

YOUR RAISED BED

A rectangular raised bed, measuring 3 x 1.2m (10 x 4ft), is really straightforward to build and needn't be expensive either. It can be built in a garden or paved yard, or even on a roof terrace.

CHOOSE YOUR RAISED BED

WHAT YOU NEED

6 decking boards
(3m x 15cm/10ft x 6in)

tape measure

handsaw

8 posts
(60 x 5 x 5cm/
24 x 2 x 2in)

spirit level

spade

set square

electric drill with 4mm
($\frac{1}{8}$ in) drill bit and
screwdriver drill bit

40 countersunk
stainless steel screws
(80 x 5mm/3 x $\frac{1}{2}$ in)

a spike, such as the
end of a chisel and
point crowbar

mallet

A quick online search brings up an overwhelming number of raised-bed styles to choose from. I always build my own beds, so I've given a list of possible building materials below. If you want your bed to sit on a hard surface, use a strong material, such as thick hardwood or bricks, as you won't be able to drive posts into the ground to reinforce the sides.

- Decking made from recycled plastic is my chosen material. It has a lifespan of around 100 years and doesn't leach chemicals into the soil.
- Scaffolding boards are a cheap option, but are narrow, and their their lifespan is only around five years. They are also too thin to easily double up for extra depth.
- Wooden boards made of sustainably sourced hardwood should be about 5cm

(2in) thick. Treated wood lasts longer, but avoid chemicals that leach into the soil.

- Brick and mortar beds are long-lasting and strong, but need to be built on firm ground to prevent the walls from shifting.
- Galvanised steel sheets last well and can be screwed to corner posts. Sheets taller than 30cm (1ft) can be cut to size, or sunk into the ground for extra support.

BUILD YOUR OWN RAISED BED

To build your raised bed, have all your tools to hand before you start. If you can, find a willing helper, as this job is much easier with two people! The boards I used were only 15cm (6in) wide, so I doubled them up to get the 30cm (1ft) bed depth I wanted.

If your site is covered by particularly long grass or weeds, mow it before you start.



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1. Keep four full boards for the long sides of the bed. For the ends, measure and cut four 1.2m (4ft) sections from the other two boards. Cut eight 60cm (2ft) posts to anchor the bed.

2. Lay the boards out flat on the ground and then balance the first layer of boards on their narrow edges. Use a spirit level, or smartphone app, to check that the boards are level.

3. Where the ground is uneven, dig a narrow trench using a spade so that the footprint of the raised bed is as level as possible.

4. Hold a long board with a short board butted up to the side of it at a 90-degree angle. A set square will help to ensure that you get a right angle.

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5. Drill pilot holes through one side of the long board, so that the screws can travel easily into the end of the short board. Then screw the long and short boards together. Repeat this process in the other corners to complete one layer of the bed. Repeat steps two to five to make another layer. Keep the two layers separate for now.

6. Position the first layer of the bed on your level ground and balance the second layer on top. Carefully place a spike just inside one of the corners and use a mallet to hammer it into the ground to make a hole about 30cm (1ft) deep. Replace the spike with a corner post and use the mallet to hammer it into the hole so that

the top of the post sits just below the top of the bed. Repeat for each corner. (If you are building your bed on a hard surface, cut down the posts to 30cm/1ft and place in the corners of the bed.)

7. Drill a pilot hole through the sides of the bed and screw the decking boards to the corner posts from outside in.

8. Use your spike and mallet to create a hole 1m (3ft) along one long side of the bed, and hammer a post into it. Then screw the post in place. Repeat 2m (6½ft) along the same side of the bed, and then 1m (3ft) and 2m (6½ft) along the other long side.

FILL YOUR RAISED BED

Different grades of topsoil are available, but try to buy topsoil enriched with organic matter, as this has the nutrients that your growing plants will need. If you can only get regular topsoil (without additions), fill the bed to about 8cm (3in) from the top, add a 5cm (2in) layer of peat-free multi-purpose compost, and mix the top 15–20cm (6–8in) of compost and soil together using a fork.

Check that the topsoil you buy has a slightly acidic pH. You can do this by

testing it with a simple kit available from garden centres. A pH of 6.5 suits most vegetables perfectly, but any reading that is between 6 and 7.5 will be fine. It's rare for topsoil to be outside this range, but it's definitely worth checking before you buy.

A cubic-metre (220-gallon) bag of topsoil (get one delivered) is perfect for a 3 x 1.2 x 0.3m (10 x 4 x 1ft) bed, as it will leave a gap of about 5cm (2in) between the soil and the top of the bed.



SOIL AND COMPOST

I fill my beds using regular topsoil and peat-free, multi-purpose compost, mixing it together to ensure that the nutrients are spread out evenly.

