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Raised Bed Gardening In Red Rock Country

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GARDEN NOTES

RAISED BED GARDENING IN RED ROCK COUNTRY

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Raised bed gardening has been around for a long time and is often practiced where “intensive gardening” is important, says Rick Hefelbower, Utah State University Extension horticulturist.

“By intensive, I mean getting the most out of a small area,” he says. “Because soil is built up six to twelve inches higher than normal, it generally requires that additional soil be hauled in. Since many people live on small lots in the St. George area and would like to have a garden, the raised bed approach is a great option.”

The other reason to consider raised beds is in situations where the existing soil is poor, he adds. In some cases, all a person has to work with is compacted clay that is the consistency of concrete. Since this is not suitable for gardening to begin with, and other soil must be brought in, a raised bed is very compatible. Here are some things to consider when planning a raised bed garden:

- 1) Decide how big you want the area to be. Most books recommend that individual beds be no more than three feet wide to allow a person to reach in from either side to weed, plant, etc.
- 2) You will need to have a frame to support your soil. The most common material is wood. Pressure-treated wood will last longer than untreated wood. Creosote-treated lumber is not recommended for growing food crops because the chemicals may leach into the soil.
- 3) Give some thought to how you want to water your raised bed. Because it sits up above the ground, it will have a tendency to dry out more quickly than a flat garden. You may want to consider a simple automatic watering system using trickle tubes and a timer.
- 4) Raised beds will warm more quickly in the spring. This is an advantage to spring gardens and will get many heat-loving plants off to a good start. However, by mid-summer, it may be difficult to keep plants watered enough, due to the higher soil temperature and evaporative moisture loss.
- 5) You will need to dig up the soil underneath the bed if you want to incorporate it into the garden. If it is too hard or too sticky, you may want to build on top of it. Either way, you will need to bring in some other topsoil or amendments to increase the potential rooting depth.
- 6) Consider the following mix in equal parts: a. Peat moss; b. Dehydrated manure or

other biosolids; c. Perlite (this improves soil drainage and aeration and may be purchased at a nursery or garden center); d. Topsoil.

You will also need to consider how to fertilize your mix, Hefelbower says. Although the breakdown of organic products will slowly release nutrients, you will want to add some fertilizer - particularly at first. The best recommendation for vegetables and flowers is to use a balanced fertilizer containing some nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Use about one cup for every 10 square feet of garden.

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