen, phosphate, and potash to feed the plants properly. Apply compost throughout the summer and mulch with a 2-inch layer of leaves in the winter.

You can find information about raised beds and answers to your gardening questions by visiting our website: [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com/) and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar.

This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV — The Point.

Resources:

Raised Bed Gardening (FS 270). <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/fs270/html>

Growing Your Own (EM 9027). <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9027>

Sustainable Gardening: The Oregon-Washington Master Gardener Handbook (EM 8742). <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em8742>

“Raised Bed Gardening” Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service HLA-6033; Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Oklahoma State University.