How to Build a 10-inch Raised Bed

These garden bed building instructions are from Just Garden, a program formerly at Tilth Alliance. Please visit them at justgarden.org to learn more about their current programming!

- Lumber: use only untreated wood. Pine is more budget friendly and will last 6-8 years. Cedar is a great option, but more expensive. You can also use reclaimed wood (untreated) from other garden beds, logs or large branches, rocks, and bricks to make a border. Do not use old rail road ties.
- Soil: we recommend using a sandy loam mixed with some compost. If you are in the Puget Sound, Cedar Grove’s Vegetable Garden Mix is a good choice.
- Existing soil: only use existing soil if you know the soil is not contaminated with chemicals such as lead or arsenic. If you are unsure and cannot get a soil test, use new soil.

Step 1: Safety First

Be aware of others around and behind you. Don’t leave tools on the ground or swing them above your waist. Watch your fingers when you hammer!

Step 2: Gather your Materials

Gather wood (2 x 4-foot boards and 2 x 8-foot boards), nails, and hammers. For a 4’ x 10’ x 10” garden bed, you will need 33 bags (1 cubic foot each) of soil, or 1.2 cubic yards of soil. If you build a different size garden bed, calculate how much soil you need using the Cedar Grove Soil Yardage Calculator.

Step 3: Assemble the Bed

(If you have a drill, you can drill 3 vertical holes on one end of each board.) Place each piece of lumber alternating the end of another board (see diagram). Nail the boards together one at a time, aligning 3 nails from top to bottom, into the 2” width of the adjoining board.

Step 4: Prepare the Bed Area

Place cardboard or several sheets of newspaper (no slick ads) where the garden bed will be located. If possible, lay a 2” lip of cardboard that extends beyond the garden bed. Cardboard will help suppress any remaining weeds. It will also attract worms.

Materials (per garden bed)
- 2 - 2”x10”x 4 foot boards
- 2 - 2”x10”x 8 foot boards
- Shovels
- Garden Rake
- Hammers
- Nails
- Wheelbarrows
- Soil: 33 – 1 cubic foot bags or 1.2 cubic yards
- Drill (optional)
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Step 5: Fill the Bed

Watch your backs on this step! Fill wheelbarrows with soil and dump them into the new garden beds. Be careful not to move the bed in the process. Use a flat rake or side of a shovel to even out the mound throughout the process. Fill the bed until the soil is 1 inch above the box. This soil will settle over time. Remember: do not stand on the soil or tamp it down. Doing this will compact the soil and remove important air pockets that allow roots to spread and water to filter through effectively.

Step 6: Plant!

You are now ready to plant your seeds and transplants! If you have added compost, or used a soil mixed with compost, fertilizer isn’t needed, but it’s ok to add it if you like. Generally a good fertilizer to use is 5-5-5 (nitrogen – phosphorus – potash fertilizer ratio). Water well and get gardening!