



Easy with **Growing** the Instant Organic Gardener

STEPS TO GET YOUR
RAISED-BED GARDEN GROWING.

by Don Rosenberg

Vegetable gardening at home can be made so easy that anyone can do it. Last month's article revealed the secrets: Go organic and focus on healthy soil and organic fertilizers; consider a small garden of raised beds instead of a traditional in-ground garden; and fill beds with weedless potting mix instead of tilling up existing Carolina clay soil. The resulting garden will be extremely productive and easy to maintain, with minimal watering and almost no weeding.

This month we'll talk about how to get your raised-bed garden started, beginning with site selection and preparation – a key element to success.

The right site

Putting a garden in the wrong place can spell disaster. Identify an area that gets at least six hours of full sun. If it gets full sun for five hours and 50 percent sun for another two hours, that's fine, too. Choose a site near your back door and near a water source. Visiting and tending the garden should be easy, so don't put it in the far corner of the lot.

An average family of four will need two raised beds that measure approximately three feet by nine feet. When you've selected your site, use a mower or weed whacker to trim the existing grass as close to the ground as possible.

Before building

A variety of materials can be used, but each has pros and cons. I use vinyl fencing in my business, but it's hard to come by. Wood is inexpensive but attracts termites and will rot after only a few years. Cedar and redwood won't rot, but they're expensive and can splinter and warp over time. Railroad ties treated with creosote should not be used in vegetable gardens; tell anyone you know who's doing so to convert the beds to contain flowers or shrubs and start over elsewhere in the yard. Bricks, cinder blocks and stone are other materials to consider, but your best bet is pressure-treated decking.

Although decking is not ideal for organic gardening, you can use black plastic to line the raised beds' inner walls so the chemicals used to pressure-treat the wood won't leach into your garden.

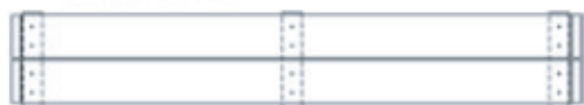
Bed construction

Create slots for your rails by digging a two-inch-wide trench that starts an inch below the lowest spot in the bed. Continue around the perimeter, keep-

Materials list

- Four 12-foot pieces of 5½-by-1½-inch decking, each cut into a three-foot and a nine-foot section
- One eight-foot pressure-treated two-by-four, cut into six 16-inch pieces
- One very small roll of black plastic
- 30 1¾-inch decking screws

Side View...



Top View...



ing the trench level. In each inside corner, dig a deeper hole to accept a two-by-four post. You'll also need holes for posts in the inside middle of each rail to keep it from bowing out when you add the soil.

With the trench and holes dug, insert the posts and attach the rails, using two decking screws per board at each post. Then staple a layer of plastic sheeting to the interior side of each rail. Don't put plastic on the bottom of your bed; that makes a bog, not a garden.

Filling the bed

Next, cover the bottom of the bed with three layers of newspaper and start adding the soil mix. Remember to use a potting mix *without* synthetic fertilizers, any decent brand will do. This part can get expensive; each bed will hold up to 24 cubic feet of soil, but the investment will pay off nicely. You also want some organic, slow-release fertilizer, especially one with micronutrients or "trace elements" listed as ingredients. As you add soil, mix in some fertilizer and add water to moisten it. Continue until the soil is within an inch of the top of the rails. Now you're ready to plant.

Building the beds is the hardest part of getting a garden started – from now on, all you have to do is plant seeds and water as needed. Feb. 16th is the day to plant most of your spring garden seeds, so get going, and get growing! □

Rosenberg will be Ray Terry's guest Feb. 16, 8-10 a.m., on WKNZ 1660 AM's "About Your Home." Tune in as Charlotte Weekly's Instant Organic Gardener answers callers' questions and shares how to eliminate 90 percent of the work associated with gardening.