

Starting a Raised Bed Garden

Cost Considerations

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Prices at the grocery store have gone up significantly in the past few weeks. Perhaps you have considered growing your food as a result and aren't sure where to start. Raised beds are a fantastic way for a beginner level gardener to begin experimenting with growing their own groceries. There are advantages and disadvantages to understand as well as start-up costs to consider.

Advantages of Raised Beds

- No heavy tools needed. A garden trowel is all that is necessary.
- Skip the challenges of growing in our native sandy soil with low organic matter content. You get to choose your soil substrate to grow in.
- Less water required than a traditional bed with long rows.
- Required less space than a traditional garden.
- Less weed pressure, and the few weeds you have are very easy to pull.
- A raised bed can go right on top of a concrete slab, if that is the only place you have enough sun.
- No soil compaction if your bed is no wider than 4'. You just reach in rather than step in the bed to work.
- They can be attractive additions to your landscape and HOAs may be more likely to approve.

Disadvantages of Raised Beds

- Not enough room to grow sprawling crops such as watermelons.
- Start up expense of the frame and soil. However, you avoid the expense of a tiller.
- Limited in your ability to rotate crop families unless you have multiple beds.
- Dense plantings can sometimes increase fungal disease pressure due to less air flow.

Start-Up Costs for One 4'x8' raised bed.

These prices were compiled on June 29, 2022. Please confirm current prices before starting your project.

All costs assume a 4'x8' bed that is 12" high and 32 cubic feet for soil calculations.

Frame Material	Quantity Needed	Total Cost
Pressure Treated Lumber (2"x12"x12')	2	\$76
Landscape Timbers (4"x3"x8')	9	\$45
Commercial raised bed kit – sizes vary	1	\$120-260
Concrete Blocks	22	\$60

Growing Media	Cost per Unit	Total Cost for 32 cubic foot bed
Topsoil in bulk	\$38 per cubic yard	\$45
Topsoil in bags	\$2.50-3.75 per cubic foot	\$80-120
Compost in Bags	\$5.38 per cubic foot	\$172
Garden Soil in Bags	\$3-6 per cubic foot	\$96-192

Transplants vs Seeds and Grow Trays	Cost for 18 plants
4" transplants at \$4 each	\$72
One seed packet at \$3 PLUS One seed starting tray with prepacked grow media at \$10	\$13

Ways to Cut Your Costs

- Use materials you have on-hand to construct the frame such as old lumber scraps, bricks, stones, etc.
- Make your own compost or use free compost (Zoo Poo from the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens)
- Instead of making the bed 12" high, make it 8" high and use less soil media.
- Fill the bottom 2" of the frame with fallen leaves
- Plant heirloom varieties and save your seeds from year to year.