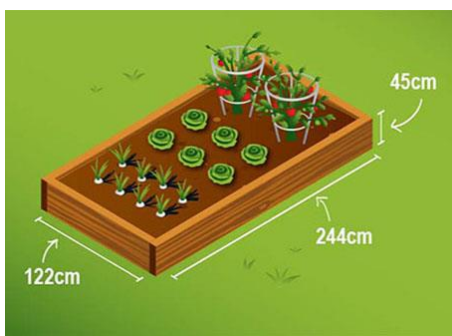


Building Your Own Raised Bed

Planting into raised beds is a great way of growing different plants, fruits and vegetables in your garden. By doing so, you will benefit from improved drainage, increased soil temperature and have the option to use the optimum soil type to improve plant growth.

1. Before starting to construct your raised beds consider what you want to grow in them, this will affect amongst other things the depth and type of soil required.
2. Decide the size and position of your raised bed. Make sure that there is room to access both sides without needing to walk over the soil and damage your plants. The minimum depth for raised beds is 20cm (8in) however some plants need 45-60cm (18-24in). Most root vegetables need around 60cm (24in) of soil depth to root deeply. If you plan to build on a hard surface make sure that a depth of *at least* 40cm (16in) is allowed for. The width and length of the raised bed can be whatever you require although it is a good idea to build the bed so the entire area of soil is within easy arm's reach.



3. Mark out the area, clear all perennial weeds if you can. Land can be levelled or, if building on a slope, build the bed in a terrace style with one end or side boards higher than the other to achieve a level growing area.
4. Choose your material. Railway sleepers, old scaffolding boards, bricks, natural stone, logs, cement bricks or plastic? Timber is cheap but doesn't have longevity, whereas sleepers are expensive and hard to work with but last much longer. Next add retaining stakes to each corner of the raised bed (except for masonry beds). We suggest using a minimum size of 5cm timber stakes at every corner sunk at least 30cm into the soil. If the bed sides are longer than 1.5m a retaining stake should be fitted in the centre to help prevent the wood bowing with the weight of the growing medium. If using wood, check it hasn't been treated with toxic preservatives – if this is the case, just line the inside of your wood frame with polythene sheeting to prevent toxins leaching into the soil. Most modern wood treatments are normally safe.
5. Attach your raised bed side walls to the stakes with nails or screws to secure them firmly in place. Use a spirit level to check the stakes are straight vertically and horizontally
6. Add your growing medium. You can buy in topsoil or create a growing medium using manure, seaweed, compost or soil sods from another area of ground. Beware bought in topsoil might bring with it unwanted weeds, pests and diseases such as New Zealand flatworm. Sometimes once established pests and diseases cannot be eradicated. If you are creating your own growing medium in situ, it will take a while to rot down. You will be limited as to what you can grow in the first year. Only certain plants can cope with the high nutrient levels. Add your growing medium until its level with the top of the frame. It will drop as it settles and will need to be topped up in the following growing seasons and can incorporate your soil feeding programme.